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ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD

US, 2017, 132 minutes, Colour.

Michelle Williams, Christopher Plummer, Mark Wahlberg, Romain Duris, Timothy Hutton, Charlie Plummer, Andrew Buchan.

Directed by Ridley Scott.

The title will remind many of the gospel saying of Jesus about gaining the whole world and losing one's soul. In fact, the screenplay could be a fable on this very theme.

The name of Getty is known in today's world because of the art collection and gallery. One of the side consequences of this narrative is finding out how the gallery was established as well as the collection.

But, the film is about the abduction of John Paul Getty's grandson, Paul, his being held by Italian gangs in 1973. In case John Paul Getty is not a well-known name, the film offers a historical prologue about his gaining his wealth, in oil exploration, in building up an oil company with strong international connections.

Getty is played by Christopher Plummer (famously stepping in for 10 days of substitute work after accusations of sexual misconduct against Kevin Spacey). He is something of a curmudgeon, spending his time examining the tapes with stock exchange information, writing a book about wealth, accumulating huge art collection, intending to hand over his empire to his son but finding him a weak character, alcoholic and drug addict. He placed hopes in his grandson, then this grandson was

abducted, Getty making a strong stand that he would not supply any money for the ransom – he had so many grandchildren that it was likely that many of them would be abducted (or create a hoax of abduction). This is a powerful performance by Christopher Plummer.

The person concerned about the abduction is Paul Getty's mother, a rather strong character, and she had to be with such a father-in-law and weak husband, Gail, played by a rather steely Michelle Williams. Also on hand is Getty's shrewd fixer, Fletcher, played by Mark Wahlberg, taking rather a second place to Plummer and Williams.

Paul Getty is a teenager, spoilt, checking out Rome prostitutes when he is taken. He is played by Charlie Plummer (no relation).

The bulk of the film shows the young man in captivity, Italian peasants from Calabria holding him, one of them particularly concerned about him, Cinquanta (French actor, Romain Duris). The kidnappers live a frugal life in the countryside but are certainly deadly, especially when one of the abductors, removing his mask and being seen, is shot. A criminal Italian syndicate then decides to pay for the rights and hold Paul Getty and do deals. John Paul Getty is finally persuaded to do a deal, harsh, supplying money but having sole guardianship of his grandson. Gail, with the help Fletcher, tries to raise money only to find that the antiquity gift his grandfather gave his grandson when a boy is merely a Museum souvenir.

There is some excitement when the deal is done, the money handed over, the teenager let loose on the highway and trying to hide in the town, the police converging...

At one stage Getty is praised for his book about how to get money – with his sardonic comment that getting money is easy, it is holding on to money, living with money, that is difficult. Yet, at the end, the old man has to let it all go. He can't take it into eternity. What has he gained? What soul has he lost?

The film was directed by Ridley Scott, versatile director of commercials and enormous range of genres in his films over 30 years.

BREATHE

UK, 2017, 118 minutes, Colour.

Andrew Garfield, Claire Foy, Ed Speelers, Tom Hollander, Hugh Bonneville, Stephen Mangan, Jonathan Hyde, Diana Rigg, Penny Downie, Miranda Raison, Camilla Rutherford.

Directed by Andy Serkis.

Breathe is a fine British film, based on the true story of Robin Cavendish, a tea-broker working in Kenya in the late 1950s, enterprising, charming, seen at first as a cricket match, the keen sportsman. He suddenly collapses and is diagnosed with polio, needing a ventilator to breathe, paralysed from the neck down.

There have been many films with health subjects, fighting against adversity, overcoming adversity – films like *Me Before You*.

One of the problems film reviewers have with films like this is that they are considered "worthy", a word which is not always complementary. It often implies that this is the kind of film better made for television and the television audience at home, that this is a kind of film that could be labelled as sentimental. (But this reviewer always likes the quotation from W.Somerset Maugham that

“sentimentality is only the sentiment you disapprove of”!).

And this become something of a problem with British films compared with American films. It is a contrast between films made with a stiff upper lip and films made with heart on sleeve.

So the question arises, especially with *Breathe*.

By way of review, it can be said that this is a moving film, in fact produced by Robin's son, Jonathan Cavendish as tribute to his parents. Andrew Garfield embodies Robin Cavendish, lively before the polio, initially despairing but continually moving ahead in great hope for 34 years before his death in the 1990s. Garfield is limited in his performance by having to rely on words and the use of his eyes, his mouth, raising his eyebrows, otherwise paralysed. And he is supported well by Claire Foy as Diana, his wife, who urged him to live and who was with him, supporting his zest for life, with the experiments for coping with communication, for a chair with a ventilator in it, designed by Ted Hall (Hugh Bonneville), and the work promoted by Dr Clement Aitken on behalf of disabled people (Stephen Mangan).

For Andrew Garfield's performance, the dialogue and its expression has to be conveyed by tone of voice, pauses and rhythms, smiles, eyes and eyebrows raised. This is the case even in the significant sequence where he goes to Germany, sees disabled people in an ultra-clean and scrubbed mortuary-like display, the disabled in layers, heads out, mirrors in front of them, almost imprisoned in a mausoleum. Cavendish gives an impassioned speech, an emotional thinking man's speech.

This can also be seen in a very brief sequence where Dr Aitken and Robin Cavendish go to appeal to a philanthropist for funds for more chairs with ventilators. The philanthropist is played by Diana Rigg. The sequence is clear, clipped, successful. No mucking about with sentimentality here!

The emotional demand on the audience is initial disbelief that such a collapse could happen, that Cavendish would prefer to die. However, his wife is a strong and committed woman, arranging for him to be surreptitiously released from hospital, start to enjoy life at home, find different ways in which he could be comfortable and safe. This leads to his active intervention in improving conditions for the disabled, the chairs with ventilators, a plane flight – and even being stranded for 36 hours in Spain after an accident, lots of people gathering joyfully, the local priest giving them all a blessing and that God's sometimes seemingly harsh jokes bring people together in celebration.

By the end, Robin Cavendish had achieved a great deal – and there is a final challenge for the audience to reflect on issues of assisted suicide, the choice of the person concerned, the impact on the family. This film portrays what actually happened and so is a contribution to the moral debate.

COCO

US, 2017, 105 minutes, Colour.

Anthony Gonzalez, Gael Garcia Bernal, Benjamin Bratt, Alanna Ubach, Alfonso Arau, Ana Ofelia Murguía.

Directed by Lee Unkrich, Adrian Molina.

For more than 20 years, Pixar studios, now owned by Disney, have been producing at least one animated film year, many of them winning awards, including Oscars. Sometimes they venture into repeat material like the Toy Story franchise or the Cars franchise. Sometimes they parody popular

films of the time like *The Invincibles* (and 2018 *The Invincibles 2*). Sometimes they are very inventive as with the psychological comedy, *Inside Out*.

This one is for the wide American audience, especially the Hispanic American audience, the setting being Mexico, the film drawing on old traditions, especially the Day of the Dead, veneration for the ancestors, rituals and beliefs that have very little to do with the Catholic tradition (although once there is a glimpse of Our Lady of Guadalupe), a mythical, fairy-tale vision of the afterlife.

The advertising features a young boy who loves music, plays a guitar, who belongs to a family with the tradition of being anti-music, the great grandfather, allegedly, having run off to be a success as a musician and never coming back to his family. Their resentment has led to a business enterprise making shoes and, for generations, they have been very successful. The little boy is not Coco. He is a Miguel, who defies his family, enrolls in a music competition in the square where he polishes shoes, has his guitar smashed by his harridan of a grandmother and decides to go to the mausoleum to borrow the guitar seen in the torn photo of his ancestors, the runaway father missing.

The whole family, and the audience, assume that the missing member of the photo is the celebrity singer-actor, Ernesto. We get the full treatment of Ernesto's career, his songs, his movies (including a singing cowboy and an earnest adviser-priest). And his doom, crushed by a bell.

But, with this dark underlying theme of family abandonment and successful career, there is a good dramatic twist which a review should not spoil.

The last part of the film takes place in the land of the dead, something like a giant fiesta, with the dead as skeletons, yet dressed in all the traditional Mexican styles. Ernesto is one of the stars in the land, a massive crowd for his anniversary show (televised and video recorded in this mysterious dead land). Miguel find himself in the land, coming across various relations, encountering a rather wistful songwriter called Hector. And Miguel dog, Dante, is transformed into one of the rather lively dead.

And Coco?

She was the little daughter of the father who disappeared, who sang his songs to her. She is now an old lady, moving towards dementia. She has one longing to see her father and sing with him again.

How this can happen, even happily, means that audiences will have to see the film!

DARKEST HOUR

UK, 2017, 125 minutes, Colour.

Gary Oldman, Kristin Scott Thomas, Lily James, Ronald Pickup, Steve Dillane, Ben Mendelsohn, Samuel West.

Directed by Joe Wright.

In 1940, in Britain, *Darkest Hour* had an immediate resonance. The possibility of an invasion of Britain was more than possible. May was the month of Dunkirk. It preceded the Blitz. (Unfortunately, for the title of the film for a popular audience these days, it sounds more like a B-budget horror film.)

However, as with three other films during the past year, *Their Finest*, *Churchill*, *Dunkirk*, the

audience is taken back to World War II, Britain in the 1940s. And one of the principal focus characters is Winston Churchill.

The action of this film, excellently written by Anthony McKernan[?], takes place, and a visual calendar indicates the passing of the days, in the latter part of May 1940. The parliament has lost confidence in Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, who was still associated with the allegations of appeasement prior to the outbreak of war, with leader of the opposition, Clement Atlee, denouncing him as unable to lead the nation in peacetime let alone in war. A coalition of parties for wartime government is suggested. Who will be prime minister? The conservatives do not like Winston Churchill at all. They prefer Halifax. The Labour Party prefers Churchill.

King George VI is a friend of Halifax and not a great supporter of Churchill but reluctantly agrees to the proposal. This film is very interesting in highlighting how Churchill was unpopular, especially with memories of loss of life at Gallipoli, his time in the political desert in the 20s and 30s, his staunch opposition to Hitler and warnings about imminent war.

The other feature of the film is to highlight how Churchill rose to the occasion given the invasions of Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands and the defeat of France, the pushing back of the British troops to Dunkirk and Calais. Patriotic, even jingoistic, in his attitudes, Churchill is not keen on suing for peace, especially as promoted by Chamberlain and Halifax. In a scene, whether factual or not, Churchill goes to the Underground (and it is stated that he never travelled by bus and was only once in the Underground and got lost), talks to ordinary people, engages their opinion as to standing against Hitler and their opinion as to what they would do under any terms of peace that Hitler influenced.

This gives Churchill great confidence, bypasses his War Cabinet, goes into the parliament and makes his famous speech "... fight them on the beaches..." And wins the support of both sides of Parliament, including Chamberlain (who would die of cancer by the end of the year).

Many Britons consider Churchill is one of the greatest of all Britons – but this would date from his Darkest Hour experience and his decision to fight, survive, victory.

Many actors have portrayed Churchill and here is Gary Oldman, well-made up to look like Churchill, adopting his swagger, his oratory, quite an intense performance. Kristin Scott Thomas is Churchill's wife, the always supportive but always critical, Clemmie. There is a very good supporting cast with Ronald Pickup as Chamberlain, Stephen Dillane as Halifax, Lily James as the secretary, Miss Layton, and, very surprisingly (who would have thought of casting him in this role), Ben Mendelsohn doing an effective job as George VI.

The screenplay is literate and intelligent. It contains a lot of Churchill's own words – but the most telling comes when Halifax is asked what happened with Churchill's landmark speech: "the English language has been mobilised and sent to war)!"

A solid opportunity to go back into British World War II history.

THE DISASTER ARTIST

US, 2017, 104 minutes, Colour.

Dave Franco, James Franco, Seth Rogen, Ari Graynor, Alison Brie, Jackie Weaver, Paul Scheer, Zac Efron, Josh Hutcherson, June Diane Raphael, Megan Mullaly, Jason Mantzoukas.

Directed by James Franco.

They say seeing is believing. In the case of *The Disaster Artist*, seeing is actually disbelieving! Who would believe that this is a true story?

It is the story of actor, writer, director, Tommy Wiseau, a man who in fact had covered himself in mystery, claiming to be from New Orleans, to be only in his 20s, with a very strange accent, an amateur film-maker. (While the end of the film says that his origins are still unknown, one has only to Google him to find that he was actually born in Poland in 1955 – and has done a little more filmmaking than *The Disaster Artist* might suggest.) It should be said that Wiseau collaborated in the making of this film and has a guest appearance.

The first question to ask is whether the audience has actually seen his film, *The Room*. It has been in circulation for 13 years or more and has become quite a cult film, screening at midnight sessions, eliciting audience response, vocal response, as it unfolds on the screen. After the success of this film and its nominations and awards, *The Room* might make a whole lot more money at the cult box office!

James Franco is a prolific, more than prolific, writer, actor and director, several projects every year for the last years. This time he acts and directs, immersing himself in the bizarre appearance, gaunt and sallow face, long black hair, that odd accent, of Tommy Wiseau. He casts his younger brother, Dave, as Greg Sestero, the star of the film, caught up in an odd friendship with Wiseau, some mutual dependency, later author of a book about his experience in making *The Room*.

Dave Franco, in all his films, has an immediate smiling face and so is well cast as the rather naive, exuberantly enthusiastic, ultimately partly disillusioned Sestero. Greg and Tommy are both in acting school and Tommy takes a shine to Greg, especially in a football scene where Tommy is hopeless at kicking and passing the ball. However, off they go to Hollywood to fulfil ambitions. Not easy until Tommy gets the bright idea that he should make his own film.

Most of the film is about the making of the film, scheduled for 40 days but going well beyond 50. Tommy hasn't much of a clue about equipment but buys some, not too much of a grasp of what the technical crew actually does and employs a range of actors, generally on some kind of whim or intuition. He writes his screenplay of *The Room* and off they go. The making of the film is very funny for the audience but, generally, we are laughing at Tommy, something which happens at the premiere of the finished film.

There is a very interesting supporting cast led by Seth Rogen as the film editor who has to take over some of the role of director, especially when Tommy acts (67 takes in his first sequence where he continues to forget the lines), Zac Efron and Josh Hutcherson as his friends, Ari Graynor as Lisa, the girlfriend, and, an interesting choice, Jacki Weaver as the mother.

James Franco does a very good job communicating the eccentricities, the moods, the self-centredness, the vindictiveness (even against Greg moving out of the apartment with his girlfriend), and the unflappable self-confidence in thinking that he is making the greatest film on earth.

The premiere sequence is a highlight but audiences will very much enjoy the device of having sequences with the actors in this film in split screen along with the original sequences. In these, Wiseau has to be seen to be believed/disbelieved, a far worse a performer than Franco trying to mimic his badness.

Quite a different film about film-making – but, Tommy Wiseau, who does appear in this film, is still around and involved in film-making.

DOWNSIZING

US, 2017, 135 minutes, Colour.

Matt Damon, Christoph Waltz, Hong Chau, Kristen Wiig, Rolf Lassgard, Udo Keir, Jason Sudeikis, Maribeth Monroe, James Van der Beek, Laura Dern, Neal Patrick Harris, Margo Martindale, Joaquin De Alameida.

Directed by Alexander Payne.

What if?

There are all kinds of ways about imagining how humans might change the world, might improve human nature, might prepare for the end of the human race. Downsizing looks at all these aspects.

The opening of the film keeps the audience on its toes. An experiment in a scientific centre in Norway has succeeded in reducing living creatures to about 5 inches or 12 cm in height. Some years later, at a scientific convention, the organiser of the experiment presents the scientist who made the breakthrough – 5 inches high. Excitement, exhilaration.

Then, 10 years later, people go willingly into the downsizing program. The audience is introduced to a centre in the US, going into a small satellite city called Leisureland. There are various advertising campaigns, budget plans for those seeking something different. And that is the case with Paul and Audrey (Matt Damon and Kristen Wiig) who decide that they will go into downsizing mode. Lots of discussion amongst friends, family, chats with those who are downsized.

There is a bit of tension as the couple undergo the process, shaved, naked, injected, recuperating, and walking out into a new life. Actually, it doesn't go as Paul had planned for him and his wife – she backed out.

While the motivation for downsizing is to help population and sustaining the world by using so much less of its energy and resources, there is a lot of lip-service to this ideal – but, we realise and soon see that, human nature being what it is, there is a lot of self-focus in downsizing, in leading a life of leisure and hedonism. Yet, Paul works diligently in a company at a desk, although his earlier ambitions had been to be a doctor and he had had to be satisfied with occupational therapy.

We are then introduced to a number of eccentric characters, especially Christoph Waltz as Paul's upstairs Serb neighbour, hosting rowdy parties, glitz and glamour, and there is no one like Christoph Waltz to create a somewhat creepy character. He is joined at the party with a lifelong friend who owns a yacht (who can send it to Norway by FedEx? and it will arrive before he himself arrives there, in planes which have seating for both sizes).

Then there is the Vietnam dissident, Ngoc Lan Tran (Hong Chau), imprisoned, having lost a leg, now running a cleaning company including Waltz's apartment. She would have made a very good prison warden, strong-minded, direct, uttering orders which she takes for granted will be obeyed – and that includes Paul (who finds an occupational therapy outlet in working on her leg).

The film then takes a different direction, introducing Paul to the downside of downsizing, people on welfare, living in crowded tenements, slums, people in medical need, a whole range of people that

Ngoc Lan Tran cares for. A whole new perspective on life Paul, self-sacrificing care.

And then the film takes you another different direction, with the four central characters all going to Norway, to the original colony, to meet the founder and the breakthrough scientist. Paul is exhilarated, in admiration. But, the scientist is predicting the end of human life, wants to establish a colony deep in the mountains, a remnant who can emerge after the Earth cataclysm.

Will the enthusiastic Paul go? Will the others go? What is the alternative?

Alexander Payne has cowritten and directed quite a number of arresting films including Election, Sideways, About Schmidt, The Descendants, Nebraska. He raises interesting human nature questions and environmental puzzles.

FERDINAND

US, 2017, 106 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: John Cena, Kate Mac Kinnon, Bobby Cannavale, Jack Gore, Carlos Saldanha, Jeremy Sisto, Colin H. Murphy, Anthony Anderson, Peyton Manning, David Tennant, Gina Rodriguez, Sally Phillips, Daveed Diggs.

Directed by Carlos Saldanha.

Ferdinand is a bull. He lives in Spain. At first, he is a little bull, along with some friends, whose main goal in life is to be chosen by the matador to go to the ring in Madrid, for greater glory. The young bulls watch their fathers' striving to be chosen by the matador – and Ferdinand's father is chosen rather than the father of Val, Ferdinand's biggest rival and taunter, a real case of bull-ying. Ferdinand actually prefers not to fight, plants a flower and waters it, delights in smelling his flower.

Ferdinand has the opportunity to escape and finishes up at a flower farm, bonding with the little girl, Nina, and her father and her dog who is unwilling (despite his eager tail wagging) to befriend Ferdinand. Suddenly, little bull, transforming into big, very big bull. All should be lovely at the farm but Ferdinand, after some to-ing and fro-ing, decides not to obey the command about his not going to the town and the elaborate flower show. He is delighted by the flowers and the display – but is stung by a bee and what follows are some spectacular scenes of mayhem and smashes, including a literal bull in a china shop.

Back to the Casa del Toro. He meets his old friends – and there is a newcomer, a Scottish-brogued bull called Angus. Val has grown bigger at this stage and is eager to be chosen for Madrid. Ferdinand is under the charge of a bucktoothed goat and trainer, Lupe, who is charmed by his friendship, understands his reluctance to fight and they concoct a plan for escaping. Val and Ferdinand do have a clash with Val breaking one of his horns and so ineligible for the ring, Ferdinand being chosen.

The escape sequences are also quite elaborate, having to go through the house and Ferdinand having to breathe in a lot to get out of windows and get through kitchen spaces. Fortunately, there are three tiny hedgehogs with comic voices doing comic turns who are escape experts.

There are some funny scenes when the group try to go to Madrid to rescue Ferdinand, the animals, commandeering a bus, an enormous traffic jam in Madrid which provides the opportunity for a very animated car chase through the city.

As we see right from the beginning, with Ferdinand sniffing his favourite flower, this is not a film that promotes bullfighting. On the contrary, it takes humane stands in consideration of the animals,

which means that the final bullfight does not go as the matador predicted, nor as the crowd initially wanted, but humanity prevails or whatever the word for the combination of bull-humanity could be also prevails.

A very good voice cast is led by John Cena as Ferdinand, Kate MacKinnon? enjoying herself as the toothy goat, Bobby Cannavale as both Val and his father – and a good turn and from Angus the Scottish bull voiced by David Tennant.

The director, Carlos Saldanha, originally from Brazil, has directed or co-directed a number of the Ice Age films as well as Rio and Rio 2.

THE FLORIDA PROJECT

US, 2017, 111 minutes, Colour.

William Dafoe, Bria Vinaite, Brooklynn Prince, Christopher Rivera, Valeria Cotto, Mela Murder.
Directed by Sean Baker.

Writer-director Sean Baker has a solid art-house and reputation as the maker of small slices of life, somewhat on the seedy side of life, Starlet, Tangerine (which was actually made with his smart phone).

This is a much more ambitious film, going down to Florida, going to Orlando, the city of Disneyworld, but actually staying on its outskirts, a kind of self-contained enclave, and giving us a portrait of a group of characters who live there, especially three young children.

The film has been listed for awards. It has received an amount of critical praise. But, not everybody has been satisfied, many people finding it too much.

For this reviewer, there was much to admire in the film – though the experience of sitting there and watching was something of an endurance.

What is it about the film that divides audiences? For those who praise it, they see it is almost a docudrama of poor people, especially single mothers, a lot of children running rather wild, nothing to do during the summer holiday except be cheeky and vandalise. The challenge is, especially for those who find it an endurance, is to ask about sympathy for the characters, their way of life, to ask how much they are trapped in this way of life and do not want to get out of it – or do not know how to get out of it. Given some of the adults, especially Halley (Bria Venaite), who embodies the single mother, self-centred yet loving her daughter, angry and resentful in herself, relying on money by prostitution, yet afraid that everything will go to pieces if she is arrested again, this is important.. So, how much sympathy? How much concern? How much compassion for those who are trapped in a life that most of the audiences find repellent or don't approve of?

But, it is the children who are the life of the Florida Project, slum projects or a social welfare project, or both? Brooklynn Prince is Moonee, six years old, no idea of discipline, no idea of control except of controlling her two friends, Scootie and Jancey, and controlling her mother. It is an extraordinary performance, a little girl portraying relentless wilfulness, cheekiness, some spitefulness, some malicious vandalism. The question is: will she grow up to be Halley? Or the reverse of the question: was Halley like Moonee when she was young?

Presiding over all of this, trying to use to some control but not always succeeding, is Bob, Willem

Dafoe, the manager of the motel, always on the move with umpteen repairs, the owner checking out and writing more rules for the residents, intervening in the disputes, the object of insult by Halley, trying to do his best with the kids.

The film is inhabited by trailer park types but who live in the massive motels, the main one rather garish painted in primary mauve. And then there are the gift shops associated with Disney World, a large restaurant in the shape of half an orange, The Big Orange, a gift shop with a large Gandalf painted on the front, and loads and loads of hoardings with kitschy advertising.

It is true to say that the audience is immersed in this world of the Florida Project – an opportunity to see and to feel, perhaps, how some of the other half try to live. And to ask whether prison will rehabilitate Halley? Whether the intervention of social care authorities will do any good for Moonee?

THE GREATEST SHOWMAN

US, 2017, 105 minutes, Colour.

Hugh Jackman, Zac Efron, Michelle Williams, Rebecca Ferguson, Zendaya, Keala Settle, Paul Sparks.
Directed by Michael Gracey.

Come to the circus, the greatest show on earth.

It didn't actually begin in that way. First of all there was a Museum with all kinds of odd exhibits – not a success. Then there was what was called a freak show, all kinds of characters, bearded lady, Siamese twins... And a ringmaster. Finally, there was the circus, again with the freaks but with all the animals, the big top, the eager and applauding audiences.

But, even before that, there was Phineas Taylor 'P. T.' Barnum, who saw himself as the inventor of "show business".

Phineas didn't have an easy childhood. He worked with his father, a builder, somewhat impoverished, humiliated by aristocrats, even being slapped in the face by the father of the young girl, Charity, whom he frequently met with and loved. He tried the railroad to make some money. He worked as an accountant until the firm went bankrupt. What to do? With a wife, Charity, and two daughters?

If we really want to know, it is probably best to Google Wikipedia and read all about him. While there is a foundation in this screenplay, there is a lot more to Barnum's life, especially after his involvement in sideshows and circuses, even a political life. But, this is a musical, this is a comedy, this is a feelgood zest for life kind of film and not the place where one would go to find history and biography (which, apparently, some unhappy critics say they did expect to find in the film).

Lots of songs, lots of dances – and the songs composed by the creators of the music for La La Land. And who better to be Barnum than Hugh Jackman? Hugh Jackman would really have been at home in the MGM musicals of the 1950s, always cheerful, strong voice, good dancer, good actor, someone you can't help but like. And this time he is aided by Zac Efron, a decade on from High School Musical, keeping pace with some singing and dancing but providing a serious part of the story, a New York playwright from a wealthy family who decides to run away to the circus, falls in love with the trapeze artist, tries to save her from the burning Museum, has enough nous to have invested his percentage so that the circus can rise again.

Michelle Williams is Charity and joins in the singing and dancing. Keala Settle makes a big impact, as a big lady, a bearded lady. One of the New York journalists upgrades Barnum for exploiting the “freaks”. But they are on Barnum’s side, relating how people hid them, looked down on them because of their characteristics, idiosyncrasies, deformities, but that Barnum brought them out from the shadows, gave them a life, a zest – and at the end, they tell him not to indulge in self-pity when the museum burns down but to get up and live.

There is a subplot where Barnum goes to England and has an audience with Queen Victoria – who is amused. In London he meets the Swedish singer, Jenny Lind (Rebecca Ferguson), and organises a tour of the United States for her, which leads to touches of scandal in the newspapers and some financial disaster, despite her success as a singer and the adulation of the audiences.

Those who might like a comparison with Hugh Jackman, can search out a 1986 television biography film of Barnum with Burt Lancaster in the title role.

In the meantime, this is for rollicking on.

JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

US, 2017, 119 minutes, Colour.

Dwayne Johnson, Jack Black, Kevin Hart, Karen Gillan, Bobby Canavale, Rhys Darby, Tim Matheson, Nick Jonas, Alex Wolff, Madison Iseman, Maribeth Monroe, Ser Darius Blain.
Directed by Jake Kasdan.

Back in the 1990s, there was a film of the board game, Jumanji, an action adventure, featuring Robin Williams and, if memory serves, stampeding rhinoceros. In this version of the board game, there are more than four adventurers in the land of Jumanji, a fantasy land that blends jungle and overtones of middle eastern towns and markets. In the rhinoceros stampede is back.

The film opens in 1996, a young man finding of the board game (but not having seen the film!), Switches on the game and disappears, leaving his home dilapidated over the next 20 years and his father a psychological wreck.

2017. Much more up-to-date. We are introduced for different students. Spencer is a raking nerd who writes assignments for fellow students. One of these students his Fridge, an African-American? sports hero wanting a scholarship. Then there is Martha, rather misanthropic, shy and awkward, wanting to study rather than socialise. Quite by contrast is the glamorous Bethany, incapacitated in life without her phone, flirtatious and unconscious of her interviewing in other people’s lives. They are all put in detention.

And, what do they find in detention but an old tradition of Jumanji – with choices with whom they might identify in the game. They press the buttons, drawn into the game, and there they are, in the form of the characters they have chosen.

And here is one of the advantages of the film, some humour that adults might enjoy as well. Spencer the nerd now appears in the form of Dwayne Johnson, tall, strong and musclebound. But, inside, he is this still the same nervous and awkward Spencer, amusement for the audience in seeing Dwayne Johnson coping with his inner nerd. Fridge, on the other hand, has become a zoologist and has grown up to be diminutive, Kevin Hart, a screen motormouth if ever there was one. Martha has

become the glamorous and tough heroine, Karen Gillan. Bethany, on the other hand, has made a mistake in interpreting the name of her character and she is transformed into – Jack black. And there is quite some amusement to be had in seeing Jack black as male, trying to come to terms with his inner Bethany, always with the touch of the feminine.

So, off they go, encountering a British explorer who gives them a mission, to recover a stalled jewel, taken by the archvillain Bobby can avail and restore it to a mountain crag which is in the form of a Jaguar with the jewel forming its eye.

There are some corny adventures, some wisecracks, some heroism and some cowardice, hippopotamus swallowing, Jaguars pursuing, elephant rides, sweeping and swooping helicopter ride through canyons, pursued by enemies and a surveillance Eagle, enough adventures to keep audience attention. Old-time Saturday matinee stuff.

They also meet the young man who disappeared 20 years earlier, Nick Jonas, and they team up with him to get the helicopter, to get themselves to the mountain, to fulfil the mission with quite some acrobatic derring-do and get back home to ordinary life.

This kind of adventure always has some kind of moral and the four characters learn about themselves, learn to be their better selves, Spencer and Martha being attracted and having a kiss, and all being well unless they should find themselves trapped in yet another game.

The target audience is adolescent boys (either in age or in mentality).

THE NUT JOB 2: NUTTY BY NATURE

US, 2017, 91 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: Will Arnett, Maya Rudolph, Bobby Cannavale, Bobby Moynihan, Isabella Moner, Peter Stormae, Gabriel Iglesias.

Directed by Cal Brunker.

This animation feature was a surprise. The original film, *The Nut Job*, seemed conventional enough entertainment for young children. This sequel is much better – and quite entertaining for adults, even for reviewers.

The animation was done in South Korea for this American production. The animation is fairly straightforward, the setting in Liberty Park and the background of the city, but the action is mainly in the park. The main time outside the park is spent in the office of the avaricious and corrupt Mayor, seen with his cronies, a drawer full of bribes ('political contributions', of course), envious of the park which does not produce any revenue. Plan: destroy the park, build a theme park, rake in the cash.

However, the main attention, of course, is on the animals from the park, mainly squirrels, a mole, a rat, some groundhogs, dogs... And they all have very entertaining voices. But, at the opening, they are all indulging in an abandoned nut shop, greed galore. However, Andy, a very nice squirrel, is advocating the traditions, instincts, collecting nuts, storing them for the winter. She doesn't have a chance, even as she appeals to the leader, Surly.

Clearly, there is going to be a confrontation between the Mayor and the animals. It should be noted that the Mayor has a most horrible daughter, Heather, spoilt and aggressive, attention-seeking who must inevitably get her comeuppance (as she and her father do).

In many ways, as with so many animation stories, there is a bit of moralising. Andy makes a great appeal to the animals not to take the easy way out, but to rise to challenges. And this is the case when they face the demolition of the park and decide to move into protest mode and to sabotage. And, when the theme park opens (with a lot of shoddy work to cut costs), they go to work with demolition. The point being made is that all individuals can take a stand, but when they collaborate, they can be very effective.

So, there is a lot of action throughout the film to keep the young audience attentive – with enough, characters and physical comedy. This is particularly the case with a group of mice, ousted from the park but deciding to get training in martial arts as well as Eastern meditation techniques – with the leader voiced by Jackie Chan (and a nice little bonus during the final credits when Chan himself is photographed recording his voice).

Will Arnett is very strong as Surly, a leader yet a bit on the lazy side, challenged by Andy (Katherine Heigl) to be his better self, be a role model, caught in an adventure which has its ups and downs. Maya Rudolph and Bobby Canavale enjoy themselves as the two romantic pugs, Precious and Frank.

Adult audiences will enjoy the verbal humour, puns, jokes and parodies.

PADDINGTON 2

UK, 2017, 105 minutes, Colour.

Voice of Ben Whishaw. Grant, Hugh Bonneville, Sally Hawkins, Julie Walters, Michael Gambon, Imelda Staunton, Madeline Harris, Samuel Joslin, Sanjiv Bhaskar, Ben Miller, Jessica Hynes, Jim Broadbent, Tom Conti, Peter Capaldi, Meera Suall, Richard Adyode, Brendan Gleeson, Noah Taylor, Marie- France Alvarez, Joanna Lumley, Robbie G, Eileen Atkins, Maggie Steed.

Directed by Paul King.

Many were taught in the past that response to a drama was “a willing suspension of disbelief”.

This is something that is certainly required for the Paddington films. In fact, the British public, and the public worldwide, faced with a story about a talking bear in Paddington, more than willingly suspended their disbelief. And they will continue to do so with Paddington 2.

After all, it is about a bear who came to London from Brazil, who was saved from the rapids by his kind Aunt Lucy who, with her spouse, Pastuzo, intending to visit London. Paddington did go to London, finished up as a member of the Brown family, endeared himself to all the neighbours (except the crusty local guard, Mr Curry, Peter Capaldi, still inveighing against Paddington here), but did get tangled up with a nasty villain played by Nicole Kidman.

Can the formula be repeated? Definitely, yes.

One of the great advantages of the films is Ben Whishaw’s voice, a quietly persuasive and engaging Paddington. He is full of courtesy, full of good nature, full of goodwill. The Browns are all back again, Henry (Hugh Bonneville) the insurance agent, Mary (Sally Hawkins) always concerned, the wise and wary grandmother (Julie Walters), their daughter Judy (Madeleine Harris) was now publishing a local paper but not allowing any boys on the staff, and Jonathan (Samuel Joslin) temporally giving up his interest in trains until at the end where he actually does drive a steam train.

The opening does a re-viewing of the story, with Paddington writing a letter to Aunt Lucy (Imelda Staunton) and uncle (Michael Gambon). Aunt Lucy gets the opportunity to imagine a visit to London in the pages of a pop-up book of the sites, as well as visiting at the end for her birthday.

This is definitely a London film and all those who love the city, are familiar with the city, the main sites, will enjoy it very much.

Just as with the first film, there is a complicated plot, Paddington wanting buy a pop-up book from the local antiques dealer, Mr Gruber (Jim Broadbent), but finding it too expensive, takes on some jobs (badly) from a disastrous haircut to a cantankerous judge (Tom Conti) to window cleaning – a little more successful. At the opening of the Steam Fair, he is chosen by the celebrity, Phoenix Buchanan, to assist in the ceremony. When asked what he wants, he explains to Phoenix that he would love to have the book. Yes, we have guessed it. Phoenix is an absolute fraud and wants the book for himself.

We haven't been seeing so much of Hugh Grant in films in recent times but this is a wonderful role for him, sending up his own image, accent, performances, a scoundrel of an actor who delights in disguises (even as a nun in St Paul's Cathedral whom the dopey guard thinks is one of the most attractive women he's ever seen!). He steals the book, Paddington in pursuit on the local dog, but arrested by the disbelieving police.

The film then turns into a prison show, especially in the prison dining room with its inedible porridge and Paddington challenging Knuckles, the Irish cook (Brendan Gleeson) – but charming him with bread and marmalade and not only their working together, a lot of the lags (including Noah Taylor) outing their recipes and making cakes.

The Brown family also take it in hand to discover who the criminal is, everyone having a job, entering Phoenix's house, deceiving him with an edited phone call to go to the Ritz... This involves interviewing a theatrical agent, a Joanna-Lumley-like [Joanna Lumley](#)!

It wouldn't be a prison film without an escape. So, There is an enjoyable one here, Knuckles persuading Paddington to join, actually a hot air balloon with the laundry basket as the carriage!

There is an enjoyable flashback from the woman who invented the Steam Fair (Eileen Atkins) and some revelations about the pop-up book, the clues it contains, the story of a murderous magician – and you will guess the connection – and hidden treasure.

As mentioned, there is a desperate train chase with Paddington confronting Phoenix.

All is well that ends happily will – but do not miss the credits because there is a lot of wonderful recapitulation and, of all things, a prison musical, Stephen Sondheim's song, given the full prisoners' treatment starring Hugh grant!

With such a big cast and entertaining cameos, and entertaining fantasy – the best of British!

PITCH PERFECT 3

US, 2017, 93 minutes, Colour.

Anna Kendrick, Rebel Wilson, Hailee Steinfeld, Brittany Snow, Ruby Rose, Anna Camp, John Lithgow, Elizabeth Banks, John Michael Higgins.

Directed by Trish Sie.

Given the amount of singing in this film, both a cappella and with instrument accompaniment, the pitch of the now, very well-known group, the Bella's, is still very effective.

However, the use of the word "perfect" in the title is quite an overstatement!

This is one for the fans only. It presupposes audience liking the central characters, especially Beca and Fat Amy, Anna Kendrick and Rebel Wilson; it presupposes audience knowledge of the ups and downs of the group, the different personalities, their interactions, their failures and successes in the past in competitions, their being on a high at the end of the sequel. They have a strong desire to join up again, especially since Beca has given up her job as a music producer, in frustration with the antics of the talent. Everybody finds themselves available – and the venue for this third film in the series is Europe, Spain, Italy and France, the girls participating in a USO concert tour.

The first part of the film could be very wearing for some audiences. The whole film is very female-oriented in its tone, very "girly" in its characters, behaviour and their appeal. There are some token males throughout the film, generally friendly, and Navy man accompanying the group, a record producer...

The film does start with a huge explosion on a yacht in the Mediterranean and Beca and Amy leaping off. Then it goes into flashback. Halfway through the film, a new character is introduced, Fat Amy's father, who calls her by her real name, Patricia. Since Patricia is Australian, then her father, played by John Lithgow, has to have an Australian accent – or, at least, caricature of one. He has deserted his family in the past, is clearly hypocritical in seeking out his daughter and has dire intentions! This gives a bit of conflict drama to the screenplay – over and above the Bellas trying to compete with another talented group.

The screenplay seems to admit that this will be the last of the Pitch Perfect films for a while (anyone for Pitch Perfect: The Reunion in 10 years time!). The dialogue makes it quite clear that each of the Bellas has different intentions for the future, family, study, business...

This third film is rather forgettable, certainly not perfect. However, it must be said that Beca, Fat Amy and the other Bellas have provided a lot of entertainment to audiences in recent years.

THE POST

US, 2017, 115 minutes, Colour.

Meryl Streep, Tom Hanks, Sarah Paulson, Bob Odenkirk, Tracy Letts, Bradley Whitford, Bruce Greenwood, Matthew Rhys, Alison Bree, Carrie Coon, Jesse Plemons, Michael Stuhlbarg, David Cross.

Directed by Steven Spielberg.

This is a film well worth seeking out for those who enjoy intelligent cinema. It has been directed by Steven Spielberg, winner of two Oscars for best director, *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan*. More recently he made the very interesting *Bridge of Spies*.

One suspects that he is rather politically motivated to make this film at this time, a story of *The Washington Post*, denounced during his presidential campaign and his first year in office by Donald Trump. It stars Meryl Streep who spoke out about the President at an award ceremony and was

dismissed by a presidential Twitter as “over-rated”. With the release of the film she has urged him to see it so that he will have more respect for those he disagrees with.

So, a timely film, although its setting is 1971. This is The Washington Post story of The Pentagon Papers, their publication, the move to prevent their publication by President Nixon and the subsequent Supreme Court judgement on freedom of the press. For those who remember, for those in the know, the film ends with a security guard discovering an open door in the Watergate centre and the beginnings of the Watergate scandal exposed by The Washington Post (which might be a suggestion that we have another look at All the President’s Men from 1976).

The film actually opens in 1966 in Vietnam, three short sequences of camouflaging, night combat, recuperation, with the journalist typing his report. They again remind us of how effectively Spielberg can film war sequences.

The journalist concerned is Daniel Ellsberg who is shown in an encounter with Secretary, Robert McNamara, who then gives a press conference stating optimistic views about the war in Vietnam – though having authorised elaborate study, which has been kept secret, highlighting US policy from Truman, through Eisenhower and Kennedy, to Johnson, indicating that the war is doomed to failure. Yet the government was continuing to send American troops, some conscripted, far away from the US to fight and die in Southeast Asia. There are also scenes of protest in the film.

In 1971, the New York Times published some of these Pentagon Papers and an immediate injunction was placed on them. At the same time, The Post editor Ben Bradlee (played very energetically by Tom Hanks) was eager to boost the status of The Washington Post, bringing not only in enthusiasm but a demand on his staff as well as pressure on the publisher, Katharine Graham. Her father had founded the paper, bequeathed it to her husband, Philip Graham, and, on his suicide, she had inherited the role of publisher.

At this point in a review, it is worth noting that the credits make a point of tribute to Gloria Steinem. The Post could serve as a very useful example in studies on the role of women, of women in business, CEOs, with its vivid scenes of Katharine Graham walking into board meetings, dominantly male, being condescended to, coming from an affluent world of society parties, women withdrawing at the end of meals for their own chat and gossip, fashion and socials. Katharine Graham had to break through this glass ceiling – and Meryl Streep certainly brings Katharine Graham to life, especially in the scene where she has to make a decision about publishing the Pentagon Papers or not, few words spoken, but Meryl Streep communicates intensely what was going through Katharine Graham’s mind, through her feelings, making the judgement.

In some ways the section on The Post and its journalist, Bagdikian (Bob Odenkirk), making contact with Ellsberg, getting the documents, the team under Bradlee sorting them and building up a story with only hours for their task, the lawyers coming, the warnings, the decision to publish and run the risk of imprisonment, are the elements of a thriller.

President Nixon does not come well out of this story, banning The Washington Post from the White House – and remembering, again, the irony of The Post exposing Watergate.

The Supreme Court does come out well, the verdict of six – three in favour of freedom of the press, the press to serve the people rather than the government.

The film is very well acted by a large cast, is certainly intelligently written, is a satisfying look back at history, of journalism (and a reminder that in those days there were no iPads, emails, 24 hour online

news services – and no tweets!).

THE SECRET SCRIPTURE

Ireland, 2016, 108 minutes, Colour.

Rooney Mara, Vanessa Redgrave, Eric Bana, Theo James, Jack Reynor, Susan Lynch, Aidan Turner, Adrian Dunbar.

Directed by Jim Sheridan.

This is an Irish story, a story that takes place in two different time periods, the 1940s and 1990s. It was made by Jim Sheridan who in the 1980s and 1990s chronicled some of Ireland's history, featuring Daniel Day Lewis and three of his films, *My Left Foot*, *In the Name of the Father*, *The Boxer*, as well as making the stark film, *The Field*. He returned to an Ireland very harsh in its past, still harsh but mellowing in later times.

The framework is the part of the story told in the 1990s. A sympathetic doctor, Dr Grene, Eric Banner, is summoned by the doctor- superintendent of an institution because it is closing and all the residents have to be moved. Problems are caused by an elderly lady, Rose, played by Vanessa Redgrave who also offers the voice-over for the rest of the film. Rose is dignified, sometimes bewildered, living in her past, unwilling to move.

When her possessions are thrown into a rubbish skip, Dr Grene is able to recover them, especially her copy of the Bible. And, she reveals, on the tops of pages and in the margins, she has written details of her story. Dr Grene gets permission to stay with her, with the help of a sympathetic nurse, Susan Lynch, and she recounts her story. The film goes into flashback.

In 1942, Ireland did not enter World War II but there was advertising for RAF pilots. Rose, a mixture of the waif and touches of strength, comes to live with her aunt and work in her cafe. She is played by Rooney Mara. There are several immediate influences on Rose. She encounters a sympathetic young man, Michael, Jack Reynor, at his shop. She is threatened by the IRA chief, Aidan Turner, and told to choose the right side. A strong swimmer, she goes to the beach but is warned by a stranger that she is swimming in the wrong place. The stranger then gives her a lift but she is mystified as to who he is and what he does.

The mystery is solved when he arrives at the cafe and is revealed to be a local priest, Father Gaunt (Theo James). From then on, her life becomes something of a tangle, the priest attracted to her, ambivalent in his behaviour, causing some gossip in the town. Michael has become a pilot and after parachuting and being caught in a tree, Rose has to rescue him, taking him to her hut in the woods where she has had to go because of the gossip and her aunt, conscious of customers, has fired her. She and Michael love each other. The IRA, however, come to threaten her and Michael escapes.

In the meantime, Father Gaunt is conscious of the gossip in the town, realises that Rose is pregnant and that people think he could be the father. He writes a denunciation letter to an institution, writing of Rose as nymphomaniac. Her aunt commits her.

Here is the harshness of Irish history, severe nuns, severe nurses, doctors relying on electric shock... The important fact of Rose's life is her pregnancy and the birth of her child – and accusations that she killed her child, reasons for her internment, her declaring that her child was alive, and her being tormented by these memories over the decades.

With Dr Grene helping her, many audiences might have a wishful thinking ending in mind – and it does come about with some credible information twists at the end of the film.

Ireland, harshness, judgemental in moral issues, the influence of the church, the role of the clergy, this is a story of what was and the yearning for what might have been.

STAR WARS: THE LAST JEDI

US/UK, 2017, 152 minutes, Colour.

Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Adam Driver, Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac, Andy Serkis, Lupita Nyong'o, Domhnall Gleeson, Anthony Daniels, Gwendolyn Christie, Kelly Marie Tran, Laura Dern, Justin Theroux.

Directed by Rian Johnson.

Within 10 days of release around the world, The Last Jedi had drawn in almost \$1 billion at the box office. That's popularity.

It is 40 years since the first words began to scroll upwards on the screen, introducing audiences to the galaxy far, far away, to the now-immediately-recognisable opening to John Williams striking score. And, 40 years later, that is the way that episode eight, The Last Jedi, opens. Not only do we know instantly that we are in the galaxy, that we have gone far, far away from our ordinary lives, but we feel what it is like to be in the galaxy, remembering the past episodes, hopeful for this new one.

Those in charge in the galaxy now are the First Order, ruled over by a Gollum-like creature (and, in fact, he is played by Andy Serkis), sinister and slimy both in look and voice. He is ruthless, his Star Wars aggression being led by General Hux (Domhnall Gleeson), assertive but something of a weak and insipid character. Meanwhile, the rebels are at their headquarters spaceship, led by Princess Leia. This film is dedicated to Carrie Fisher who had completed her work for the film before her untimely death. She has a strong and substantial role in this episode, reminding us of the strength of her character when we first met her in 1977.

The film is also strong for the presence of Mark Hamill. In episode seven, Rey (an intrepid Daisy Ridley) has gone to the planet where Luke Skywalker has exiled himself, on a craggy island. Her mission is to bring him back to help the rebels. He is reluctant, treats her with dismissal but, ultimately does train her in Jedi ways. He still has The Force and communicates with Leia. He also tells the story of his trying to train Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) and his discovery of the young man given over to the Darkside, even responsible for the death of his father, Han Solo – and initially prepared to destroy the rebel headquarters and his mother.

Also in the action is the adventure pilot, Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac), involved initially in daring raids against the First Order, disobeying orders but being successful, though demoted when Leia is injured and hands over to her successor, Vice Admiral Holdo (Laura Dern).

And, just as we might have been wondering where Finn is (John Boyega), he seems to come out of hibernation and soon goes on an important mission to try to get the codes to destroy the First Order headquarters. He is accompanied by Rose, Kelly Marie Tran, whose sister was killed in one of Poe's all attacks. They infiltrate the headquarters and meet a dubious character who knows the codes, played by Benicio del Toro.

So, the stage is set for more adventures and star wars, Vice Admiral Holdo will sacrificing herself so that the remnant can escape. The stage is also set for a confrontation between Luke Skywalker and

Kylo Ren, Luke relying on the Force to play strategic tricks on Kylo Ren.

And so, the stage is also set for the passing of the old Jedi links, Luke and Leia, the anointing of Rey as the new Jedi with Poe and Finn to be the co-warriors in episode nine.

After 40 years, changing the imagination and consciousness of audiences worldwide, the force of the series is still with us.

SWEET COUNTRY

Australia, 2017, 110 minutes, Colour.

Bryan Brown, Sam Neill, Hamilton Morris, Matt Day, Ewen Leslie, Natassia Gory Furber, Gibson John, Anni Finsterer, Tremayne Doolan, Trevon Doolan, Thomas M. Wright.

Directed by Warwick Thornton.

Here is a film which should be seen by as wide an audience as possible, especially Australian audiences, both indigenous and non-indigenous.

It is based on events that took place in 1929 and was filmed in South Australia. Director and cinematographer, Warwick Thornton, received great acclaim for his film about young people in and around Alice Springs, *Samson and Delilah* (2009). Thornton has photographed quite a number of films, including *The Sapphires*, as well as directing some short stories in *The Darkside* and an episode in Tim Winton's *The Turning*.

At one stage, a remark is made that this desert outback is a sweet country, good for cattle. However, audiences immediately realise that it is not necessarily a sweet country for indigenous people. As the credits begin, there is a close-up of water boiling and racist remarks being made offscreen. Then there is a close-up of Sam, an older aboriginal man in a court case. How did this happen?

Sam (a first screen appearance by Hamilton Morris, highly effective and persuasive) lives with his wife and niece on a land spread, managed by a God-fearing, Bible-reading owner, Fred Smith (Sam Neill). All are equal on this property. Suddenly, a neighbouring landowner, Harry Mitchell (Ewen Leslie) comes to ask for help from Fred and then asking for its permission to take Sam and his family to help with work. Harry Mitchell served on the Western front, does not believe in God's presence nor in equality. He is harsh with Sam, has a lustful eye on the niece, exploits Sam's wife. He is also harsh with the young aboriginal lad, Philomach, who belongs to another neighbouring spread.

Complications ensue, the boy, in chains, runs away, Mitchell goes in pursuit, confronting Sam, guns drawn and Mitchell shot. Sam realises that in killing a white man, it will be hard for him to get a hearing and justice. He and his wife go walkabout.

In town, the local policeman, Fletcher, Bryan Brown, is definitely in charge, a touch of the genial but also more than a touch of the arrogant. A significant part of the plot is his going out into the desert in pursuit of Sam and his falling victim to the desert and lack of water.

When Sam gives himself up, a young judge (Matt Day) arrives, rejects the suggestion that the case be held in the bar, takes it outside with a desk and deck chairs. Fred is there in support of Sam.

The court scene is very moving, the young judge, rather inexperienced and a bit full of himself, makes demands in his questions, impatient for answers, not appreciating the pace of indigenous

reflection and response.

The screenplay leads the audience to an appreciation of Sam, as well as the old aboriginal man, Archie (Gibson John also in a first film role) who was taken from his family and is subservient to the white owner, to watching Philomach, and wondering where he will finish. But the film also dramatises the exploitation of the indigenous, both men and women, by insensitive and cruel white men, treating the workers as the equivalent of slaves, no respect for them as persons, a rugged atmosphere, a rugged life, with seemingly no future for the indigenous men.

But, in 2018, almost 90 years later, an indigenous director all is telling the story and reminding everyone of the shame.

SWINGING SAFARI

Australia, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.

Guy Pearce, Julian McMahon, Radha Mitchell, Kylie Minogue, Asher Keddie, Jeremy Sims, Jack Thompson, Atticus Robb, Darcy Wilson,
Directed by Stephan Elliot.

The Americans can certainly make raucous, ultra-raucous comedies. So can writer-director, Stephane Elliott. He is best remembered for Priscilla but he also made A Few Best Men and Welcome to Woop Woop.

The success of this film and audience response will depend on moods. For those wanting a laugh, they will enjoy it very much. For those who don't do raucous comedy very well, it will seem very irritating and very silly. And the rest will probably be somewhere in between – and depending on those moods. How much laughing with or laughing at?

This is the 1970s, 1975 to be particular, with the success of Jaws. The film was made on the Gold Coast. The song, Swinging Safari, become something of a theme song, but in the background are many of the Australian hit songs of the time.

In the foreground, in the tradition of Dame Edna and her mocking the products of the past and their advertising, there are all kinds of visual icons of what was popular in those days in the shops, in homes, fashions and accessories, food and gadgets. Also in the foreground are the fashions and clothes of the time, Tony Abbott -like budgies, long hair, that is for the men, and stylised hairdos for the women. And, a variety of clothes.

It is summer. Three families are at the beach. We are introduced to each of them, the role of the father, the presence of the mother, the number of children. They are all friends – but, an experiment of permissiveness of the times, sexual, keys in a bowl and changing partners, leads to some excess but also to regrets and clashes.

The story is told from the point of view of a young photographer who gets his friends to be involved in making short films, small plots, eccentric characters, and one friend geared up to do all the stunts, including being set alight and having to jump into the swimming pool (with the other kids pouring in chlorine). The young man is Jeff Marsh, ably played by Atticus Robb, rather more serious than the other kids and sympathetic to Melly (Darcy Wilson) who is introverted, critical, on the way to serious lamia.

The other main theme is a beached whale. Everyone is fascinated, the Mayor, Jack Thompson, encouraging tourists – but, after it is impossible to get the whale back into the water after it dies, explosives are planted with an enormous explosion and bits of blubber, huge and small, descending on all the characters, something like an apocalyptic judgement.

The film has attracted strong character actors for the parents. Guy Pearce and Radha Mitchell (almost and recognisably raucous) are the Halls. Julian McMahon and Kylie Minogue (playing rather morose) are the Joneses. Jeremy Sims and Asher Keddie are the Marshes.

Priscilla worked well and led to stage productions. Welcome to Woop Woop seems rather stupid. And, somewhere in between, depending on your vantage points of good or bad, lies *Swinging Safari*.

THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MISSOURI

US, 2017, 115 minutes, Colour.

Frances McDormand, Woody Harrelson, Sam Rockwell, Lucas Hedges, Caleb Landry Jones, Abbie Cornish, Kathryn Newton, John Hawkes, Samara Weaving, Clarke Peters.

Directed by Martin McDonagh.

Martin McDonagh is an extremely talented writer. He has had many successes in theatre. In film, he made *In Bruges* as well as *Seven Psychopaths*. He certainly likes titles with the touch of eccentricity – no more than in this one. Who else would have billboards in the title, let alone a reference to Ebbing, Missouri?

This is a most interesting and highly entertaining film – though, those familiar with his other works will find that McDonagh is prone to include a high quotient of expletives. But, they seem rather appropriate in the mouth of the central character, Mildred Hayes. She is a citizen of Ebbing, Missouri, and finds the framework for three billboards outside the town, not used since the 80s, and decides to rent them.

She is an angry woman. And she is played as if born to the role by Frances McDormand, a fine, strong actress, who won an Oscar for her Minnesota sheriff in *Fargo*. This now is an award-winning performance on any level. But, Mildred's motivation? Her daughter, Angela, was raped and killed. There have been no police results. So, on the billboards, in red and black, bold letters, a challenge to the local police, especially Chief Willoughby, played by Woody Harrelson.

McDonagh has an ability not only with words but also with plot developments, character explorations, the interconnections. Chief Willoughby goes to see her, reveals that he is dying of cancer, eliciting little sympathy from Mildred, but he is a good man, is trying his best, dealing with his local police, especially Dixon, played expertly by Sam Rockwell. In fact, Harrelson and Rockwell are at their very best here.

There is sadness in the portrayal of Willoughby, especially with his family, his cancer, terminal, his response, especially a day out with his family, and a fine ability to write letters, especially to his wife (Abbie Cornish), to Mildred, to Dixon – fine and encouraging letters.

Mildred's billboards are rejected by the townspeople, and Mildred is no slouch in counter-attack, especially a needle in a dentist's hand, setting fire to buildings, and some scorching repartee. There are scenes with her former husband, John Hawkes, and his very young girlfriend (Samara Weaving). Her son, Robbie (Lucas Hedges), lives at home and has difficulty at school, the local priest coming to

help the boy but being on the ultra-sharp edge of some condemnation by Mildred, likening priests belonging to the church to criminals belonging to gangs, and while they might not commit crimes individually, they are all tarred with the guilt of the gang.

Perhaps the best development of character in the film is that of Dixon, a redneck Missouri policeman, who tortures “persons of colour”, not particularly bright, dominated by his slovenly mother at home, grieving for Willoughby, angry at the young man who made the contract for Mildred to have the billboards, throwing him out of a window and bashing him. When he is suspended, by an African- American superior officer, he is resentful. However, he is touched by the letter, touched by some help from Mildred after the police station goes up in flames, tries his own method to discover who the murderer is.

There are many minor characters in Ebbing, all of them well depicted. This all goes to make an interesting screenplay, offbeat certainly, with characters who are not clear-cut black or white but all have their ambivalences, ambiguities in what they do and say.

So, interesting, entertaining, demanding reflection.

WONDER WHEEL

US, 2017, 101 minutes, Colour.

Kate Winslet, Jim Belushi, Juno Temple, Justin Timberlake, Max Caselli, Jack Gore, David Krumholz.
Directed by Woody Allen.

Wonder Wheel. The Wonder Wheel of Coney island, a popular landmark. Brooklyn, Woody Allen’s hometown. One wonders whether there is anything autobiographical in this film. The setting is 1950. Woody Allen would have been 14, turning 15 the end of that year.

At one stage, reviewers and the public were criticising Woody Allen for not being funny. There was a presumption that he would make comedies only. And, we remember, he has made many comedies. But, in 1978, he made *Interiors*, a homage to the serious films of Swedish director, Ingmar Bergman. Audiences were puzzled. However, over the decades, he has made many films with serious themes, and acknowledged the influence of filmmakers and playwrights like Federico Fellini or Anton Chekhov. And, many agree that one of his best films he has the 1989 *Crimes and Misdemeanours*.

There are references to Eugene O’Neill in the screenplay, and his *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. There also seemed to be significant references to Tennessee Williams and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, especially the central character Blanche Dubois – and comparisons were also made with Blanche Dubois with Cate Blanchett’s Oscar-winning performance in *Blue Jasmine*.

Which is an introduction to the review of this film that does not set out to be funny at all.

The focus of the film is Ginny, who turns 40 during 1950. We find her working as a waitress in a diner in the summer of 1950 at a crowded beach at Coney Island. She feels she is having a life of drudgery. She is worn out by the routines, suffers from frequent migraines. And she has an impossible son, a pyromaniac, continually getting into trouble with authorities, lighting his eyes at school and even in the therapist’s office. Otherwise he is stealing money from Humpty, to whom Ginny is married, and using the money for going to the movies which he loves. (Interestingly, the main poster Woody Allen shows is *Winchester 73* with James Stewart and Shelley Winters – one doesn’t usually associate Woody Allen with westerns!).

Not exactly the most intriguing of dramatic setups, but...

However, there are quite some complications. First of all, it should be acknowledged that casting, always interesting with Woody Allen, and performances, are quite striking. Kate Winslet is at her best as Ginny. Jim Belushi has the opportunity to be a middle-aged equivalent of Stanley Kowalski, looking after the carousel on the beach. Juno Temple is Carolina, his alienated daughter who comes back after a divorce from a gangster, having spoken to the FBI and is now marked for death. The other main character is Mickey, who has served in the Navy during the war, is a student of drama with intentions to write plays, a propensity to theorise about drama, tragic flaws and tragedy, quoting Eugene O' Neill. He also does the narrative voice-over of the film and is played by Justin Timberlake – an interesting, if not always effective, choice.

The colour in the photography is heightened, summer at the crowded beach, bright, sunny, colourful. On the other hand, some of the interior scenes in the upstairs apartment at the beach where the family lives are quite dark.

Mickey is younger, a touch carefree, attracted to Ginny, easily luring her into an affair which brings some love and affection into her life, a growing sense of guilt, embarrassment about the age difference, and an increasing jealousy when Mickey encounters Carolina and she interprets his attentions as flirting. This will ultimately lead to Ginny and her own version of crimes and misdemeanours.

In these years, reviewers are conscious that a Woody Allen film is an annual event and there is pressure on them either to enthuse or to condemn. This reviewer's feelings about Wonder Wheel the more to the infuse. Ginny is a strong character and her interactions with other characters tend to stay in the memory, partly to condemn, partly to understand – which means that Woody Allen and Kate Winslet have created quite a memorable character.

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THE COMMUTER

UK/US, 2018, 105 minutes, Colour.

Liam Neeson, Vera Farmiga, Patrick Wilson, Jonathan Banks, Sam Neill, Elizabeth Mc Govern, Killian

Scott, Florence Pugh.
Directed by Jaume Collett- Serra.

This is another fast-paced thriller with Liam Neeson. In older age, he seems to have been specialising in this kind of film, especially with the three films of the series, Taken. And this is the fourth film that he has made with Spanish director, Jaume Collett- Serra. The previous films were Run All Night, Unknown, Nonstop.

Nonstop provided tension in the air. This time a lot of the action takes place in a train, one of those commuter trains that travels north from New York City along the Hudson River. So, The Commuter can take its place confidently in the catalogue of exciting films that take place on trains – as well as train crashes. But, there is also some good action after the crash when the train is under siege from the police and FBI agents.

Liam Neeson is usually a hero – he has played some villains but, tall and strong, he was born to be a hero. It is only after some time that we learn that he actually was in the New York police force but left and has become an insurance salesman. He lives in the suburbs, devoted wife, Elizabeth McGovern, intelligent son about to go to college, Killian Scott, colleagues at work, attentiveness to clients – and then he gets fired. He begins to drown his sorrows with his former police partner, Patrick Wilson, noticing that the head of the squad, now a captain, is also in the bar (Sam Neill).

We have seen him on and off the train many times. This time a woman, Vera Farmiga, comes to sit with him, a psychologist asking him a hypothetical question – well at least she says initially it is hypothetical. For \$100,000 she challenges him to find someone on the train who answers to the name, Prynn, who needs to be eliminated. As a former detective and feeling miserable about his situation, he accepts the challenge.

At this stage, we might be wondering what on earth we would do faced with such a challenge and the impossibility of identifying such a character on a crowded commuter train. Well, he recovers the initial outlay of the money, starts to move up and down the train. He has to use all his ingenuity, causing all kinds of disruptions and suspicions, getting phone calls from the mysterious woman who seems to be observing close-up all that he does or fails to do.

Lots of suspicious characters, lots of suspicious behaviour, and seemingly no nearer to identifying Prynn.

Eventually, as they near the end of the line, the main suspects are in just one carriage but, of course, it doesn't end there.

Plenty of excitement, plenty of scrutiny of potential criminals, some twists and who are the goodies and baddies, and then the crash and the siege.

After the preview, there was some discussion as to whether the plot was plausible (hopefully not happening too often) and whether it all made sense, especially the role of the woman who challenged the commuter as well as her involvement in the situation that led to this fatal trip. It seemed to require a bit of thinking, connecting and linking, but it does seem that the plot, despite its far-fetchedness, can actually be explained.

On the other hand, with the fast action, not so many members of the audience will be sitting back and detachedly working out whether it all makes sense.

DEN OF THIEVES

2018, 140 minutes, Colour.

Gerard Butler, Jordan Bridges, Pablo Schreiber, Evan Jones, O'Shea Jackson Jr, .50 Cent Jackson, Eric Braeden.

Directed by Christian Gudegast.

While 'den of thieves' is a scriptural phrase and Jesus is the one to clear them out of the temple, it is a bit of a stretch to see the special squad of the LA sheriff's department, scruffy, tough, burly and brutal, as the equivalent of Jesus!

We are informed at the opening that LA is the bank robbery capital of the world, a robbery happening every 48 minutes. Whether they are like the robberies in this film is another matter.

For two hours twenty minutes, the audience is immersed in the world of the robbers as well as the world of the special squad. And, in its way, it is very interesting. However, with the proliferation of guns, the seemingly indiscriminate firing of the machine guns during robberies, it is not quite an advertisement for anyone to go to live in LA. (A reviewer remarked: the National Rifle Association's film of the year!)

The film opens with a robbery just before dawn, a security truck stolen by a group of masked men outside a doughnut shop. The police arrive as do the FBI and shots are fired, a policeman killed. And there are clashes between the tough leader of the squad, Nick O'Brien (Gerard Butler) and the neatly-suited vegan leader of the FBI.

As the film progresses, we get to know the squad, Nick, a big tough man (though there are some domestic scenes where he is shown not to be able to handle his family situation well at all even in being shown weeping as he sat in his car), the various loyal members of the group and their methods.

And, as the film progresses, we get to know the thieves, highly organised and their den, an old warehouse, the group with expertise in mechanics, communications and Internet, surveillance techniques. They are led by Merriman (Pablo Schreiber), a former footballer and military man. His group have quite a diverse ethnic representation, African-American, Hispanic, Anglo, Hawaiian.

Nick makes a connection with their getaway driver, Donnie (O'Shea Jackson, who more than resembles his father, Ice Cube, whom he played in Straight Outta Compton). Donnie defends himself and is seen as an ace risk-taking driver. Nick also accosts Donnie when he is out at a restaurant with the whole group, Nick identifying Merriman as the past footballer.

Which leads up to the plan for the den of thieves to rob the Federal Reserve. How they plan to do it is part of the interest and entertainment of this film. In preparation, there is a robbery at a local bank and the taking of hostages, once again Nick and his squad arriving as well as the FBI who want to take over and have a negotiator which the thieves have explicitly forbidden.

But, this is a decoy and it is Nick who discovers what is really happening. And, the scenes of the Federal Reserve, are shown in some detail. It is all rather smart, especially the way that Donnie is employed on the staff of the Reserve diner, enabling him, however, to participate in the robbery.

Enthusiasts of this genre have all referred to the Robert De Niro-Al Pacino thriller by Michael Mann, Heat. However, most of the audience will not quite remember the detail of Heat and take this film on its own merits, written and directed by Christian Gudegast (son of Eric Braeden who has a guest appearance).

(For some years this reviewer has been advocating Gerard Butler full-screen versions of Lee Child's Jack Reacher – Tom Cruise did all right, but Butler looks and sounds the real thing!)

And, most of the audience will surely not have guessed the final twist - something to look forward to.

FATHER FIGURES

US, 2017, 113 minutes, Colour.

Owen Wilson, Ed Helms, Glenn Close, Harry Shearer, Terry Bradshaw, J.K. Simmons, Katt Williams, Christopher Walken, June Squibb, Katie Aselton, Jack Mc Gee, Ving Fhames.

Directed by Laurence Sher.

Two 40 year old men, who are revealed to be twins, definitely not identical, played by Owen Wilson and Ed Helms, go to their mother's wedding ceremony. So far, so all right. But Peter, Helms, is an extremely uptight doctor, expert proctologist, divorced and with a son who doesn't like him, takes the opportunity to ask his mother about their father about whom she has never spoken. Kyle, Wilson, on the other hand is, well, Owen Wilson as in so many of his films, laid-back, easy-going, getting a huge royalties income from the fact that a photo of him as a surfer has been on millions of sauce bottles.

Mother is played by Glenn Close. She has stories about the 1970s, the easy morals, the promiscuity, doubts about paternity... But, she gives them a clue, sending them on a quest, something significant because the two have had difficulties in getting on, Peter, the older, being severely protective and Kyle, the younger, needing a father figure. At this stage, his Hawaiian girlfriend, reveals that she is pregnant so finding a father figure is significant.

Luckily, money and buying tickets is not a problem! Following the clue, off they go to Miami, tracking down a famous football player from the 1970s, Terry Bradshaw. Non-football fans will get a surprise at the final credits to find that Terry Bradshaw is being played by – Terry Bradshaw. The twins are excited, have always been fans of Terry, happy memories of him. Terry takes a shine to Peter and tends to ignore Kyle. Anyway, you will have to see the movie to get the details, but he is not the one.

Next candidate is a financier whom Terry and his friends looked down on. They track him down and he turns out to be Roland Hunt, played by J.K. Simmons, not quite the financier they were expecting. In fact, the opposite. He explains that he is involved in repossession of cars and, eagerly, they join him in one of his quests but it turns out that he is a sham and a con man. He is not the one.

Peter is inclined to give up except that Kyle has a theory that the universe is talking to them and that they need to pursue their quest. Actually, the universe responds by getting them stuck in a traffic jam, seeing a hitchhiker and Peter, of course, wanting to look the other way. Kyle, on the other hand, reaches out. Hitchhiker is African- American (so a lot of comments on race issues) who wants to get home to his wife and children for a birthday celebration. Katt Williams is very genial in the role

of the hitchhiker, being tied up the brothers in case he is a serial killer, trying to arbitrate in the squabble between the two brothers and, if a reviewer were to claim that they are stuck on a level crossing with the train approaching, the reader would be inclined to disbelieve. But...

Then the universe speaks to them in the form of police who know well the next candidate to be their father. This time they are off to Boston. Kyle has led a very free and easy life in Hawaii. Peter is in no way free and easy but actually gives in to Kyle's advice in a casual encounter with a sad young woman at a bar. Actually, this leads to even more complications than might have been anticipated and the possibility that their father is a very well-known and respected policeman. But, with a lot of discussions, he is not the one.

They go home, go to see the local vet, Christopher Walken, who put down their pet cat years earlier. They aggressively believe that he must be their father and attack him but mother comes to see them and, there is a twist in the revelation of their parental identity.

Some tears at the end as well as some smiles. Not a must-see but, in many ways, a pleasant enough pastime moving from the raucous, as in so many American comedies, to the moral and moralising.

FILM STARS DON'T DIE IN LIVERPOOL

UK, 2017, 105 minutes, Colour.

Annette Bening, Jamie Bell, Julie Walters, Stephen Graham, Kenneth Cranham, Vanessa Redgrave, Francis Barber, Leanne Best.

Directed by Paul Mc Guigan.

While enjoyment of the film does not depend on audience knowledge of actress Gloria Grahame, it will certainly enhance the enjoyment of older audiences who do remember her and film buffs who have seen her performances and are aware of her reputation.

The film star who does have the possibility of dying in Liverpool – but does not, is Gloria Grahame. In fact, the film incorporates some scenes from the actual films, the credits for *Naked Alibi* and an extensive insert of her song in that film, *Ace in the Hole*. Gloria Grahame won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in *The Bad and the beautiful*, 1952. The film ends with the footage from that ceremony, her walking up the aisle, accepting the statuette, saying thanks and immediately walking off – with a final quip from compere, Bob Hope.

But, Liverpool?

As Gloria Grahame's career began to fade in Hollywood, she appeared on stage, travelling to England in the late 1970s to appear in Lancashire in *The Glass Menagerie*. This is where the film opens, her putting on her make-up, week, in some detail, and then collapsing. It gives the audience the opportunity to look at Annette Bening and her interpretation of Gloria Grahame, certainly a fine performance from the actress, not trying to impersonate her but to communicate her character.

The film is based on an autobiographical memoir by Liverpool actor, Peter Turner. He is played by Jamie Bell (reunited with Julie Waters after *Billy Elliot* – Julie Walters playing his mother here). He has a chance encounter with Gloria Grahame and they begin a friendship, her staying at his family home, befriended by his mother, admired by his father (Kenneth Cranham in a good cameo), and his brother Joe, Stephen Graham.

The two begin an affair, symbolised by a scene in Gloria's room in the house where she wants to learn disco dancing and Peter obliges (reminding audiences of how talented a dancer Jamie Bell was when he was young Billy Elliot). They travel to America, his seeing Gloria's American world, as well as to California with a visit Gloria's mother, played by Vanessa Redgrave, and her hostile sister, played by Frances Barber.

There are lyrical moments in the UK where Gloria is successful in the play, Rain. However, she is ill, with the cancer which she has neglected. There are key sequences in the United States where Gloria goes out all day without telling Peter where she was, seems to turn on him and he leaves. Then there is the same sequence from her point of view, visits to the doctor, her unwillingness to have Peter involved in her illness – quite an emotional change for the audience. However, in England, she phones him and takes refuge in his house.

This is a British film directed by Scots Paul Mc Guigan who has a rather wide range of dramatic films as well as Sherlock telemovies with Benedict Cumberbatch. He has a very intelligent screenplay by Matt Greenhalgh to work with and excellent performances all round. This is symbolised by a very moving sequence towards the end, a reading of a scene from Romeo and Juliet between Gloria and Peter.

In the early part of the film, many in the audience might feel that they are prying into the private life of an actress. However, as the film proceeds, the characters become more real, more interesting and the audience becomes more able to identify with them, until the sad ending with Gloria's death and the amusing postscript of her ultra-brief Oscar-acceptance.

I, TONYA

US, 2017, 120 minutes, Colour.

Margot Robbie, Sebastien Stan, Allison Janney, Julianne Nicholson, Paul Walter Hauser, Bobby Cannavale, Bogdana Novakovitz, Caitlin Carver, Maizie Smith, Mckenna Grace.

Directed by Craig Gillespie.

This is a strongly autobiographical title. And the Tonya is champion ice skater, Tonya Harding – who, in the 1990s, was known as a determined competitor and who was responsible for paying injury to her main rival, Nancy Kerrigan. With this film, this aspect of the reputation will happen all over again.

With the I in the title, Tonya is telling her own story, and she does it straight to camera, sitting in her kitchen in later years, confiding in the audience, reminiscing, becoming angry, and always insisting that anything that happened to her was not her fault. At other times, during the film, she will also turn to camera tell us all about it.

In fact, other characters also talk to camera. The main person in her life was her mother, an embittered woman, taking out her angers on her daughter, living through her daughter and her skating talent but always undermining, often physically violent, badmouthing her daughter. Allison Janney, whom audiences have admired for decades, notably for her performance in the television series, *The West Wing*, has already won the Golden Globe award for Best Supporting Actress and the same award from the Screen Actors Guild. It is an extraordinarily intense portrait of a monstrous woman, absorbed in herself, seeing everything in connection with herself, but also absorbed, up close or at a distance, with her daughter. It is a performance worth watching.

But also, well worth watching, is the performance of Margot Robbie as Tonya. Two talented little girls portray her when she was small, determined, and outskilling girls at her skating who are older. She tells us that she always loved skating, that she knew nothing else, that this was her life. Margot Robbie has to portray Tonya as a teenager, as a young adult, the crisis in her life and the attack on Nancy Kerrigan coming when she was only 23. Margot Robbie embodies Tonya, as a character, as a redneck, which she claims she is, as a moody young woman, and as a competitive performer, Margot Robbie doing a great deal of the skating herself.

The other person in Tonya's life was Jeff Gilhooly. He is played here by Sebastian Stan, another strong performance, a friendly young man, in a relationship with the teenage Tonya, ambitious for her, but also prone to irrational and violent outbursts. This is a tempestuous relationship, a fierce example of domestic violence. And her mother continually declares she never liked him.

Jeff Gilhooly has a friend, Shawn (Paul Walter Hauser), a large and oafish young man, not too many brains to bless himself with, who acts as Tonya's bodyguard and is the brains (or lack of brains) in going beyond Jeff Gilhooly's aim to frighten Nancy Kerrigan but employing an ignorant friend who bashes the skater's knee.

The action after the event of the bashing reveals Jeff is becoming more and more desperate, the police investigation, Shawn's ignorant denials, the arrest of the actual basher, Shawn setting up Jeff at midnight at a diner to get him to confess... It is hard to tell how much Tonya actually knew or discovered after the event. Nevertheless, she perseveres in competitive skating, preparing for the 1992 Winter Olympics, making impression with her skills, though always alienating the team of judges by her personality, by her presentation, by her attitudes.

Comes the moment at the Olympics...

In the epilogue to the film, it is revealed that Tonya became a boxer, another violent sport. A postscript indicates that she has settled down somewhat and, in fact, accompanied Margot Robbie to the Golden Globes.

The credits images are worth seeing, impressive scenes of the actual Tonya Harding and her skating – and a glimpse her actual mother looking exactly the way Allison Janney portrays her in the film

A slice of American life – with many bitter tastes.

LADY BIRD

US, 2017, 93 minutes, Colour.

Saoirse Ronan, Laurie Metcalf, Tracy Letts, Lucas Hedges, Beanie Feldstein, Lois Smith, Jordan Rodrigues, Odeya Rush, Kathryn Newton, Stephen Mc Kinley Henderson.

Directed by Greta Gerwig.

Every reviewer has said, or is going to say, that Lady Bird reminds them of films that Greta Gerwig has appeared in and/or has written. So this reviewer is going to say the same – because it is true.

Here is a film set in Sacramento, California, in 2002. Partly autobiographical?

Information on Greta Gerwig indicates that she was born in Sacramento, 1983 (which makes her two

years younger than the protagonist of *Lady Bird*), that she was brought up as a Unitarian but went to a Catholic school.

There is something distinctive about the films that Greta Gerwig writes as well as about her delivery – there is wit, there is nonchalance, there is determination, there is something seething under the surface, there is a desire to be agreeable... And all this is to the fore in *Lady Bird*.

Two words to describe the writing and the direction: perspective and sensitivity.

Here we are in the US in 2002, a cross-section of people who live in Sacramento, ordinary Californians. They work in hospitals, in IT. The children go to high schools and are involved in studies, school activities like plays, get together, listen to music, experiment with drugs, are preoccupied with sexuality and their identity. Because of the incisiveness and insight of the writing, we get to know a great number of characters fairly well. And their parts are sensitively written and performed.

One of the advantages of the film is that many of the sequences are particularly brief yet significant. Though the running time of *Lady Bird* is 95 minutes, with such brief and telling sequences, it seems more in the sense of that there is more to see and to reflect on.

Saoirse Ronan has been a significant actress since she was a girl, Oscar-nominated 10 years earlier for *Atonement*. She has appeared in a range of interesting films including *Hannah*, *The Lovely Bones*, *Brooklyn*. She is the type of actress that can inhabit a role, becoming the character rather than a star whom we recognise instantly. This is a very subtle performance – and her Christine, “*Lady Bird*”, is an irritating character, a frequently likeable character, a teenager who is self-absorbed, who has been put upon by her always critical mother, supported by a rather depressed and soft father, making friends at school, exploiting teachers, choosing boyfriends (rather unwisely), yearning to be out of Sacramento yet the nun teaching her tells her that her assignment on the city is actually full of love for the city she declares she hates.

Laurie Metcalf is very strong as her ever-criticising mother, loving her daughter, doing her best, wanting her daughter to be the best she can be but unable to be verbally affirming. Tracy Letts is very effective as her father. In fact, the whole cast, especially the teenagers at school, have been well selected and bring their characters to vivid life, especially Beanie Feldstein as her friend Julie whom she momentarily betrays and Lucas Hedges as her friend Danny.

So, we are immersed in the school year 2002 – 2003, reminded of the invasion of Iraq and its political consequences.

Of interest is the church background. Greta Gerwig attended a Catholic school but is not a Catholic and this is the case with *Lady Bird*, receiving a blessing instead of communion, for instance. There are Catholic motifs role throughout the film, the celebration of Mass and the enthusiastic response (despite a lot of the students being bored and distracting one another). There is a genial priest, Father Leviatch (Stephen McKinley Anderson), a widower, ordained, taking the students for drama and putting on a Stephen Sondheim musical. His successor, very amusingly, takes the drama and directs as if it were a football match. Lois Smith is a genially tolerant none.

The characters of this film have great qualities but are also flawed, making this an always interesting film, audiences being able to identify easily at times, distance at other times – which makes it quite a substantial drama.

MARY AND THE WITCH'S FLOWER

Japan, 2017, 195 minutes, Colour.

Voices of (English-dubbing): Ruby Barnhill, Kate Winslett, Jim Broadbent, Ewan Bremner, Lynda Baron, Louis Ashbourne Serkis, Morwenna Banks.

Directed by Hiramasa Yonebayashi.

Mary Stewart was a British author of children's stories. She wrote about Merlin and these books were adapted for a television series. She also wrote the popular story, *The Moonspinners*, adapted by Disney as a film vehicle for Haley Mills in the 1960s. This film is based on her novel, *The Little Broomstick*.

There has been something of a tradition in Japanese animation, especially from Studio Ghibli, with taking British stories and animating them, for example *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Steamboy*.

This film was made by an alumnus of Studio Ghibli, Hiramasa Yonebayashi, who had directed *The World of Arrietty* as well as *When Marnie Was There*. The visual style of this film, from Studio Ponoc, resembles Ghibli in many ways. Which means that it will appeal to the fans of this kind of Japanese animation.

The film opens with quite some vigour, a castle on fire, vain attempts to put it out, the audience noting a little girl trying to escape, getting away but then being pursued by monstrous creatures through the air. Then the credits. Then a very peaceful English countryside and a country house, with the Mary of the title, a young girl whose parents are away and a week to go before school starts. She is under the care of her grandaunt Charlotte and the housekeeper Mrs Banks.

Unfortunately, Mary has an inordinate propensity for breaking things and getting matters tangled. But, she is given a mission to take some raspberry jam to the delivery boy, Peter, who has commented adversely on her appearance and to whom she has taken a dislike. He is also the owner of two cats whom she has encountered, one grey, one black, who will appear and reappear throughout the adventures.

And, adventures is probably the key word. Mary finds mysterious flowers in the woods, which came from the seeds that the little girl in the opening had been trying to rescue. They have extraordinary powers – and Mary finds herself being transported, on a mysterious broom (the little broom of the novel's title who elicits our sympathy because of its presence, being broken, mended, magical powers) to an Academy run by two eccentrics, Madame Mumblechook And Doctor Dee, who want to use the essence of the flowers in order to create super creatures with magical powers.

Madame and the Doctor are not the most ethical teachers in the world and this builds up into a conflict with Mary, their wanting to experiment on Peter, her pledge to him to save him. This involves a mysterious experiment with a large and evolving globular mass which has trapped Peter.

Obviously, it will end happily, but there is tension and a lot of it on the way.

Made for Japanese children's audiences – but it would be interesting to discover how the English-language audience responds to it, magical action and themes of magic, with a very strong British voice cast which includes Kate Winslet, Jim Broadbent, Ewen Bremner and Ruby Barnhill as Mary.

THE MAZE RUNNER: THE DEATH CURE

US, 2018, 142 minutes, Colour.

Dylan O' Brien, Thomas Brodie- Sangster, Kaya Scodelario, Walton Goggins, Katherine McNamara, Aidan Gillen, Natalie Emanuel, Patricia Clarkson, Giancarlo Esposito, Barry Pepper, Ki Hong Lee.
Directed by Wes Ball.

Since this is the third episode in this young adult story, it is clearly geared for fans of the books on which the films are based as well as the films themselves. For those who might come to this film cold, it presupposes so much of the previous films that they might well be lost.

The fans will remember the previous films in all their detail, the first story about teenagers losing their memories and trapped in a maze. They will also recall the escape, the second film and the laboratories where experiments on a virus and the spreading of plague are done. For the less-involved audience and reviewers, it is sometimes a bit of a hard slog to remember the previous films in detail and not mix them up with similar stories, especially the Divergent series which it resembles in many ways, except that this time the central character is a hero rather than, as in Divergent and The Hunger Games, where the central character is female.

This time, the film opens with desert scenes, a ship that the rebels are refurbishing as a refuge, young captives in a train, rebels in pursuit, some rather spectacular stunt work with the rescue.

Then, we are introduced to get into a great number of the characters. At the centre, is Thomas. He has been played by Dylan O'Brien but this time he seems a rather sullen, short-fused seeker of vengeance as well as a saviour figure. (The IMDb notes that Dylan O' Brien is characterised by a goofy personality – he must be a good actor because there is absolutely nothing of goofiness in his performance here as well as in American Assassin).

The villains are also back. Aidan Gillen is Janson, the often seemingly-smiling security head of the laboratories where investigations are going on to find a serum against the plague. Patricia Clarkson is also back again as the doctor who does have some sympathy for the rebels. With her is Teresa (Kaya Scodelario) who for motives important for herself has been the agent of the capture of the main rebels. One of them are still being experimented on, Minho (Ki Hong Lee).

Thomas is also prone to taking heroic risks as well as some dopey risks. He decides to go into the city to rescue his friend from the laboratories, naturally enough his best friends all agree to go with him. So does an older associate, Giancarlo Esposito.

So, there is a lot of action in the city, infiltrating the city, being the zombie-like plague victims, infiltrating the laboratories. There are a lot of confrontations, Thomas with Teresa, with Janson, leading to a lot of stunt work fights at the end.

Thomas has always had a thing for Teresa but is angry with her, wanting to go into the city to find her – and she finding that he is not only a saviour but his blood might have the cure for the world. It doesn't quite work out for the happy-ever-after ending audiences might have hoped for. Thomas Brodie- Sangster as Newt, Thomas's devoted friend, is also in danger because he has contracted the plague.

As might be expected in this kind of post-apocalyptic story, there is a final remnant, finding peace away from the turmoil of the city and the plague.

With this series completed, what will turn up next...?

MOLLY'S GAME

US, 2017, 140 minutes, Colour.

Jessica Chastain, Idris Elba, Kevin Costner, Michael Chiro, Jeremy Strong, Chris O'Dowd, Brian d'Arcy James, Bill Camp, Graham Greene.

Directed by Aaron Sorkin.

Molly's Game is actually poker. She does not play herself. She supervises, controls, vets possible players, learns the techniques, and is handsomely tipped by her wealthy clients and gamblers. She is played by Jessica Chastain, another very strong performance.

The writer-director is Aaron Sorkin. He is well-known as a storyteller, excellent script writer, and now he makes his directorial debut as well as writing the screenplay. While the plot is quite strong, it is the dialogue which is very powerful and the actors give it more than capable delivery. This is very true of an extensive voice-over from Jessica Chastain (perhaps a little rushed at the opening, getting so much information across). Idris Elba is her lawyer and has some very powerful scenes and some very forthright speeches. Kevin Costner, on the other hand, as her father is intense but laid-back.

This is a true story, based on a book by Molly Bloom (some references to James Joyce's Ulysses and assumptions that she is Irish), but some characters and episodes have been fictionalised, as they always are, for dramatic purposes.

We are challenged right from the opening sequence in voice-over to speculate on what would be the worse thing that could happen in sport. There is talk about losing. Molly actually has been a top skier since she was a little girl, pressurised severely to succeed by her psychologist-teacher father., She suffered an accident and spent time in hospital. She recovered, was on the Olympic team but had another accident and was hospitalised. Molly is certainly a determined woman.

Then the scene shifts. Molly is in bed in her apartment. In the early hours, there is a disturbance at her door and armed FBI agents come to arrest her. The accusation is that she has been running illegal poker games and that she has been associating with Russian Mafia gangsters.

The film is quite long but moves rapidly – except for audiences like this reviewer who have no knowledge or experience of a poker game except that everybody is bluffing and putting on their poker face. This is a bit of a drawback for non-players to understand the details of what is going on.

However, there is much else to be involved in, especially Molly trying to persuade her lawyer to take on her case even though she has no money, all confiscated by the government. He has a rather erudite little daughter who was influential in his taking on the case despite himself.

He reads Molly's book. He sits and listens to her. He interrogates her. And this gives the opportunity for flashbacks, to Molly as a little girl and her skiing and defying her father, to a teenager deliberately baiting her father at the meal table as he sits with the mother he has betrayed and with two sons who were to become very very successful. We are taken back to Molly's time as a cocktail waitress in Los Angeles, the offer of a job in an estate agency and the boss's request to her to supervise and then organise the poker games with his high-rolling friends.

There are some interesting subplots involving some of the players, especially Michael Cera as a

rather vain and flirting actor, Brian d'Arcy James is a seemingly innocuous, ignorant player who is rather more shrewd in money matters, Bill Camp as a talented player who gets baited, losing his cool and losing his money.

When Molly is closed down in Los Angeles, she moves to New York, sets up new games, especially with the help of an Irish friend, Chris O'Dowd[?], but this leads to the criminal associations and her downfall. To cope, she has become dependent on medication, both uppers to keep her going, downers to give her some kind of rest.

Molly's character doesn't quite go in the directions we might have expected and so there is an interesting dramatic conclusion to her story, her appearance in court, her father's reappearance one evening as she goes skating and his giving her a three-minute therapy lesson for her to ask the right questions to get answers about her relationship with him and its consequences.

For those who know their poker, no problems. For those who don't, some attention pauses throughout the film, but soon taken up again with the interesting plot and the performances – and the strong dialogue.

MENASHE

US, 2017, 89 minutes, Colour.

Menashe Lustig, Yoel Falkowitz, Ruben Niborski, Meyer Schwartz, Ariel Vaysman, Yoel Weisshaus.
Directed by Joshua Z. Weinstein.

There is often a hesitation in being invited into a closed community, especially a religious community that has strict cultural traditions. This is the case with films about Orthodox Jews. A number of these films, often critical, come from Israel. However, this is a film from New York City, an Orthodox enclave – and, significantly for cultural awareness, spoken in Yiddish.

This rather brief film opens with a street scene, men and women walking, the background of shops and buildings, but, in the foreground, many of the men with their hats and religious locks. From them a middle-aged man, a touch heavy, a touch balding, hat and locks, emerges and the camera follows him. He is Menashe.

Menashe is a widower with a young son. However, with memories of unhappy aspects of his marriage, he is very cautious about the tradition that he should marry again, that a man cannot manage a household. This is a woman's task. In the meantime, his very demanding brother-in-law has taken charge of his son. The two men are seen frequently clashing.

While the film shows many scenes of Menashe at work, his busy and critical boss, an accident with goods and a truck, there are also many scenes of Menashe at home with his son. It is an awkward relationship, with memories of the mother. The boy is not entirely at ease with his father.

The central episode of the film is a dinner in memory of his dead wife. The brother-in-law expects that he and his family will prepare the dinner. Menashe is determined that he will, even though he is not particularly good at cooking and has to borrow recipes from his neighbour (one of the very few women who appears in the film, along with the mother of many children shopping in a supermarket).

Religious men talk amongst themselves, quote the Talmud, Menashe joining in the scripture

readings and prayers. However, they come to the dinner and, even though the cooking is not particularly good, the rabbi is complementary. And, Menashe's young son sings his mother's favourite song, giving some feeling to the dinner.

So, Menashe will assert himself, wants his son to stay with him and the son has to make his decision.

While so many of the interactions are common to human nature and universal, there is a continued challenge to an audience wanting to understand what seems to be a strange culture, sometimes oppressive traditions, always in the name of religion, and the listening to Yiddish making the characters and their crises even more distant.

PHANTOM THREAD

US, 2017, 130 minutes, Colour.

Daniel Day- Lewis, Vicki Krieps, Lesley Manville, Gina Mc Kee, Brian Gleeson.

Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson.

An ingenious and fascinating title.

This is an unexpected story from writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson. However, every film that Anderson makes is so different from the previous one that he is always unexpected. And this time this is a British story, filmed in England, with British characters and British tone. An American's perspective on Britain in the post-war period, in the 1950s.

The threat of the title is rather literal. This is a film about fashion. It is a film about the fashion world in London in the 1950s, a focus on an individual dress designers and makers, Reynolds Woodcock, whose life and work is in vivid contrast to the lives and work of French costume years, Dior and Yves St Laurent. (There have been several documentaries and feature films on these two men which highlight the difference between their lives and careers and that of Reynolds Woodcock.)

Paul Thomas Anderson directed Daniel Day Lewis to an Oscar winning-performance in *There Shall Be Blood* (2007). Daniel Day Lewis is the only actor so far to have won the Oscar for Best Actor three times (*My Left Foot* and *Lincoln*). He is an actor who does not make films so frequently but has the capacity to go deeply into his character, to inhabit his character. It has been noted that he does not usually have his own British accent which he does here. His performance is very subtle, eliciting some puzzle from the audience about the intricacies of his character, his moods, his talent, his capacity for relationships – and not.

For the audience interested in fashion, there are many sequences of dressmaking, the wearing of the different creations, and a detailed fashion show.

Reynolds works with his sister, Cyril (Lesley Manville, so often in Mike Leigh films, a strong and sometimes astringent presence), who looks after the business side of the House, also keeping an eye on her brother's emotions and relationships.

The relationship in this part of Reynolds' life is Alma, effectively played in a mixture of meekness, gentleness, determination and exercise of power, by Luxembourg actress Vicki Krieps. He is attracted to her when she is a waitress serving him breakfast, invites her to dinner, she returns to his house and becomes part of the household, her measurements taken in great detail, dresses designed for her, her wearing them, becoming a model, participating in the fashion show.

But, back to Reynolds. He becomes continually more complex, exceedingly demanding on Alma, fidgety and easily irritated by excessive noise, wanting to concentrate, sketch designs, and is rather absorbed in himself.

The plot becomes more complex as Alma realises her love for Reynolds (but not the co-dependency) which leads her to become more wilful than we thought her capable of – and more wilful than she might ever have dreamt about herself. She devises a way to subdue Reynolds, partly subjugate him, symbolised mushrooms and by her presence as a lavish party for New Year's Eve and his desperate following her and trying to rescue her from the crowd.

Anderson has directed the film in a very measured way, not concerned about time or fast pace, allowing the camera to stay focused on the character's face, or on a tense situation for far longer than the audience might be expecting. Anderson wants audiences to get to know his characters, try to empathise with them, try to understand them, to reflect on them. So, a reviewer's warning, this is definitely not a film for the impatient.

An intriguing film that would probably well repay a second viewing.

THE SHAPE OF WATER

US, 2017, 123 minutes, Colour.

Sally Hawkins, Michael Shannon, Richard Jenkins, Octavia Spencer, Michael Stuhlbarg, Doug Jones, David Hewlett, Nick Searcy.

Directed by Guillermo del Toro.

Has water shape? But it can be shaped by its containers. Has water a life? Depending on how you look at it, its qualities, life-giving.

There are many aspects of water in this film. But, the initial water focus is on a strange amphibian, brought from the Amazon region to a facility in the United States for examination. For those with movie memories – and Guillermo del Toro certainly has these with many illusions and quotes in this film, Shirley Temple and Bojangles dancing, Betty Grable and musicals, Alice Faye singing the Oscar-winner, You'll Never Know – there is the 1950s Creature from the Black Lagoon.

The amphibian is brought to a facility in an American city which, to all intents and purposes, looks to have been created in a studio, the exteriors of the street, side of the local cinema, the interiors of the apartments. But this is in contrast to the facility where the amphibian is kept, military, security and laboratories, sterile corridors, a white coated staff for medical purposes, officials for experiments and, significantly for this story, the cleaners.

But, this is a story of Elisa, a mute but hearing woman who lives alone in her apartment, gets up in the morning, starts her routine, bath, sexual awareness, breakfast, bringing food to her kindly neighbour, going to work – where she is one of the cleaners, along with the benign Zelda.

British actress, Sally Hawkins, so good in such films as Happy Go Lucky, Blue Jasmine, and Mrs Brown in the Paddington films, is Elisa, a woman of pathos but of determination. Octavia Spencer, becoming indispensable to so many films, is Zelda.

But, the beginning of the film gives it a fable tone rather than emphasis on realism. An elderly,

private and timid, commercial sketcher, Giles (Richard Jenkins) introduces us in voice-over to the story of a Princess. She is Elisa. However, he might have said this is a variation on Beauty and the Beast. And this is the interest of the co-writer and director, Guillermo del Toro. From Mexico, he has built up a reputation over the decades of creating myths and fables, including The Devil's Backbone and Pan's Labyrinth, as well as enjoying creating monster stories, Mimic and Pacific Rim and the Hellboy films. He is able to combine both interests in an arresting way.

In the local facility, scientists are concerned about space travel, beating the Russians into space, studying how humans can survive in space travel – and hence wanting to dissect and study the amphibian. Elisa makes friends, brings eggs, plays music, and the amphibian is able to comprehend her sign language. It is not a spoiler to say that the central part of the film is Giles and the two women spiriting the amphibian out of the facility and into the apartment.

The man in charge of the experiment is Richard Strickland, played by Michael Shannon in a very Michael Shannon kind of role, always seeming sinister, intense, short-fused...

So, the drama is the search for the amphibian, Elisa keeping him in her apartment with Giles's help until it is time for him to go back to the sea.

There is a very emotional conclusion to this fairytale involving death and life.

VISAGES, VILLAGES/ FACES, PLACES

France, 2016, 89 minutes, Colour.

Agnes Varda, JR.

Directed by Agnes Varda, JR.

There is a great deal to enjoy in this documentary or, rather, cinema essay. It has great humanity as well as a delight in cameras and photography.

The French title is quite arresting but the English title capitalises on the play on words in the French title and gives us an English equivalent. In fact, there is quite a range of faces/visages throughout the film, both men and women, photographed for the documentary but also photographed for the installation which is the goal of the journey. And, as the filmmakers travel throughout France, quite a range of places/villages as well.

There is amusing animation for the opening credits, introducing the two central characters by sketch before we see them in real life. Agnes Varda is a veteran of the French film industry from the 1950s. She was a director, cinematographer, collaborator with a lot of the key filmmakers of the time including Jean-Luc [Godard](#). And she was married to the director, Jacques Demy. At the time of making this film she was 88. In more recent years she had shown an interest in photography and documentaries with the feature film, The Beaches of Agnes.

And JR? This is the official name of artist and photographer and muralist, Jean-Paul [Beaujon](#). There is more than half a century in ages between the two. He is 33.

The film amusingly shows a number of scenes of coincidence – where the two are in the same place but do not encounter each other. Rather, Agnes eventually seeks out JR and proposes a mission. They will drive around France, not with any set itinerary, but rather an excursion of discovery. He has a van, The Outside Project, which has its own studio, cameras, and a capacity for developing giant

photos.

And this is what JR does. He photographs what interests him, especially people, and with his loyal long-term team, he pastes them on all kinds of surfaces, seemingly the larger the better. He and Agnes enjoy meeting people, interviewing them, finding out about themselves and what their lives are like, then photographing them and installing the photos.

The audience will enjoy going to various locations, small towns, docks, goat farms, restaurants, factories, along a street of houses owned by miners, about to be demolished. There are scenes by the sea, and a huge bunker which has fallen off a cliff and has landed on the sand. The title more than justifies the focus on places.

And the faces are very strong: the discussions with the miners and the memories of their way of life are quite intense as is the talk with Janine, the sole survivor, who has remained in the homes which are to be demolished. She stands at the door of her house with a giant photo of her towering above her. At the goat farm there is a debate about whether the horns of the goats should be removed or not as they are herded into be milked and the milk turned into cheese. There is a huge photo of the goat on the barn wall. This is the same with a farmer who does all the work, formerly done by so many, on his own. The visit to a factory leads to conversations about work, and each shift taken in a group photo.

At the fish market, there are many photos of fish which finish up on the water tower of the country town. At the docks, there are interviews with the men but, especially with their wives who do substantial work on the docks and their portraits, head to toe, pasted on the containers on the wharf. Finding the bunker which has fallen off a cliff onto the Normandy Beach, Agnes offers a photo of her photographers from the past – but the high tide washes it away overnight.

There is also a visit to the house of Jean-Luc [Godard](#) with whom Agnes had worked in the past but the visit does not turn out as hoped for.

Agnes has failing eyesight and needs injections – leading to the idea of photographing her eyes as well as her feet and toes with their finishing up on rail carriages.

At the end of the journey, the couple sit together, the animation returns, a gentle pleasure for audiences to remember what they have experienced.

INXEBA/ THE WOUND

South Africa, 2017, 89 minutes, Colour.

Nakhane Toure, Bongile Mantsai, Niza Jay Ncoyini.

Directed by John Trengove.

In this case, the wound is circumcision, male circumcision. The setting is an initiation period for young Xhosa tribal men who go into the mountains for a week of ceremonies to make them into men. Circumcision also stands as a symbol for many of the themes of the film, focused on the male sexual member, the notion of manhood, maleness.

However, at the centre of the film is a worker in a factory, Xolani, called X, a man who might have

gone on to studies but has opted for a working life. Each year, he volunteers to go into the mountains to be one of the carers for the initiates. This year he has been asked by a businessman from Johannesburg to be the carer for his son – whom the father considers to be “soft”, and wants him to become a stronger man.

This time there are ten initiates, and three of them have as their carer, Vija, a regular at the ceremonies, a married man with children, but a close friend of X.

The director is a white South African and there was some criticism that this was a white outsider’s view of initiation ceremonies and circumcision. However, John Trengove is a South African and had Xhosa writing collaborators for his screenplay.

On the one hand, the initiation ceremonies are taken very seriously. On the other, those who preside over the rituals are a group of very ordinary men, workers, fathers, supervised by a medical man. It should be noted that the actual circumcision sequences are quite graphic, not so much visually, as visceral. The young men endure the ritual with quite some stoicism, having to declare frequently that they are men. However, the recuperation is severe, herbs and lotions, bandages, slow healing, camping out in the countryside.

But the film is also about realities of homosexuality amongst the tribal men. X is a gay man, living alone, a lonely man, encountering Vija each year, Vija being sexually ambiguous in his behaviour. Homosexual behaviour is frowned on by the community and the initiates, despising the soft young man from the city, insult him as a faggot, but there is never any explicit indication that he has a gay orientation.

This means that on the one hand, there is an almost documentary-like presentation of the initiation and the circumcision. And that, on the other hand, there is a personal drama, struggles with sexual orientation and behaviour, condemnation, the need for secrecy – which leads to dramatic torment for X and the young initiate confronting him and leading to tragedy.

The film was South Africa’s Oscar-nomination. It is quite a powerful film, highly critical of the circumcision (not necessarily of initiation rites), very demanding on its audience, emotionally, viscerally, psychologically.

FILM REVIEWS BERLINALE 2018

The winner of the Ecumenical Award: Im den Gangen/ In the Aisles

A commendation was awarded to: U: 22 July

AGA

BLACK 47

BOOKSHOP, The

CENTRAL AIRPORT THF

DAMSEL

DON'T WORRY, HE WON'T GET FAR ON FOOR

DOVELTOV

ELDORADO

EVA

FIGLIA MIA

HAPPY PRINCE, The

HARD PAINT/ TINTA BRUTA

HEIRESSES, The/ LAS HEREDERAS

INTERPRETER, The
IN THE AISLES
ISLE OF DOGS
JOURNEY DE MA TETE/ DIARY OF MY MIND
KHOOK/ PIG
MUG
MUSEO
MY BROTHER'S NAME IS ROBERT AND HE IS AN IDIOT
PRIERE, LA
REAL ESTATE
SILENT REVOLUTION/ DAS ZWEIGENDE KLASSENZIMMER
SUNDAY'S ILLNESS/ LA ENFERMEDADA DEL DOMINGO
TOUCH ME NOT
TRANSIT
U – JULY 22
UNSANE
YARDIE

AGA (Out of Competition)

Bulgaria, Germany, France, 2018, 91 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Milko Lazarov.

This is an ethnographical film, portraying the life of Eskimos in the Arctic Circle as well as focusing on the changes in temperature, availability of animals for hunting, mysterious deaths of animals, and the younger generation moving into the city and to different kinds of work.

As with this kind of film, the cinematography is beautiful and vibrant, wide screen. It opens with scenes of the tundra, the lone man with his dog and sled traversing the screen. The film focuses on the man, older, living alone with his wife who is ill. There is a great deal of detail for those who like this kind of documentary, close-up of the couple, their communication, their being busy all the time with tasks in the home as well as preparation for the hunt, the wife making a hat from the skin of a dead furry animal, attempts at fishing in ice holes...

The son has gone to the city but does pay them a visit with news of other relatives.

The couple endure a heavy storm, putting great strain on the wife who recounts a dream she has about meeting a polar bear, turning into a young man, his inviting her to his home, it being a vast hole, very deep, with all the stars of the heavens, where she loses her memory and her consciousness. It is clearly a premonition of death.

When his wife dies, the older man decides to visit his daughter with whom the parents have quarrelled, Aga. He travels along way, spring coming on and, instead of snow and mountainous rocks, there are hills with trees, a road with a truck driver and a logging load, his finding the diamond mine where his daughter works, an extraordinary excavation, truck tracks on the sides of the mountain. He eventually sees his daughter. She weeps. And the camera with a helicopter crane sequence lifts out of the vast mountain up into the air, over the works, over the town, over the modern world.

The film makes the point that the Eskimos lived an ancient way for centuries but this is now coming to an end with the younger generation moving out and into the cities as well as the effects of climate change.

BLACK 47

Ireland, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.

Hugo Weaving, James Frecheville, Stephen Rea, Freddie Fox, Barry Keoghan, Moe Dunford, Sarah Greene, Jim Broadbent.

Directed by Lance Daly.

The title refers to 1847 in Ireland. Very black times. The potato famine. The rule of the British and their oppression.

The film will have quite an impact in Ireland, an opportunity to look back at a particular time, not frequently shown in film, and to reflect on the subjugation of the Irish by the British, the nature of the oppression, the impact of the potato famine and the consequences on starvation in Ireland itself as well as the migration to Britain, Canada and Australia.

Those who have Irish ancestry will find it particularly interesting, especially if some of their ancestors suffered in the famine and migrated at this period.

The framework for the film is a vengeance story. It opens with a British soldier, fraternising with the police and the local authorities in a bar, then going to the prison and brutally interrogating an Irish rebel, choking him for information – and then being charged with murder. The soldier, Hannah, is played with his usual intensity by Hugo Weaving.

But the central character is another soldier, an Irishman who fought with Hannah in Afghanistan, but who left the Army, deserting, taking some weapons, returning to Ireland and finding his family devastated. His mother has died in the famine. His brother has been executed. His brother's widow and children are destitute. This character is Michael Feeney, played by Australian actor James Frecheville, and made to look up like an outlaw, bushranger of the times, severe in demeanour, long beard, travelling by horse.

When Michael Feeney begins to kill those who are responsible for the deaths of his family, the authorities decide to send a young British officer, Pope (Freddie Fox) to capture Feeney. He is to take Hannah along to identify him as well as helping in the arrest. Also in the group is very young recruit played by Barry Keoghan, in charge of the horses, who later is shocked to discover the repercussions of the famine. Interestingly, in 1847, they travel by train to the north to pursue Feeney in Connemara, the bleak and often barren landscapes of the county.

Along the way, the group pick up an Irish traveller, who can spin a yarn, can give information, Conneely (Stephen Rea). He leads them to the town where the local landowner has a mansion. The landowner is played with enormous arrogance by Jim Broadbent, the landowner who loves the land but despises the Celtic people and longs for the day when they will all be eliminated.

Feeney encounters owners of shops who betrayed his family, various officials, and kills them in dramatic and symbolic ways.

It all builds up of course to a dramatic climax, the bond between Hannah and Feeney somewhat

rekindled, Feeney skilful in destroying his enemies but ultimately destroyed – with Hannah having the option to stay in Ireland and face prison or, as Feeney advises him, to go to America.

Perhaps a bit specialist for non-Irish and non-Irish ancestry audiences.

THE BOOKSHOP (Berlinale Special)

Spain, 2018, 113 minutes, Colour.

Emily Mortimer, Bill Nighy, Patricia Clarkson, Honor Kneafsey, James Lance, Hunter Tremayne, Frances Barber, Reg Wilson, Michael Fitzgerald, Nigel O'Neill, Harvey Bennett.

Directed by Isabel Coixet.

A title like *The Bookshop* seems a box office risk. With the closing of so many bookshops, with the reliance on Internet, social media, online books, the title seems, despite so many readers' regrets, something of an anachronism.

However, Spanish writer-director, Isabel Coixet, is certainly an admirer of books. In 2007, she made a film with the evocative title, *The Secret Life of Words*.

While the director is Spanish, she has made quite a number of films in English, in the United States, in England. This one is very much in England, though the location photography for the British coast was done in Ireland.

The setting is 1959. Florence is a war widow, still grieving and unsettled but who now decides to fulfil an ambition to open a bookshop in a small town on the coast. She feels she is ready. She loves books. She has legal advice, she has financial advice. Could it go wrong?

The answer lies in a character of a local grande dame, exercising power in the town, seeing herself as the leader of the town. She is the wife of a retired general, Mrs Gamart. She is played, all stops out, as very British by American actress, Patricia Clarkson. While Florence had taken possession of an empty residence, *The Old House*, Mrs Gamart had intended the house to be used as a local arts centre.

The film shows Florence's exhilaration in setting up the bookshop. She is helped in the store by a young local girl, Christine (Heather Kneafsey), quite outspoken, quite determined, but, as she says, not a reader, although she enjoys geography and maths. Another ally for Florence is the local recluse, Edmund Brundage, played effectively and quietly by Bill Nighy. Edmund makes contact with Florence and she supplies some books, getting him interested in the works of Ray Bradbury (especially *Fahrenheit 451* and the story of bookburning) and asking his advice as to the literary quality of *Lolita* and whether she should stock it.

The atmosphere of this film is very British, old-style. And audiences who appreciate going back into the lives of 20th century Britain will enjoy this. The performances are excellent, Emily Mortimer charming and determined as Florence, Bill Nighy, Patricia Clarkson, Heather Kneafsey, all quite persuasive. There is a local cad played by James Lance.

The film is told in voice-over, the voice being that of Julie Christie. And, at the end, it is revealed who her character is.

As with so many British stories, there are bittersweet tones in the film which also make it engaging if

sometimes saddening.

CENTRAL AIRPORT THF (Panorama))

Germany, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Karim Ainouz.

This is an arresting documentary, especially in the light of the migrant movements from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. From 2015, the numbers increased considerably, with Germany leading in accepting a large number of migrants but other Middle European countries closing their borders.

The central airport of the title is Tempelhof, the Berlin airport.

This film gives a brief history of the airport itself, its being established in the 1920s and immediately becoming too small, Hitler's ambitions to make it a large airport in the 1930s. Subsequently, it served as a central focus for Berlin, especially with the dividing of the capital after World War II and, particularly with the famous Big Lift of 1948.

Tempelhof was closed in 2008.

This is a vast space, the arrival and departure areas, the large number of hangers. There is also open land on the outskirts of the airport.

What happened in 2015 was the decision to make the space available for incoming migrants. The area provided an opportunity for people to stay, receive care, be classified for documentation and status.

The director of this film is Brazilian, with his ancestors coming from Algeria. He has a sympathy for the refugees. He also has a background in architecture which makes him interested in the airport itself and its plant.

He accompanies two refugees over a period of a year, telling their stories, all the time photographing the reality of life in the airport, the dormitories, the rooms, the services, shops, eating areas...

One of the refugees is a young Syrian who turned 18 during his time at the airport, finally getting permission to stay for three years and so to move outside Tempelhof and to begin some studies. The other refugee is a doctor from Iraq, prevented from officially working as a doctor but giving his time and energies and skills to those who are ill in Tempelhof.

While the film gives an overview of the airport and this important use for refugees, it is personalised with interviews conducted with a number of the people there but, especially, with the two central subjects of the film.

DAMSEL (Competition)

US, 2018, 113 minutes, Colour.

Robert Pattinson, Mia Wasikowska, David Zellner, Nathan Zellner, Robert Forster, Joseph Belingerie.
Directed by David Zellner, Nathan Zellner.

When we see the word “damsel” in the title of the film, the expectations are probably to find something of a “damsel in distress”. The damsel in this film does experience some distress – but she is one of the last women who needs to be rescued!.

This is a Western. But it is not the kind of Western we are accustomed to. There are beautiful location sequences, in the mountains, as well as a town by the sea. There are unusual characters, especially some old hands in the town, some men roving the wilds, people living in isolated huts.

We soon learn that the tone of this film will be different. In the vast deserts, with towering mesas, a lone man is sitting waiting for a stagecoach. He is a Parson, disillusioned with his work and his congregation and their lack of interest, wanting to go back home East. Another young man turns up, his wife having died in childbirth, wanting to go West and make new beginning. The former Parson sheds his clothes and gives them to the young man and wanders out into the desert. Where to from here? (Somebody remarked that this is in the vein of the Coen Brothers.)

At the opening, we see some joyful scenes, the two protagonists, Samuel and Penelope, dancing in a town celebration, an eager band, smiles on the faces of the two. Surely a romance in progress or coming up!

Well, not exactly.

The first half of the film focuses on Samuel, played by Robert Pattinson as an earnest young man in the West, and a gold tooth which makes him more striking, but wandering the West, eventually arriving at the town in a rowing boat with a big box containing a diminutive horse – a gift for Penelope. But, what Samuel is doing in the town, despite some derision from the old fellows, is looking for a Parson and take him back to his town to perform the marriage ceremony with Penelope. The Parson is dead drunk, sees himself as a failure – and is the young man we saw earlier who wanted to go West to make a new beginning.

The first half of the film then is the trek with Samuel and the Parson going back to find Penelope so that Samuel can get on his knees and propose to her. He feels she has been abducted by a rival and he is there to free her, give her a ring – and the horse.

As might be expected, it doesn't all turn out as Samuel expected – nor as the audience expected. Penelope is no damsel in distress and Samuel has misunderstood the situation completely. And then there is a twist in the plot for audiences to discover.

The second part of the film focuses on Penelope, her response to Samuel and the consequences, her hold over the Parson, not trusting him, and their trek back to the town. It is a reverse proceeding, troubling for the Parson, encountering the wild man that Samuel and the Parson had confronted earlier in the film as well as a Native American offering an occasion for some reflection on rights and prejudice.

Where are they going? Do they know? How much does it matter? It is not spoiling the ending to indicate that the ending is quite open, leaving the audience to determine just what they think will happen to Penelope, or not. Penelope is played by Mia Wasakowski in a very vigorous performance.

The film was written and directed by brothers Nathan and David Zellner. They both appear in the film, one as the Parson encountered during the journey, the other the brother of the alleged abductor of Penelope.

Using the Western conventions – but tongue-in-cheek.

DON'T WORRY, HE WON'T GET FAR ON FOOT (Competition)

US, 2018, 113 minutes, Colour.

Joaquin Phoenix, Jonah Hill, Rooney Mara, Jack Black, Beth Ditto, Olivia Hamilton, Udo Keir, Kim Gordon, Emilio Rivera.

Directed by Gus van Sant.

Every new film by writer-director, Gus van Sant, is something of an event. Over almost 30 years, he has produced some offbeat films, as well as some conventional films, but focusing on characters and the human condition. This is no exception. It is based on the life of cartoonist from Oregon, John Callahan (1951-2010).

Of interest, the star of the film was meant to be Robin Williams, to whom there is a dedication at the end of the film. Interestingly also, the star, Joaquin Phoenix sometimes looks made up like Robin Williams, also with some of the angles at which is photographed.

But, this is definitely a Joaquin Phoenix film, an intense and powerful performance with playful and ironic moments. There is a very strong supporting cast led by Jonah Hill as a wealthy facilitator of AA meetings, Rooney Mara as a Swedish airlines flight attendant, and quite a number of very effective character actors, especially in the AA meetings sequences.

The screenplay is something of a collage of events in John Callahan's life. It is also something of a jigsaw puzzle, the audience watching, observing, reflecting, and putting the pieces together – and they have not been presented in chronological order.

The film opens with an AA meeting, some powerful stories being told about people's alcoholism and their experiences. John Callahan eventually comes to a meeting. However, his background is working in Oregon, moving to LA for better opportunities, a hard-drinking man, adopted but with an obsession about knowing more about his birth mother, but also being shown on stage, in a wheelchair, and a literary event in his honour.

And so, the audience begins to put the pieces together. There are initially quite a few flashbacks, especially to John Callahan making acquaintance with a hard-drinking LA type, Dexter (Jack Black in a very Jack Black kind of role – which does contrast finally when Dexter appears later in the film, not typical Jack Black) which leads to a bout of drinking, driving, an accident which leaves John Callahan paralysed from the chest down.

So, there are many sequences of Callahan in physical rehabilitation, especially visited by Annu, Rooney Mara, and showing life confined to a wheelchair. But, there are also the AA meetings where we meet the initial group, learn more about them, see them interact. However, the revelation is Jonah Hill as Donnie, wealthy, a gay man, ill. It is often fascinating to watch Donnie in his interactions with the group, very honest, very challenging, checking humour and its appropriateness or not, guiding people along the 12 steps. John Callahan gets to know him, to like him, to accept the challenges that Donnie makes, especially in the later steps in acknowledging some belief in the transcendent or God as well as the apologies to all the people hurt.

Callahan does this in a very moving way – and, of course, Donnie urges him to forgive himself.

The creative thing is that John Callahan can draw, even with his hands almost clenched with disability. He develops his own style – and there is a continued cartoon he draws in trying to illustrate human evolution. His cartoons certainly have black humour – and, while universities and other presses give him a column, he receives quite a number of hostile and aggressive letters of complaint.

This is a story of human hope, a seemingly hopeless man and prospects for his life, even before his being put for life in a wheelchair, but with support and solidarity, finding himself and a creative outlet.

One of the final sequences of hope is John Callahan in his chair going along LA Street where previously he had fallen out of his chair and a group of youngsters, skateboarding, putting back on his chair even while holding their noses at his catheter. He goes back to join them to share in their play. The song over the final credits was composed by John Callahan and is sung by him.

DOVLATOV (Competition)

Russia, 2018, 126 minutes, Colour.

Milan Maric, Artur Beschastny.
Directed by Aleksey German Jr.

This is a film of major appeal to Russians, aficionados of Russian cinema, and those who live in northern Europe. To others, the settings may seem quite remote, distant. And Russia in 1971 may seem even more distant, the post Stalin and Krushev era, the era of Brezhnev, the control of the bureaucrats, censorship.

This is a comparatively long film especially for the audiences who are not drawn into the situations in the characters. The focus is on a writer, brought up in past decades, married and divorced, with a daughter. He finds it difficult to get published, being rejected by most magazines having to make a living by writing for in-house magazines for factories, social stories, reporting of a propaganda film made for the factory. He loathes this experience.

The film also shows other writers, poets, artists, or feeling the suppression – and gathering in bars for entertainment, music, talk, comparing notes, comparing regrets and frustrations.

There is a particular colour tone to the film, not bright at all, suggesting some of the toning down of life in that era.

Most audiences will accept the film is fiction, the story of writers, poets and artists of the clamping down their experience. It also shows the bureaucrats, their views, interviews, threats. It is very much a period of socialist ideology. There is an emphasis on workers, factories, socialist issues.

It is only at the end of the film, with information given about one of the chief characters, Jack Brodsky, Russian poet, exiled to the United States, Nobel literature prize winner in 1987, indicates to non-aware viewers that this is not exactly fiction.

In fact, the title character was real. However, his story doesn't demand full attention. He seems rather self-centred, more than a touch narcissist at times, giving his views, not exactly a great

listener to others or it is met with his ex-wife and his daughter, and communicate with his mother. But, one of the things we do not see him do, hear about only, is his writing.

So, it comes as rather a shock when the final information is given that he went to the United States, died in his late 40s and, after the fall of the Soviet Union, is considered one of Russia's greatest writers. The film does not quite give the evidence for this – rather giving the difficulties is background and life in the 1970s and 1980s.

ELDORADO (Out of Competition)

Switzerland, 2018, 90 minutes, Black-and-white, Colour.
Directed by Markus Imhoof.

El Dorado is that long-desired for destination, and the finding of riches and gold. There are images of gold during the credits of this film.

However, this is not a film about the search for riches at least in the basic material sense. It is a documentary about contemporary refugees. The El Dorado is a country where they can settle after dangerous flight from their home country and its operation.

The director of this film, Markus Imhoof, is a German Swiss director who married an Italian and a spent a lot of time in Italy. In 1980 he made a significant film about refugees of the period, *The Boat is Full*.

The basis of this storytelling is the director's memory of a young girl, from Milan, who is assigned to his family in Switzerland as a refugee from the war in the mid-1940s. She lived some time with the family then had to return to Italy and suffered ill health and an early death. The director is now composing a verbal and visual letter to her, telling her that she is the reason why he is exploring this contemporary theme of refugees, especially in the Mediterranean and the work of the Italian Navy in rescue.

Significantly, at the opening of the film, there is a celebration of the Eucharist, the priest and some of the Italian Navy personnel at Mass, scripture readings, personal intercessions and intentions, and the priest commenting on how Pope Francis is very concerned about the refugees, remembering his early visit to the island of Lampedusa in 2013, his pleas for care and concern as well as justice.

While the film does tell the story of the young girl and her influence on the director, her life in Switzerland, her return home, the film moves into documentary mode immediately showing a helicopter shining light on troubled waters, survivors of overturned boats struggling in the Mediterranean.

What follows offers a lot of detail about what happens to the refugees, the initial rescue, sitting in the boats, cold and wet, the welcome from the authorities, their being transferred to a larger boat. Unfortunately, we know that there would be no immediate El Dorado of a country where they can settle. The film indicates there is a rule that whatever our the first steps by a refugee on Europe, that is the country where they will have to stay, even if, as some of them indicate, their families are in other countries.

The film is critical, of course, about the people smugglers and the risks that Africans, especially, coming from Libya, run in their attempt to cross the sea. And, there are also the refugees from the Middle East who come by sea.

Some of the aspects of the film in its later moments are rather depressing. Some of the refugees get their status and are able to stay. Others stay in detention centres, better looked after than in some other countries, but still experienced as a kind of incarceration. There are interviews, questions and tests, rejections.

And, in Italy, when some of the refugees to get work, there is the Mafia influence. The vivid example is given of the growing of tomatoes, the picking, the transport, with everything under the control of the Mafia.

The director remembers the caution that there was during the war but also the important effect of people finding safety, some freedom, a better life. And, this is the hope that many in the audience would have as they watch this moving film. Unfortunately, it is a moving film but the situations in so many countries around the world, northern and southern hemispheres, means that politicians are not moved.

EVA (Competition)

France, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.

Isabelle Huppert, Gaspard Ulliel, Julia Roy, Marc Barbe, Richard Berry.

Directed by Benoit Jacquot.

This is a 21st-century adaptation of a novel of the 1940s by James Hadley Chase, with a French setting. It is a contemporary film noir, harking back to the 1940s, although there was a film version of Eva directed by Joseph Losey in the early 1960s with Jeanne Moreau and Stanley Baker.

The film focuses on a young man played by Gaspard Ulliel, contracted to home help for an exiled British playwright living in Paris (a touch of the Oscar Wilde) who has fallen on hard times, is failing physically, but has written a play. While the young man is helping to bathe the playwright, he dies. So, the young man takes the manuscript, and the next thing we see is that there has been a successful theatre season and that audiences and producers are clamouring for more.

While the young man relishes his success, he also tries to avoid the limelight, quite unsure as to what he is to do next. He is encouraged by the producer. He is encouraged by his girlfriend.

One of his devices for getting some kind of lead for a new work is to jot down pieces of conversation that he hears. When his girlfriend suggests he goes to a mountain chalet owned by her family, he does but immediately discovers people inside. He ousts a man who turns out to be a client of an older prostitute whom he finds in the bath – but she hits him and he escapes.

When he comes across her again, he is fascinated, more than fascinated, has conversations with her, transcribes pieces of their discussions, learns more about him – although she is reticent about the truth of her prostitution, raising money for her husband who is in jail and for his court case while pretending that he is an international traveller.

The young man's interest in the prostitute become something of an obsession, partly sexual, but partly intrigued by her character, her behaviour, her intentions.

When his girlfriend unexpectedly arrives at chalet, it is time for melodrama, for a car chase, for a car accident, for the young man to be injured, for the prostitute to be more involved with her husband.

While the film does come to something of an end, a crossroads for the characters, we are left to surmise

FIGLIA MIA/ DAUGHTER OF MINE (Competition)

Italy, 2018, 105 minutes, Colour.

Valeria Golino, Alba Rohrwacher, Sara Casu, Udo Keir, Michele Carbone.

Directed by Laura Bispuri.

This is a slice of Italian life. It is set on the island of Sardegna, in a close community.

The film focuses on a girl, about to turn 10, played convincingly by Sara Casu. She wanders to a fair, watches the riders in a rodeo, comes across a couple copulating and runs away. She does not look particularly Italian, especially with her reddish hair.

It emerges that her birth mother, played by Alba Rohrwacher (who has reddish hair), has given her away to her sister, played by Valeria Golino. The little girl does not know her birth mother. Her adoptive mother, along with her very gentle and devoted husband, has been a carer for the girl for 10 years.

The birth mother is a kind of party girl, always out and around, drinker, promiscuous. However, she does own some horses to one. But the authorities are demanding money from her and she has dilemmas about whether to sell the horses, to move away. She decides that she would like to have some time with her daughter. Her sister agrees, somewhat reluctantly.

The surprise is that the little girl is fascinated by her actual mother, supportive of her, travelling around with her, criticising her adoptive mother. She even misses out on the 10th birthday party that her adoptive mother has arranged for her and invited all their friends.

A climax comes when the birth mother asks her daughter to go down a hole in the necropolis where there is some alleged treasure. The little girl is at first reluctant because the hole is so narrow but eventually goes back and goes down. Her adoptive mother is alarmed by her absence and goes anxiously searching. In fact, the little girl is quite enterprising does get out of the hole.

Eventually, there has to be a facing of the facts interfacing of the future for the absent mother, the adoptive parents and for the little girl herself.

The film was directed by Laura Bispuri who made quite an impact with her previous film about gender questions, Sworn Virgin.

THE HAPPY PRINCE (Berlinale Special)

Germany/UK/Luxenberg, 2018, 105 minutes, Colour.

Rupert Everett, Colin Firth, Emily Watson, Colin Morgan, Edwin Thomas, Tom Wilkinson, Anna

Chancellor, Julian Wadham, Beatrice Dalle, Antonio Spagnuolo, John Standing, Ronald Pickup.
Directed by Rupert Everett.

A very interesting take on the life and, especially, the last years of Oscar Wilde.

For many audiences, Stephen Fry is the face of Oscar Wilde, so forceful in the film of 1997. In the 1960s he was portrayed by both Peter Finch and Robert Morley.

This time the portrayal is by Rupert Everett who has appeared in film versions of *An Ideal Husband* as well as *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He has also portrayed Wilde on the stage in England and in France. And, not only this, he has written the screenplay, directed the film and played Wilde. Quite an achievement.

So, this portrayal of Wilde moves away from the Stephen Fry debonair style. It is glimpsed sometimes in the flashbacks, Wilde on stage charming the audience after a performance of a play. However, these the same people who turned against Wilde, many spurning him or rejoicing in his humiliation.

Everett has entitled his film *The Happy Prince* after a story by Wilde from 1888. It is a fable about a statue of happy Prince, standing above the town, is one ordinary people, a privileged kind of life. It is also the story of a swallow, flying over the city, dying. But, God looks on the rubble of the statue and on the dead bird and raises them back to life. In the film, Wilde is seen reading this story to his two young boys.

But, it is an appropriate image for Wilde in his life and career, a statue on a pedestal, feted by everyone, clever, playwright, short stories, *Dorian Grey*, a philosophy of pleasure, a master of wit but only to crash in unhappiness.

Everett's Wilde also looks the worse for a blend of dissipation in life as well as hard labour for two years in prison. We hear of the Marquis of Queensbury but do not see him. We hear about the charges of crimes of sodomy as well as a severe sentence of the judge, hard labour. We see Wilde going to prison, stripped and humiliated, transferred from Wandsworth to Reading, sitting on Clapham Junction Station in prison clothes, mocked by the public – and Wilde later linking this severe scene in his life with the passion of Jesus.

There are also scenes with Wilde's wife, Constance (Emily Watson), supporting him financially, but humiliated, unwell, dying.

A lot of the action actually takes place in France after Wilde gets out of prison, lacking money, still frivolous, still spending, going to taverns, attracted to the boys, calming taverns fights by singing. His also supported by the faithful Robbie Ross and by his friend Reggie (Colin Firth).

And, Boscage?

Wilde has told everyone, including Constance, that he will have nothing to do with Boscage again. But, as soon as he turns up, foppish, selfish, irresponsible, Wilde is immediately won over again. They decide to go to Naples, live the high gay life, until Boscage's allowance is cut off.

Wilde's last year is a sad one. Boscage has gone. Robbie Ross is devoted – and, Catholic, conscious that Wilde may have been baptised as a child, and appreciating Wilde's fascination with Catholicism, calls a priest (Tom Wilkinson as a jovial Irish Father Dunne) to administer the last rites.

There is another important priest in the film. Wilde and his friends are pursued in the streets by a homophobic group with Wilde taking refuge in a church. He sees an old priest going to the altar, kneeling, praying desperately – and Wilde realises the reality of life's sufferings.

Wilde's poem from Reading Gaol was called De Profundis. In so many ways, in his last years, Wilde's life was, as the Psalm says, calling out to God from the depths.

TINTA BRUTA/ HARD PAINT (Panorama)

Brazil, 2018 118 minutes, Colour.

Shico Menegat, Bruno Fernandes.

Directed by Filzembacher, Marcio Realon.

A Brazilian film, set in the northern town of Porto Alegre.

The central character is a young gay man, Pedro, rather introverted, making his living by the Internet, his own website with paying viewers. His specialty is painting himself with a variety of luminescent colours. He is supported by his sister, a journalist, to whom he has been close since they were children. He also has a good relationship with his grandmother.

He is in difficulties because he was bullied as a child, tormented at college, dropping out of his course, taunted and suddenly breaking out in anger at one of the bullies, piercing his eye and blinding him. He is about to go to a court case, being advised by lawyers to be honest about the situation and the taunts – but careful about the prejudices of the judge.

As his customers drop off, he encounters a hopeful-dancer, Leo, with whom he formed forms a bond. In fact, Leo joins him online with performance – some of which is quite explicit.

Leo has an ambition to get a scholarship to train in dancing in Argentina but misses out, one of his close group of friends getting the scholarship. As he and Pedro continue their relationship, a strong affection between the two, it emerges that Leo has been offered another scholarship, this time in Berlin, and intends to go.

At a party, Pedro leaves early and is followed by some gay-bashers and he is involved in a fight with him, Leo coming to his rescue.

There is a sequence with a twist when he goes to a bar and thinks he is being picked up by a customer only to find, after the sexual encounter, that the man was picking him up and demands money. Once again, Pedro breaks out in violence against the man.

He has some time alone with Leo before his departure but then is left on his own, a broken relationship, facing the court case – and eventually weeping. It is over two and the audience to imagine his future.

There is quite some pathos and empathy for the characters – and both Pedro and Leo are played by actors in their first film roles.

THE HEIRESSES/ LAS HEREDERAS (Competition)

Paraguay, 2018, 95 minutes, Colour.

Ana Brun, Margarita Irun, Ana Ivanova, Nilda Gonzalez, Maria Martins, Alicia Guerra.

Directed by Marcelo Martinessi.

It is not often that we see a film from Paraguay. This is a rather intense personal drama, focused on a woman in her 50s, aristocratic in her manner, having to face changes in her life when her longtime companion has been involved in fraud and many of the valuable possessions in the house have to be sold.

While we do not see many films from Paraguay, we do not see many films from Latin America with a lesbian theme. The relationship between Chela (Anna Brun) and Chiquita (Margarita Irun) is taken for granted, the background to the women's lives, love and intimacy that they have shared for a long time.

However, Chiquita has to go to jail. Chela visits her there, finding the atmosphere of the jail rather distasteful. She is withdrawn, does some painting at home, looks through the door at various clients who come to examine cutlery, furniture that they intend to purchase. She has delegated the care for the clients to one of the maids.

Where is this portrait of Chela to go? One day a friend asks her to drive her to a meeting and then to do some other jobs with her car. An anxious woman accosts Chela asking her for a lift to get away from her violent companion. What emerges is an opening to the world for Chela, driving the mother of this woman to doctor's appointments, becoming something of a taxi driver, even, though fearful, venturing onto a busy freeway. It is the first time that Chela has had to do any ordinary living and is rather exhilarated by the experience.

There is a testing of her sexual feelings when she continues to drive for the woman and is attracted towards her.

There is some delicacy in the portrait of the women, in the changes that Chela must face during her 50s and the consequences for her own life. Anna Brun, as Chela, won the Best Actress award at the 2018 Berlin Film Festival.

ISLE OF DOGS (Competition)

US, 2018, 101 minutes, Colour.

Bryan Cranston, Koyu Rankin, Edward Norton, Liev Schreiber, Greta Gerwig, Bill Murray, Jeff Goldblum, Bob Balaban, Scarlett Johansson, Courtney B. Vance, Konichi Nomura, Tilda Swinton, F. Murray Abraham, Frances McDormand, Fisher Stevens, Harvey Keitel, Ken Watanabe, Yoko Ono.

Directed by Wes Anderson.

An animated allegory written and directed by Wes Anderson, whose 20 year career has provided an enormous range of genre films, serious undertones, humorous overtones, all kinds of comedy and parody. He also ventured into animation with *The Fantastic Mr Fox*. Audiences will have their different favourite Wes Anderson films This reviewer remembering happily the *Royal Tennenbaums* and, especially, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

The animation in this film looks a bit rough and ready, all to the film's advantage. There is no smooth drawing for characters most of whom are dogs. The movements of the characters are not smooth either, but humorously jerky and angular. There is a great deal of attention given to the backgrounds, especially the wastelands of the actual island where the dogs are exiled. This is not a pretty-pretty location film. Which means that just visually, there is a great deal of edge.

And the voice cast! It is led by Bryan Cranston and Koyu Rankin. Many of the cast have appeared in other Wes Anderson films and are welcome back, some having much more to say than others – and, some silent!

The film has a Japanese setting – which some would-be purists object to, Americans capitalising on Japanese characters and themes. But, this seems to be too much objection. One of the writers, who voices the Mayor in the film, is Japanese. And the central character, a young lad of 12, is reminiscent of and probably a tribute to the many animated films from Studio Ghibli and other studios.

The dialogue is certainly worth listening to, full of humour, full of spoof, full of parody – but, with quite an underlying seriousness.

The film goes back into earlier centuries with history of the status of dogs in Japanese households. It leads to a revolution where the population turn against their dogs, preferring cats, and the powers that be of a leading family decree the exiling of all dogs to an island off the coast. The population seeming to agree complacently and all the dogs are rather brutally rounded up and even brutally deposited on the island where they have to survive, make do, scrounge, break friendships, fight amongst each other.

The life of the dogs on the island is often very amusing, often very challenging. The key event is the arrival of the adopted son of the Mayor taking a plane and crash landing on the island to find his pet dog. So, the film becomes something of a quest, the outlaw dog, voiced by Bryan Cranston, becoming a friend and an ally. There is also a show dog, voiced by Scarlett Johansson, who has an interesting history and contributes to the quest.

Most of the reviewers spent their time talking about the animation, the cast, the humour, Wes Anderson's perspective. But, when one comes to think about it, the film serves as a contemporary social allegory, getting rid of the dogs seems to be an allegory of any ethnic cleansing. Those who are ethnically cleansed have to move into exile as do the dogs on their island. The critique is also of the wealthy, their corrupt use of wealth and power, manipulation of the public.

This means that *Isle of Dogs* works on two levels, that of popular entertainment – but, very seriously, an allegory of contemporary social injustices.

THE INTERPRETER (Berlin Special)

Slovakia/Czech Republic/Austria, 2018, 125 minutes, Colour.
Jiri Menzel, Peter Simonischek.
Directed by Martin Sulik.

The Interpreter proves that there is still plenty of room on cinema screens and on television for stories about World War II, the plight of the Jews, the harshness of the Nazi regime and the actions

of the SS.

This film is a collaboration between Slovakia, where a lot of the action takes place, the Czech Republic which at the time of the war was united with Slovakia as Czechoslovakia, and Austria, this film opening in Vienna.

The Interpreter of the title is played by veteran Czech actor and director, Jiri Menzel. At the beginning of the film, he arrives by train in Vienna, seeks help from people of the station, eventually finds his destination and confronts a middle-aged man, George, played by Peter Simonischek (whom international audiences may well remember for his role as Toni Erdmann), accusing his SS father, who had published a book about his exploits, and threatening to kill him. This doesn't happen and the interpreter decides to go back home, a sense of failure, a sense of failure to his parents, and the mystery where they are buried still unsolved.

But, the visit, has an effect George. He contacts the interpreter and they meet, George proposing that the two of them go on a journey into Slovakia, revisit some of the villages and see the families where his father worked, to try to get some understanding and information. The interpreter agrees but is rather hardheaded and makes a contract as regards payment.

This is certainly rather an odd couple in all kinds of ways. The interpreter is burdened by decades of unhappy memories, of injustices, of memories of the persecution of the Jews. George, on the other hand, leads a rather carefree life, knows very little about the father whom he resents.

And the beginning of the journey is odd. The interpreter very serious, trying to track down people, documents, information. George on the other hand goes to clubs, lives the high life, flirts, drinks... And actually gets robbed by a pickpocket whom he lets go. The interpreter is rather reluctant to go on in this vein. George offers more money.

The latter part of the film has the two actually visiting some of the villages in Slovakia, in the mountains, meeting the farmers, trying to remember the past, but many of the farmers very reluctant to talk about those days. George's father had left many photos, annotated with names and dates so they have clues to pursue.

So, what follows, is the interpreter at least venturing on his quest. What follows also is George learning more about his father, more about the war, the role of the SS, the persecutions and deaths. Maybe that is all is possible in the early part of the 21st-century.

There are not a lot of answers in this film – the journey and the process is what is important.

IN DEN GANGEN/ IN THE AISLES (Competition)

Germany, 2018, 125 minutes, Colour.

Franz Rogowski, Sandra Huller, Peter Kurth, Andreas Leopold.

Directed by Thomas Stuber.

This film has a delightfully playful opening. Tchaikovsky's Waltz of the Flowers comes up immediately. And the visuals are of corridors in a supermarket warehouse with forklifts going up and down the corridors, crossing the corridors, all in the rhythms of Tchaikovsky waltz, forklifts as flowers! Later the music will go to Bach and to Strauss and then to more modern songs, especially with the setting of Christmas.

This is a film which offers more than you ever thought you would need to know about forklifts! And, at the end of the film, one might be tempted to think: somebody made a bet with the director and writer of the film that he couldn't make a film of over two hours, no explicit sex and violence, mostly set in the supermarket and the warehouse. But he has.

In the Aisles won the Ecumenical Award at the 2018 Berlin Film Festival. The criteria for this award included a dramatisation of basic human values. And this is certainly a film of humanity, human values.

The film focuses on Christian (emerging star Franz Rogowski, who appeared as Isabelle Huppert's son in Happy End and as the hero in Transit) a rather reticent and shy young man who applies for a job in the supermarket. The manager treats him sympathetically and sends him down the corridors to Bruno who is the manager of forklift staff. Christian is rather awkward in personal manner as well as in driving forklifts at first but we know that he will ultimately succeed.

One of the qualities of the film is showing the camaraderie amongst the workers in the supermarket. There is a room for the coffee break and Christian is immediately attracted by Marion, played by Sandra Huller who was seen effectively as the daughter in Toni Erdmann. Christian tentatively talks with her and she is encouraging. However, we later learn that she is married to a rather violent husband and has to take time off work. But Christian continues devoted.

Christian also makes friends with Bruno over the time. Bruno lives alone, used to be a truck driver, enjoys his work in the supermarket but wants more. He plays chess with the manager of the supermarket. The group will take time off at Christmas for a drink and get together with some playful mockery of various members of the staff. Bruno even invites Christian to his home for a visit and a drink. But there is a sadness about Bruno.

As has been mentioned, the audience sees more about forklifts, the way they are driven, the height of the lifts, the working of the gears, the shifting of goods from one part of the warehouse to another, more than we might ever have expected – but it may make us sympathetic to workers in larger warehouses whose work we never think about in any detail!

Christian is accosted at one stage by his past friends and we learn that he was something of a juvenile delinquent, spent time in an institution, but was young and this has not been held against him. Despite his awkwardness and shyness, and our seeing him alone at home, he does have prospects for a future.

Ordinary people, ordinary lives, ordinary work, ordinary situations – all presented quite engagingly and with a deep sense of humanity.

JOURNAL DE MA TETE/DIARY OF MY MIND (SHOCK WAVES) (Panorama)

Switzerland, 2018, 70 minutes, Colour.
Fanny Ardant, Kacey Mottet Klein.
Directed by Ursula Meier.

This short film is a contribution to a program called Shock Waves.

The Swiss setting is very attractive, mountainous background, while the action takes place in the

town, in a home, at school, in court and in a prison.

The film opens with a young man sitting naked at a desk writing. He is Benjamin, played by Kacey Mottet Klein. He dresses, puts the material which she has been writing in an envelope, goes on his motorbike to post it, then, with a gun, goes to a police station. He appears very odd, there is a struggle and he is handcuffed.

It emerges that he has killed his parents.

The manuscript was posted to his French language school teacher, played by very dignified Fanny Ardant. In the manuscript, he explains all that he is done and his motivations. This is disturbing for the teacher, making her wonder how her classes have contributed to his mentality and to his disastrous actions.

The teacher is summonsed, has to appear before the judges to give some explanation. However, Benjamin's defence lawyer is hostile to the teacher especially after a visit from a number of the students with the teacher. The students are extraordinarily supportive and wanting to help Benjamin in prison and with his studies and to complete his exams. He tells the teacher that they are not to return.

The question is about his mentality, mentally disturbed, or responsible.

He receives a rather lighter sentence and has permission to have visits outside. His uncle is unwilling to have him. It falls then to the teacher to take him for the outing, bringing him into her home, setting him up in a room, sympathetic but advising him to keep his distance. He visits his parents' grave.

This continues for several years until his final release when, again, it is over to the teacher to help him. She sets him up in his own house. We can't guess what kind of future he will have. But the past has a disturbing effect on the teacher, her quitting her job, her asking herself what contribution she made to the young man's behaviour.

KHOOK/ PIG (Competition)

Iran, 2018, 90 minutes, Colour.

Hassan Majooni, Leila Hatami, Leili Rashidi.

Directed by Mani Haghighi.

This is a very striking title for a film from an Islamic country, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran. It sounds offensive, profane.

It takes a while for an audience to work out what is happening in this film and how seriously it should be taken and how much is satire and parody. In fact, it is a parody – although, the opening sequence sets a tone about social media in Iran, a group of veiled schoolgirls are walking in the street, busy with their mobile phones, with their cameras, taking selfies. Then there is a change as one of the girls sees decapitated head lying in the gutter.

The background of the plot is that a number of significant film directors are being beheaded, their heads left behind and their bodies disappearing. But, the central character, Hassan, a film director who has been banned from filmmaking for several years is quite upset that he hasn't been

murdered. He is quite a narcissistic man, vain, full of self-importance, but one of the scruffiest-looking film directors one will ever see, loud clothes, T-shirts with band logos like AC- DC.

Actually, he is making a commercial and there is a sudden song and dance routine, the women all in bright red. But it is a television commercial for a spray against insects! The director is working on it, clashing heartily with the producer, his daughter also producing.

In the meantime, the Hassan is upset with his favourite actress with her appearing in a film by his rival – some comic touches in the scene of a story of Iranian antiquities.

When the directors continue to be murdered, Hassan is upset, especially when his favourite star is also murdered. In the meantime, he is in discussions with the police. He plays tennis with his best friend but, is eventually arrested on suspicion.

There is a climax in a warehouse where he is setting up a pose with his friend to be photographed to prove his innocence and that he had alibis for the other murders. This has been complicated by young actress taking a video of his confrontation and angry outbursts against his favourite actress and this has had over 1 million hits on YouTube?

The villain, who has confessed, eventually appears, with a pig mask over his head. There is some mayhem – but the director's eccentric mother, previously seen with a rifle, comes in and there is some effective blasting to save the day. Wife and daughter are both men busy on social media, putting the video of everything up on Instagram ...

Tehran may not seem so isolated as it may have seemed in the past...

TWARZ/ MUG (Competition)

Poland, 2018, 91 minutes, Colour.

Mateusz Kosciukiewicz, Agnieszka Posiadlik, Malgorzata, Gorol, Roman Gancarczyk.

Directed by Malgorzata Szumowska.

In English, Mug has several possible meanings. Apart from something we drink out of, mug is slang for somebody stupid. It is also slang for a person's face – and that is the particularly relevant meaning here.

If anyone was wondering what contemporary Poland is like, the first 25 minutes of the film, with the quite extensive array of quick vignettes, in the city, travelling the countryside, country towns, homes, issues of migration, traditions of the church, all rapidly glimpsed giving an overall impression.

The centre of the film is something of the other mug, foolish man, in himself. The opening scene, is a very amusing exaggerated (we hope) parody of Boxing Day sales with the forces camped outside the shops, the doors opened, a passionate invasion, squabbles and fights to get the goods which, in this case, are underwear. Jacek (Matthieu's Kosciukiewicz), get his packet, gets into the car to go back to his village in western Poland, speeds through the countryside.

Actually, Jacek has a lot of conversations with his extensive family about the possibilities of migrating to England, obviously a Brexit theme. There are divided opinions. And, it is Christmas, there is a lot of traditional devotion in the town so visits to mass, hymn singing...

Actually, Jacek works on a huge project, (an actual project in western Poland) where the citizens of the town collected enough money to build a statue of Jesus which was to rival Rio de Janeiro – and, in fact, is larger. So, the religious tradition is to the fore, visually, with the head of Jesus standing ready to be lifted up, the body, hands lying on the ground.

And what about mug in terms of face? Jacek has an accident on site, falling down a considerable height, with damage to his face. It is pointed out that he has the first face transplant in Europe. Lest the audience feel over sympathetic towards him, he seems to be a cheerful bloke and not as put out about the injuries to his face as we might expect (or we would have had).

But, it all has its consequences. He had proposed to his girlfriend and they had engagement photos taken. She is put off by his appearance. Jacek's sister, however, is his main support, while his mother is hugely upset, thinks that he is another person altogether, feels that he is something of a devil – which later leads to the parish priest getting in and exorcist and a parody sequence of *The Exorcist*. Traditional devotion might still be prevalent in Poland but there are also bizarre superstitions.

We follow Jacek's troubles, a strong critique with a scene where his application for disability benefits is harshly rejected, where he has problems getting jobs, where he does frighten some people although, the surgeons had done a fairly good job on his face.

In the meantime, the writers introduce some themes about parish priests. At first, the parish priest seems reasonable enough, celebrating Mass, making appeals for the statue, making appeals, in fact, for financial support of Jacek. But, it is where the confessional sequences start that there is something of parody and an audience will realise why a lot of people are put off going to confession. Jacek's brother-in-law turns up first. He is rather loud mouthed, talking before he thinks... His confession is about sexual temptation (so many thinking that the word temptation has only sexual connotations rather than for sins of anger or exploitation). The priest's response is reasonable enough though a touch too curious. Then the mother comes with all that story about her son being a devil, wanting to get the devil out with the subsequent parody of the film of *The Exorcist* with Jacek screeching only to burst out laughing! Then the fiancée, the ex-fiancée comes and talks about sexual matters with the priest going far too far in wanting explicit detail.

Eventually, the statue was erected and the Bishop and his secretary are called to bless the statue with the Bishop being made to look rather foolish when the statue is looking in the wrong direction and there will have to be subsequent work and he remarks that he is not against Muslims working there (and being corrected to indicate that it is Gypsies who are working there who are not Muslims). So, some direct as well to one tongue-in-cheek criticism of the church.

And what will Jacek do? Is there a place for him and his town? Or, will his solution be in fact to migrate?

MUSEO

All Mexico, 2018, 128 minutes, Colour.

Gael Garcia Bernal, Leonardo Ortizgris, Simon Russell Beale, Ilse Salas, Lynn Gilmartin, Alfredo Castro, Leticia Bredice, Bernardo Velasco.

Directed by Alonzo Ruiz Palacios.

With a title like Museo/ Museum, one can expect a film about works of art. But, in so many of the movies, museums are a target for robberies. And this is the case here on both counts.

The film opens with an emphasis on ancient Mexican monuments, their cultural value, their significance in the present – and with the work done to transfer monuments from their sites to museums. This theme of culture pervades the film.

However, this is also the story of Juan, a rich young Mexican who had been taken as a little boy by his doctor father to witness the transferring of one of the largest statues to the museum. Juan is dissatisfied with his life, his health, his prospects, even taunted by his sister as “Shorty” – and he is short because he is played by Mexican actor returning home, Gael Garcia Bernal.

Juan has a good friend from school days, Wilson (Leonardo Ortizgris), more genial than Juan, less complicated. Juan also has some domination over him.

Which leads to the main action of the film. It is Christmas. Juan has a plan for himself and Wilson to get into the museum at this quiet time and steal a number of the precious artefacts. Juan is well-prepared and the two young men are successful.

What Juan is not necessarily in need of money, he has perhaps been too much influenced by popular thrillers and decides that he will sell the artefacts to rich clients who are avid collectors. Actually, Juan is fairly shrewd in making contacts – though his shrewdness will rather evaporate after his experience with clients. He has a connection, a guide on a historic site who puts him in touch with an Englishman, Frank Graves, played by the fine British theatre actor, Simon Russell Beale. Selling off artefacts is not as easy as it might sound. Graves indicates that he works within the restrictions of the law and so this kind of treasure is not one that he wants to have.

The scenes with Simon Russell Beale a dramatic high point of the film.

An alternative? Going to Acapulco, trying to track down another fence for artefacts, finding the singer in a club, an actress admired by Juan because of the film she appeared in and danced in. And this does not quite work out in the way that Juan intended, complicated by the fact that Wilson’s father is ill and dying and he wants to return home. Cineastes will enjoy the Fellini and Nino Rota with the dense on the beach

How can this end? Will the two young men give up? Will the police have investigated and will they become suspects? How does Juan’s father react when his son tells him the truth?

While there is a lot of comment and dialogue about Mexico’s cultural heritage and the need for preservation, it is the questions above that prevail at the end of the film, turning it into a rather low key thriller.

MY BROTHER’S NAME IS ROBERT AND HE IS AN IDIOT (Competition)

Germany, 2018, 174 minutes, Colour.

Joseph Mattes, Julia Zange, Urs Juscker, Stefan Konarske.

Directed by Philip Groening.

This is a long film which may appeal to audiences in northern and central Europe rather than

audiences in English-speaking countries. It was directed by Philip Groening who made an impact with his portrait of the Carthusian Abbey, *Into Great Silence*.

This is a contemporary story focusing on twins. They have a strong relationship with each other, sometimes antagonistic, often a rivalry. The sister is about to sit for a philosophy exam and wants to discuss the issues with her brother. While he is interested in philosophy, he is more interested in machines making a bet with his sister so that he can win one.

This means that a great amount of the dialogue in the early part of the film is quite philosophical, especially probing the nature of time, the issue of entities. There is also reference to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger – with memories of his rather fascist stances in 1930s Germany.

Some may find the philosophical dialogue difficult in comprehension and tedious to listen to – and, as has been said, not everybody is enthralled by the aesthetics of abstraction.

The locations are not particularly imaginative, the house, the fields with the various crops and an isolated service station. There are not too many of the characters either. The associates of the brother who turn up at night demanding service when the service station is closed, and that includes his former girlfriend. There is also the passive young man who sits at the counter waiting for spasmodic customers.

The other main character is the proprietor of the garage who knew the two when they were young. The sister has a bet that she can seduce someone and she set her sights on the proprietor who resists her but then succumbs – with later very severe and fatal consequences.

Because the central characters are not particularly engaging for an audience, it is rather hard to sit through their discussions, their rivalries, his drinking, her seductive behaviour, the ultimate violence.

For specialists in German cinema.

LA PRIERE/ THE PRAYER

France, 2018, 107 minutes, Colour.

Anthony Bajon, Damien Chappelle, Alex Brendemuhl, Louise Grinberg, Hanna Schygulla, Antoine Amblard.

Directed by Cedric Kahn.

La Priere/ The Prayer is a film with Catholic themes more suited to the contemporary church in many places, the Catholic Church in a secular world.

Cedric Kahn, the director, stated that he is agnostic but he has some respect for the transcendent.

The plot concerns a young man, a drug addict, suicidal, who is taken to a rehabilitation centre in the mountains, a Catholic rehabilitation centre founded 30 years earlier by social-minded nun (played in the film by Hanna Schygulla). While there is a priest at the centre, it is a lay-run centre, modelled on contemplative monasteries with their ethos of work and prayer. It is former addicts who form the staff, exercise disciplinary authority, serve as the carers. (There is a neighbouring centre with the founding nun some distance away from the men's centre.)

The image of the church that the film communicates is very much that of service and solidarity, and a justice response to problems in the modern world, the need for affirmation, care, and hope through rehabilitation.

The young men are seen doing a lot of work in the fields. They are also seen at prayer in the Chapel as well as at the Eucharistic celebration. There are traditional hymns, sacred music in the background. There are also enthusiastic popular gospel hymns, sung with great zest.

The filmmakers obviously believe in the power of reflective silence, some contemplation, finding one's own capacity for prayer whether it be in the gospel tradition, in other traditions, in reflection.

As regards the priest, while he is seen at the celebration of the Eucharist, when there is a gathering of visitors in the summer and everyone sits down at outdoor tables, he quietly comes in, wearing his clerical collar but sits unobtrusively at one of the tables. The more significant scene where he appears is in the discussion with the young man who has had his ups and downs over the months at the centre, initially resentful and refusing to cooperate, touched by some of those who look after him, running away but encouraged to return by the daughter of a couple who run a farm nearby, settling down, actually learning all the Psalms by heart and able to recite them, becoming more devout.

When the group goes on a mountain hike and he is left behind, stranded on the mountain overnight, praying to survive, he believes that he should enter the seminary and serve God there. The discussion between him and the priest is very interesting and a vocation counsellor would shout out from their seat in the cinema that he really should do a lot more preparation and thought). The priest goes through the young man's reasons, testing them, commenting on his faith experience, on the repercussions of his being lost in the mountains but found again.

There is a great deal of respect for the church in its contribution to healing, on the power and beauty of prayer, of work, and of social justice service as well as its sense of solidarity throughout the film. When the film was screened in competition at the Berlin, the organisers programmed it for 9 am on the Sunday morning!

THE REAL ESTATE/TOPPING AV INGENTING

Sweden, 2018, 88 minutes, Colour.

Leonore Ekstrand, Christer Levin, Christian Saldert.

Directed by Mans Mansson, Axel Petersen.

This is a bizarre curiosity from Sweden.

While it might echo some of the contemporary problems about housing and accommodation in our cities, it is also the portrait of very selfish woman, greedy relatives, tenants in apartments who have got contracts under the carpet, problems in ownership and maintenance.

While, the film can be looked at with touches of realism, the whole visual impact of the film is very much stylised, light and shadow, bright colours, unexpected editing – which makes some of the impact rather unsteady.

One of the reviewers at the Berlin film Festival commented on the audio clash of the musical score, commenting that it sounded as if it had been composed by “a psychopath with a huge arsenal of

power tools". Which actually is a fairly accurate comment about the audio impact and can serve as somewhat symbolic for the visual impact.

The focus is on Nojet, Leonore Ekstrand, a Swedish woman who has lived in Spain for decades, living in absolutely hedonist life, luxury, husbands and lovers, completely self-absorbed. When she inherits an apartment block in Stockholm, she wants to sell it in order to get finance for her accustomed lifestyle. In one sequence, she visits the apartments, intruding into the world of the various inhabitants, finding that deals have been done for them to reside there. However, she is not interested in the least in the plight of anybody except herself.

She has a half brother who is also involved in the inheritance. His son is the maintenance manager of the apartment block and he and his father start to scheme against Nojet.

In the meantime, she carries on as usual back home in Sweden, taking a lover, planning how she might take possession of the block. Her main plan is to build an explosive and to cause havoc in the building. It is not entirely certain what she actually intends by this – but it happens.

However, the filmmakers think that that is enough to offer us and the film goes no further.

A bizarre tale, bizarrely told.

SILENT REVOLUTION/ DAS ZWEIFENDE KLASSENZIMMER

Germany, 2018, 111 minutes, Colour.

Jonas Dassler, Judith Engel, Tom Gramenz, Leonard Scheicher, Michael Gwisdek, Lena Klenke, Isaiah Michalski.

Directed by Lars Kraume.

A very interesting film from Germany, taking its audience back to East Germany in 1956 and noting that this was five years before the building of the Berlin Wall. The film recreates the place, homes, school, the families, the harsh Soviet style government, the ideology of socialism. It also has people from the East travelling by train, being checked, for visits to the West, something which was to come to a bitter end with the establishing of the Wall.

We are introduced to some young students in their final year at school, full of hope, but their expectations of future in the East. Two of them, Theo and Kurt, go on a trip to West Berlin, cheeky to the guards who check their identities, going to visit Kurt's grandmother's grave – but also wanting to go to see a sexy movie in a West Berlin cinema. When they return, they gather with their friends to discuss the visit, some excited by the experience, some rather censorious about going to that kind of film. They are again cheeky to some of the Soviet soldiers who pursue them but let them go.

The focus on this group of students, as well as Eric and Paul who are also in the class and some of the girls, including Lena who is attracted to Theo, means that the film offers us a microcosm of the East German town, Stalinstadt, and the comparatively small drama that affects the students. And this microcosm is a symbolic drama of what was happening in the rest of the East and for the following 35 years until the Wall came down and there was reunification.

The students hear news of the Hungarian uprising in October 1956. This excites them, possibilities for freedom, of getting away from Soviet overrule. Without thinking of the consequences, they

decide to hold a two minutes silence period in the classroom. The keep looking at the clock. The teacher does not know what is going on, the tension begins.

Kurt comes from a family where his father is on the town Council, a respected authority. Theo's father, on the other hand, works in the steel mills and has two younger brothers. He is the first in his family to complete his secondary schooling and his father has high hopes. Later Theo will learn that his father participated in an uprising in 1953.

Paul takes the group to his uncle, with a reputation as a gay man, to listen to radio from the West in order to learn more about Hungary. The principal, originally a blue-collar worker, is anxious for his job and talks with students. However, an official visits, Miss Kessler, a severe interrogator and, later, the Minister for Education will visit the school.

There are divisions amongst the students, Erik idealising his resistance father but rather conservative. The others, on the other hand, are eager for solidarity with Hungary. Questions are asked about who is responsible.

Ultimately, the state will come down on students and they will have to make decisions about staying, being expelled from school, the consequences for their careers or travelling to the west.

Well acted, well written, always interesting – and, though it is the history of a small group in 1956, still challenging.

LA ENFERMEDADA DEL DOMINGO/ SUNDAY'S ILLNESS (Panorama)

Spain, 2018, 113 minutes, Colour.

Susi Sanchez, Barbara Lennie, Richard Bohringer, Miguel Angel Sola.

Directed by Ramon Salazar.

This is a very strong character study.

The film opens in the Spanish countryside, the camera still, no musical background. In fact, throughout the film there is very little musical background, occasionally with the drive into the country, some countryside scenery. Otherwise, there is soft music in a restaurant, music at a fair, the use of the song, Dream a Little Dream and its impact on Anabel.

Anabel is one of the central characters. She is in her 60s. She moves in significant and wealthy circles. Her husband is an economist, businessman and was a professor. She dresses very fashionably. She also hosts society dinners, giving orders to her servants, wanting them to be exact, no earrings or piercings... She has one daughter.

The other central character is Chiara. She is in her early 40s, seen initially visiting the forest where she grew up, a significant tree contemplated. Then she appears as one of the servants at the Society dinner. She upsets Anabel by pouring her red wine instead of white wine. There is a confrontation between the two women after the meal and the emerging of a significant secret.

Anabel had been previously married, had Chiara as her daughter, left husband and daughter when the little girl was eight. She wanted more in life, studied, married, became something of a celebrity hostess. In the meantime, Chiara had had a difficult life, some rebellion, drug addiction, and the need to reconnect with her mother. She proposes now that the two women spend 10 days together.

The two actresses are most convincing. Susi Sanchez has great bearing as Anabel, a woman of style, who has created herself but finds her creation now challenged by the appearance of her daughter. Barbara Lennie is also most convincing as Clara.

The 10 days together are episodic. They talk. There are long silences. Anabel goes to town to visit her husband's grave at the cemetery. Chiara recovers her dog from a friend who is minding the dog and invents a story about discovering it down a well, covered in mud, encouraging Anabel to hose the dog and then Chiara turning it on Anabel. There is a gradual change in the mother. This is typified when she puts on a recording of Dream a Little Dream, begins to sway and then to dance, Chiara observing her.

There is a very significant sequence at a fair, Chiara riding the carousel that she remembers from the past. Then her drinking (when she denied that she was a drinker), some outrageous flirting, dancing with a man in the square with Anabel stepping in to discipline her daughter, take her home, care for her when she is sick.

The audience may come to guess why Chiara wants the two women to spend the time together, a certain urgency and, as the title indicates, illness. Significantly, and a challenge to the audience in principles and in emotions, the issue of assisted suicide. Whether one agrees with assisted suicide or not, this is a story that brings home the reality, testing principles and emotions.

Often very impressive drama, and two performances well worth watching.

TOUCH ME NOT (Competition)

Romania, 2018, 125 minutes, Colour.
Laura Benson, Thomas Lemarquis.
Directed by Adina Pintilie.

Touch Me Not won the Golden Bear prize at the 2018 Berlinale.

The director is a documentary maker who also appears in the film herself, seen behind the camera, seen reflected, doing interviews with the central character played by Englishwoman, Laura Benson, and giving her opinions on the making of the film as well as its subject.

This is a film about the human body. It is the major concern for Laura Benson, a British actress in her 50s, often rather inhibited, feeling a great deal of internal anger. This is one of those performances usually called courageous where Laura Benson exposes her complete self, her inner psyche, mind and emotions, sexual concerns and energies, her body.

For audiences there are two aspects for the film. Firstly, there is a certain amount of prurience about the subject, about sexual behaviour, about watching sexual behaviour on screen. Secondly, there is the therapeutic aspect of spending over two hours considering the subject, listening to points of view, agreeing and disagreeing with the points of view, about the behaviour, of observing the naked body, in watching Laura discuss the situation with psychologists, acting out some of her angers, as well as the audience testing their own attitudes towards their own bodies.

While the attention is on Laura and herself and her body, there are some of the women, especially involved in sexual therapy, where there is a great deal of the female gaze, director and actor, on

male bodies, beginning with a call boy and masturbation, followed by an Icelandic man, Tudor, who has a particular condition where, at a young age, he shed all his hair who is in group work with a dwarf sized man, full body, ordinary sized head (and distracting large protruding teeth) who is particularly frank about his own urges and his sexual activity.

Audiences can remain rather calm during the therapy interviews with psychologists – although the man, is rather forward in his approach, wanting to touch Laura, to get a reaction from her – which he certainly does, her talking about her comfort zone, feeling uncomfortable, letting out screams.

At one stage, there is a group of naked men and women, a great deal of groping. At another stage, there is a look at some sadomasochistic behaviour.

Ultimately, Laura achieve some kind of self-knowledge and self-awareness, understanding herself better, becoming more comfortable – culminating in her being able to dance naked for herself and in front of the camera.

As has been said, a blend of the prurient and the therapeutic.

TRANSIT

France\Germany\France, 2018, 101 minutes, Colour.

Franz Rogowski, Paula Beer, Godehard Giese, Lilien Batman, Maryan Zaree.

Directed by Christian Petzold.

This is a German film about France during the Nazi occupation. It opens in Paris, focuses on a range of people, some about to go to the resistance, others trying to get out of the occupied zone, going south to Marseille. But there is also the ominous threat of the occupation moving south towards the Mediterranean.

The film is directed by Christian Petzold whose films are always interesting, especially *Barbara* which has an East German setting and *Phoenix* which has a World War II setting. Many of Petzold's films feature Nina Hoss as the leading lady. In this film it is Paula Beer who had appeared in François Ozon's war film, *Frantz*.

However, unless an audience is warned beforehand, it might find it very difficult to appreciate what is actually going on. What Petzold has done is to take the historical story but film it in contemporary Paris and contemporary Marseille, relying on the dialogue and situations to communicate the Occupation but counterbalancing it with contemporary images. At times, this is disconcerting. However, it makes the point that events like the Occupation can occur at any time.

The central character, a young man called Georg, played by Franz Rogowski (Isabelle Huppert's son in *Happy End*, the lead in *In The Aisles*) who is called upon by a friend to deliver letters to a famous author who is trying to migrate to Mexico. He has been abandoned by his wife but she wants to contact him. What the young man discovers is that the author has killed himself – and he takes a completed manuscript as well as the author's letters only to find that the friend who commissioned him on his mission has been arrested.

While the contemporary situation does not look threatening, the action of the film is. The young man has to accompany a very ill associate on a freight train to Marseille, which he does, forming a plan that he will assume the identity of the author and make his way to Mexico.

The bulk of the action takes place in Marseilles. There are a number of humane touches, especially with Georg encountering a young boy, a contemporary refugee, and plays soccer with him before he meets the boy's mother who is deaf-mute. Georg forms an attachment to him and helps him when the boy's asthma has a bad attack and Georg tracks down a sympathetic doctor, Richard, also trying to get to Mexico to build a hospital, to treat him.

Georg also visits the various consulates, getting his papers ready to go to Mexico, going to the United States for a visa for passing through, being challenged by the official thinking that he is the real author because the official has been dealing with the author's wife.

There are some emotional complications with the wife anxious to find her husband, finding emotional support from Richard, being offered some hopes for travel by Georg.

This is the kind of film which won't have a completely happy ending, some experience tragedy, others living with hope and acting on hope. So, it is a reminder of the events of the past while echoing some of the constraints of the present.

U: JULY 22

Norway, 2018, 90 minutes, Colour.

Andrea Berntzen, Aleksander Holmen, Brede Fristad, Elli Rhiannon Muller Osbourne. Cambridge for a start,

Directed by Erik Poppe.

For Norwegians, July 22, 2011 was a sombre day. It was the day that terrorist Anders Breivik exploded a bomb outside government offices in Oslo and then went on a rampage on the island of Utoye where many young people had gathered for a summer camp and shot 79 of them and wounded many others.

Breivikk was an extreme rightwing fanatic and made outlandish declarations during his trial. It is important for this film that he is never named and is never seen – and, in prison, he has no possibility of praising himself for being at the centre of the film.

The film is based on the events of the day, many of the stories told. However, the director, Erik Poppe, says at the end that the film is a work of fiction but based on true stories, one of many possible interpretations.

The device used is a handheld camera and the story told in a single take, using real-time to capture again the atmosphere and events of the 72 minutes of the pursuit of the students.

The film opens with newsreel footage of the explosion in Oslo causing concern on the island with parents ringing children and checking on safety. The camera then focuses on one character, Kaia, and follows her through the next 72 minutes. We see her impatient with her younger sister who is out for a good time and is very careless, rubbishing the tent. Kaia then joins a number of friends. Soon they begin to hear gunshots and are puzzled.

From then on, the camera follows Kaia, huddling with the group, taking cover, bewildered, trying to use the mobile phone, concerned about her sister and crawling to the tent but finding the sister absent as well as her leaving her mobile phone in the tent. Kaia also encounters another little boy who is terrified and she encourages him to run towards the water (with some pathos when he is

later discovered dead and she blames herself).

Kaia eventually moves towards the water where a number of taken refuge. All throughout the film one hears shots, screams, glimpses people running in all directions. At the water's edge, Kaia takes refuge with the young man whom she had earlier encountered, has conversations with him about her ambitions to be a politician, sings a song from the choir to which she belongs. As the danger gets closer, she is siezed to make a move and his shot down.

Ironically, her companion is rescued by a boat – and the audience sees on the boat, Kaia sister looking after those who have been wounded.

It is important for a nation to come to terms with such a disastrous day and the number of people dead, especially their being so young. This film is very respectful to the survivors and their stories, enabling audiences to remember and to understand.

Erik Poppe has directed fine films like Troubled Waters and The King's Decision.

This film received a commendation from the Ecumenical Jury at the 2018 Berlin Film Festival.

UNSANE (Out of Competition)

US, 2018, 98 minutes, Colour.

Claire Foy, Joshua Leonard, Juno Temple, Jay Pharaoh, Amy Irving, Matt Damon.

Directed by Steven Soderbergh.

Do we actually use the word “unsane”? Is it something of a mixture of sane and insane? Can it imply that somebody can be sane and insane at the same time?

Director Steven Soderbergh, with a strong career in films, Cannes award for Sex, Lies and Videotape, and an Oscar for Traffic, decided that he would stop making films and turn his attention to television. His decision for a new direction in work did not last long and in 2017 he released Logan Lucky and in 2018, Unsane.

The star of the film is British Claire Foy, who made such an impression as the Queen in The Crown and appeared also in Breathe. We first see her in her office at a bank, in a Pennsylvania city, treating a phone client with some severity. The worker in the next desk comments on her harsh approach. However, Seymour (she explains her name, that she was called after her maternal grandfather) is a success at work, praised by the boss, suggesting she travel with him to a conference in New Orleans – though she seems to have a quizzical response, suggestive that he is being suggestive.

Then, she goes to a bar, meeting up with a man whom she had contacted through an app, seemingly permissive but then suddenly stopping. So far, perhaps so ordinary.

However, she has been troubled by a stalker for two years, moving away from her mother (Amy Irving) and from Boston. She decides to go to a therapist and explains her fears and answers questions about contemplating suicide. Suddenly, she is interned in an institution for 24 hours, the staff suspicious of her responses, rather Cuckoo's Nest in their application of rules and regulations. She finds herself in a dormitory, tormented by the young woman in the next bed, Allison (Juno Temple).

An explanation is given that institutions like this are dependent on insurance income and can keep intended patients as inmates for as long as companies are prepared to pay the insurance. (To be a particular interest for Soderbergh who explored the exploitation of medication and institutions in his film, *Side Effects*, 2013.)

As the film develops, and Seymour finds herself confined, she denounces one of the workers as her stalker. The authorities say that he has been definitely checked and, in fact, he is in charge of the distribution of the medication each night.

At one stage, we might have been suspicious that all this was going on in Seymour's head, that she had imagined the stalker. Yet, here it is (Joshua Leonard) and sometimes in charge of Seymour.

She does make friends with another inmate, Nate (Jay Pharoah) who tells her about the insurance scams and lends her his mobile phone so that she can make contact with her mother who hurriedly drops everything at home and hurries to her daughter, making demands, taking strong stances.

The plot does get quite complicated as it goes on, Seymour and her dealings with the alleged stalker, his behaviour, his interactions with Nate, his plans for a happy life with Seymour.

There is plenty of melodrama here, especially in a final confrontation, police investigations, media investigations into the ethics of the institution...

And, with Seymour returning to work, and some of her behaviour, we begin to wonder what has really happened...

REVIEWS MARCH 2018

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THE 15:17 TO PARIS

US, 2018, 94 minutes, Colour.

Alec Skarlatos, Anthony Sadler, Spencer Stone, Judy Greer, Jenna Fischer, Irene White, William Jennings, Bryce Gheisar Paul-Mikel [?](#) Williams, Thomas Lennon, Tony Hale.

Directed by Clint Eastwood.

Depending on memory, audiences may or may not be aware of an episode on a train from

Amsterdam to Paris in 2015 where a terrorist threatened passengers with guns and three Americans, some of them military, thwarted the attack by the terrorist. The three of them then wrote a book recounting the episode.

This is a Clint Eastwood film— post-production completed when he was 87! His name is on the advertising but his name does not appear as part of the film's title. His name is a marketing device. And, in many ways, this film has a lot of Clint Eastwood's themes, American heroism, American military, striking action, and background stories of the central characters.

The production question arose as to casting of these central characters. It was decided that the men should play themselves. They were not actors. They had no drama lessons. Rather, were invited to re-enact the events that they had lived and to bring conviction to those performances. And, generally, they do.

Eastwood does what he did in his most recent film, Sully. There are some sequences scattered throughout the film of the ultimate confrontation with the terrorist. However, there is a lot of back story and the incident is not shown fully until the latter part of the film once we have got to know the three protagonists.

One of the great advantages of the film is the casting of the three young lads to portray the heroes when they were at school and at home. The greater credibility to the real adult characters/performers.

Spencer Stone gets the most attention in the film. William Jennings portrays him as a boy, not a little boy, but a rather big boy for his age, not the quickest runner on the block, criticised for ADD, cared for by his single mother, played by Judy Greer, a boy who did not know what he would be when he grew up but was interested in the military. The boy who portrays Anthony Sadler, Paul-Mikel Williams, is a vivacious and appealing character as a little boy, always getting into trouble, not always deserving it, perhaps too much picked on because of his African- American background. Bryce Gheisar is very good as Alec Kartelos, it is best friend, medium-size, potential for grown-up work, joining the military. His mother played by Jenna Fischer.

The mothers have their difficulties, especially when called in by the principal of the Christian school where they send their sons, played seriously by comedian Thomas Lennon. Their sports master is impatient often reporting them, the discipline master is forever urging them to get to classes. (The presentation of the Christian school is not a particularly flattering portrait but Spencer Stone does pray St Francis Peace Prayer – which he does at the end of the film.)

When they grow up, in their mid-20s, Spencer has tried and failed in several of the courses he is interested in and lacks vision depth, disqualifying him, and Alec has spent time in Afghanistan. They join up with Anthony for a European tour. Some audiences have found this unnecessary and a touch boring – you for the violent bits! But those who have visited Rome, Venice, Amsterdam, Berlin, will enjoy some reminiscences. And so, finally, they decide to go to Paris and are on the 15.17 from Amsterdam.

The film does raise the question of how would we all react if suddenly on a train were confronted by a terrorist with guns and 300 rounds of ammunition. The three men tackle their attacker, subdue him, with the help of an older Frenchman. There are some frightening moments, edited with some pace, with the potential to alarm the audience wondering what would happen if they were there.

There is a final ceremony with the French president presenting the men with the Legion of Honour

and strong praise for stances against terrorism.

The film is patriotic – after all, they are American heroes! But audiences who abhor American trumpet-blowing have found this irritating, with comments that Clint Is too patriotic. But, one could ask, why not?

AU REVOIR LA HAUT/ SEE YOU UP THERE

France, 2017, 118 minutes, Colour.

Nahuel Perez Biscayart, Albert Dupontel, Laurent Lafitte, Niels Arestrup, Emilie Dequenne, Melanie Thierry, Louise Balster, Philippe Uchan.

Directed by Albert Dupontel.

This is an impressive French film which can be recommended.

The audience is taken back into French history in 1918-1919. While there have been many films on World War I and the role of the French (Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* is an excellent film of reference), this film takes us behind the scenes of the trenches and the brutal warfare in the fields, especially on the two days before the signing of the armistice. But, the film goes on from there, looking at the consequences of the war, the effect on the lives of soldiers, those who survived, those who survived with deep physical and psychological consequences.

The film actually opens in Morocco with Albert, Albert Dupontel, who both wrote the film and directed it as well as acting the central role, being interrogated about a fraud concerning war memorials. This is an alert at the beginning of the film, the action returning at various times to this interrogation. But the film is mainly the flashbacks which Albert is telling to the investigating officer.

Which takes us to the trenches, Albert, Edouard, a young man who is an artist and Pradelle, a sadistic officer who relishes war rather than peace and is prepared to send his men over the top even though the armistice is about to be signed. Not only does he send his men over the top, he rather relishes their dying or being wounded in action and, in fact, shoots two of the men that he sends out as scouts in the back. He is to appear significantly as the action goes on.

Albert is saved by the artist, Edouard (Nahuel Perez Biscayart) but Edouard himself is wounded severely, saved by Albert, taken to a hospital where a nun reminds him that he is sharing in the sufferings of Christ (not so persuasive for the injured man), who needs some reconstruction on his face and, subsequently, will have to wear a mask. (He is an artist and designs quite a range of masks for himself).

We see the life of the veterans. Albert is poor, his fiancée gives him up, he tries various jobs, is a lift driver, is a placard advertiser. Edouard, on the other hand lives in seclusion, painting, being helped by a sympathetic young girl who is able to understand his muffled words and communicate for him.

Edouard's father is a wealthy man, estranged from his son (Niels Arestrup). His daughter seeks out Albert, tries to find out what has happened to Edouard – and there is a scheme by Edouard to assume another identity and for people to think that he is dead. Unfortunately, the sadistic officer from the trenches, Pradelle (Laurence Lafitte) becomes involved, marrying the daughter, exploiting war grave situations with Chinese labourers and small coffins, knowing the truth about Albert and Edouard.

And the fraud? There is a great movement for war memorials in France in 1919, Edouard's father even investing in one. There are competitions for design – which, of course, Edouard enters into. He sets up false companies, takes investments, exploiting and thieving the money.

This means that there is plenty of plot, unusual characters, fine characterisations, some empathy for Edouard and yet questions about his integrity, with a very moving and disturbing final sequence concerning his father.

And, at the end of Albert's interrogation in Morocco, there is an interesting twist – and Albert can have a future.

BLACK PANTHER

US, 2018, 134 minutes, Colour.

Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong'o, Danai Gurira, Martin Freeman, Daniel Kaluuya, Letitia Wright, Winston Duke, Sterling K. Brown, Angela Bassett, Forest Whitaker, Andy Serkis, Isaac de Bankole, Sebastian Stan.

Directed by Ryan Coogler.

Within a week of its release, Black Panther had received very favourable reviews, a further development of the Marvel Comics universe – although the character had appeared in Captain America: Civil War (and a scene from that film is reproduced here to explain the origins of T'Challa, the Black Panther, the death of his father and some disastrous consequences of his father's decisions). Within two weeks of the film's release, it had taken almost half \$1 billion at the world box office.

But, it is also become something of a social phenomenon. Here was a superhero film with black characters, most performed by African or African-American actors, opening up a different world from the expected, introducing a mythical kingdom of Wakanda, hidden somewhere in the southern part of Africa, all traditions and rituals combined with contemporary and futuristic technology. And, the screenplay puts a lot of emphasis on the history of slavery, the slaves going to the United States, human rights. In hindsight, it is not surprising to find that the film was embraced not only by African-American audiences in the US but by various cultures all around the world who identified with the colonised as well as the enslaved. And the film was directed by an African-American director, Ryan Cooper who had made his mark with small socially-concerned film, Fruitvale Station, and then the rebooting of the Rocky series with Creed.

As a superhero film, it is certainly striking in its visuals, especially the city capital of Wakanda, skyscrapers, transport, people freely walking around, and, more especially, the last waterfall and cliffs settings for the establishing of T'Challa as the Black Panther King and as the scene for a challenge from a rival, a vigorous battle. (And another vigorous battle later on when the mysterious black American character and villain arrives to challenge T'Challa). The screenplay draws on a lot of mythical lore which may or may not have grounding in fact. But, it creates the setting for a mysterious kingdom, the source of its power, Vibranium, not known anywhere else in the world, preserved for the people of Wakanda who are finally challenged to contribute to world progress and peace. In its presentation of Wakanda and the potential of an African nation to contribute to the world on the responsibility of its leaders, there seem some criticism of leaders past and present local Robert Mugabe and Jacob Zuma.

Chadwick Boseman is T'Challa, the Black Panther. He had already played real-life characters as

Jackie Robinson, James Brown and Chief Justice Marshall Thurgood. T'Challa is a strong hero but is not unvanquishable. In fact, those of a religious frame of mind with references might note something of a death and resurrection.

He receives his power from the traditions, from his father who was assassinated in 1992 in Vienna, from his strong mother, Angela Bassett, from the wise adviser, Forest Whitaker, and from costumes and masks with special inherent powers and from the Vibranium. His technological-whiz sister, Nakia, played with verve by Lupita Nyong'o, has vast resources of technology, expertise in managing them, virtual cars and plane cockpits, and still has the time to go out to battle and give communication advice in the middle of conflict. There is also Okoye, Danai Gurira, also a warrior, in love with T'Challa. In fact, this seems to be a Praetorian guard of powerful female warriors.

So, the concerns of the story focus on black characters. And for token whites in the film – there is Andy Serkis as a sleazy arms dealer from Johannesburg, Martin Freeman as a former pilot and CIA agent (interestingly, both these whites are British rather than from the US).

But, the main villain, is also a black, with an interesting back story about his father, an ambassador to the United States, his vision for the use of Vibranium, his death and his heritage for his son. The son is part Wakandan, part American, involved in "CIA activities and learning a brutal trade. He is played by Michael B. Jordan (who also appeared in Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station* as well as *Creed*).

Whether *Black Panther* will be a social rallying cry for some time, the raising of black consciousness, or will be a phenomenon of 2018, it is hard to say. However, it continues the tradition of Marvel superhero films (with Stan Lee doing his usual cameo, at a casino, and billed as *Thirsty Gambler*), and T'Challa will become part of *The Avengers* (that rather clogged series with an abundance of superheroes each waiting their turn for a battle sequence).

The audiences who rush to the exit as soon as a word appears on screen will miss a significant rousing and encouraging speech from T'Challa about world peace and development. And, there is a mini preview of another *Black Panther* film at the end of the credits.

FIFTY SHADES FREED

US, 2018, 105 minutes, Colour.

Dakota Johnson, Jamie Dornan, Eric Johnson, Eloise Mumford, Rita Ora, Luke Grimes, Jennifer Ehle, Marcia Gay Harden, Bruce Altman, Arielle Kebbel, Callum Keith Rennie.

Directed by James Foley.

Shades of Grey, *Shades Darker*, and now the *Shades are Freed* – whatever that might mean.

Here is the third film in the series, based on the best-selling but not necessarily best-written, novels by E.L. James. This film and its predecessor were directed by James Foley. And the two stars, Dakota Johnson and Jamie Dornan are back again as is the villain of the previous film, Eric Johnson. Marcia Gay Harden appears as Christian Grey's mother and you might glimpse Jennifer Ehle in the wedding sequence.

Wedding?

The film opens with Anastasia and Christian in love, going through a marriage sequence which could come from any romantic film. It is very lovey-dovey. And then they go off to a honeymoon on the

Riviera, relishing the sun, the sun on bodies (although Christian has some rather prissy reservations about Anastasia on the beach), even more lovey-dovey giving a context for the sexual scenes.

So, what plot can ensue with such a happy ending at the beginning?

Ominous messages from Seattle, documents in safes, Christian finding that he must return to his business. Anastasia will go back with him – and resume her job at the publishing company, finding herself promoted. She would like to be called Ana at work but finds that Christian does put an emphasis on “Mr Grey” – so she becomes “Mrs Grey”.

Anastasia in this film is certainly very attractive, quite self-assertive, supporting Christian, even in some visits to the Red Room which, we remember from the past, is a domestic chamber for some sado-masochistic behaviour, hanky-spanky. Anastasia seems to be rather in control, happily devoting herself to Christian and his idiosyncrasies.

But, Christian himself? Still terribly serious. Still terribly controlling. Still insisting on intervening in Anastasia’s life and career. And absolutely no sense of humour. Probably at the wedding sequence he did smile but not very ostensibly.

Which means then that they have to invent some melodrama to have some plot. Not that life is always unpleasant – holiday in Aspen, Colorado, with Christian’s brother and sister. Plans to redevelop a mansion outside the. But, Jack, from the previous film, working with Anastasia but not getting her job, becomes even more of a dramatic heavy, stacking documents, attacking Ana at home, sent to prison, getting out on bail, becoming involved in more than a little abduction and financial demands.

Anastasia has to face all this crisis and does not want to tell Christian who has reacted very badly about the news that were all expecting, Ana expecting.

However, she is not exactly a damsel in distress and can drive a car at a more than mean pace, can conceal a gun and shoot it when necessary.

So, marriage, business, melodrama all as catalysts for freedom from the dark shades.

Those who can’t bear reading even a word on the screen at the end of the film and race towards the exit have to pause a moment because there is quite a sweet and twee sequence to bring the series to a close: pregnancy, children, Christian the smiling father... Whether Fifty Shades Family will have the same prurient appeal...?

FINDING YOUR FEET

UK, 2017, 111 minutes, Colour.

Imelda Staunton, Timothy Spall, Joanna Lumley, Celia Imre, John Sessions, David Haymon, Josie Lawrence.

Directed by Richard Loncraine.

A film for the young at heart – not necessarily for those who are young only in age. It opens up the world for them that they will associate with oldies, their grandparents (and, maybe, their parents).

While older age might be a late time to be finding your feet, the film reminds us that many men and

women discover that they have been stuck in life, need to make a new beginning, need to find their feet again, if not for the first time.

Finding one's feet means discovery, the ability to use one's feet and walk in new directions, finding balance – and, as in this entertainment, some fancy footwork in dancing.

This is a British film, very British characters and situations, enjoyable for those who spent some time in Best Marigold Hotels, familiar characters and situations, and pleasing for those who expect the expected.

A wonderful cast. Imelda Staunton plays Sandra, relishing that her husband of 35 years, former police chief (John Sessions) has now been knighted. She loves the idea of being a Lady. But, at the celebratory party, she makes a dreadful discovery, feels humiliated, denounces her husband at the party and moves out. But where is she to go? She has not seen her older sister, Elizabeth (Bif), for 10 years. Bif is played as a free spirit, full of vitality, full of charm, by Celia Imre.

In the meantime, we have been introduced to Charlie, the ever-welcome Timothy Spall. He lives on a houseboat in a London canal alongside his good friend Ted, David Heymann. Charlie does all kinds of odd jobs, especially helping out Bif. He has to help out Sandra at one stage but she is extraordinarily rude to him. Not a great start for a romance...

There is quite a deal of pathos when we discover that Charlie's wife suffers from severe Alzheimers, is in a home that Charlie could pay for by selling their family home and his living on the houseboat. The scenes between the two, where she not only does not recognise him but rejects him, is very sad, an alert about the impact of Alzheimer's.

Dancing has been mentioned. Bif and Charlie go to a local club, mainly for the oldies, where they are encouraged to do all kinds of dancing. Sandra, who danced when she was little, is resistant but finally... of course she joins in. Another friend at the club is one of those sophisticated English woman who has had several husbands and perhaps talks like Joanna Lumley. Actually, here she is played by Joanna Lumley.

Lots of interactions that will to entertain the target audience but maybe a bit remote and/or tedious for other audiences. Although, it should be said, that sons and daughters of older parents may well find this film well worthwhile watching and thinking about the future of their parents.

The dance group does a charity performance in the middle of London, very exhilarating. They are captured on video, put on YouTube² and receive an invitation to perform in Rome, all expenses covered. The characters are happy to go to Rome – and so, probably, will the audience.

Not all sweetness and light. Sandra is still bitter about her husband despite her urgings from her daughter and grandson. Charlie faces the terrible fact that his wife has gone from his life. Bif has some pains in her back and (we can probably guess the rest).

The target audience for this film is a solid older demographic. By and large, it is a light film, but a serious portrait of old age, and will probably be very much liked and appreciated by the demographic.

GAME NIGHT

US, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.

Jason Bateman, Rachel McAdams[?], Kyle Chandler, Sharon Horgan, Billy Magnusson, Lamorne Morris, Kylie Bunbury, Jesse Plemons, Michael C. Hall, Danny Huston, Camille Chen.

Directed by John Francis Daly, Jonathan Goldstein.

This is a popular comedy with serious undertones and overtones. Some have found it hilarious. Others have found it amusing. Most audiences will find their reaction somewhere in between.

The film has a good cast including guest appearances by Dexter's Michael C. Hall and Danny Huston. Jason Bateman and Rachel McAdams[?] are Max and Annie and make a very genial hosting couple. Kyle Chandler is Jason Bateman's boastful brother. There is a couple, Kevin and Michelle, sweethearts from childhood but suddenly finding out about a momentary lapse – and spending the rest of the film arguing about it, the man in question allegedly Denzel Washington but only someone who resembles him (and, in the cast, referred to as not-Denzel – and is the subject of an amusing post-credits sequence which most audiences rushing out will miss). There is also Ryan (Billy Magnusson) who is not the smartest man in America who brings to the games girlfriends who used to be referred in the bad old days as “dumb blonde is”. However, Ryan is also blonde and he is a “dumb blonde” par excellence (par worst). But, this time, he brings an intelligent Irish working partner, Sarah (Sharon Horgan).

Those who find the film hilarious will enjoy the characters and their characterisations, the madcap situations which eventually emerge when there are real plots instead of just made-up abduction and detection situations. Quite a lot of farce. Those who find the film on the amusing rather than hilarious level will enjoy all of the above but might well enjoy a great amount of the dialogue, some amusing references to a range of movies and actors for those in the know - as well as an unnecessary amount of superfluous coarse language.

It is good to see adults who are not just staying at home watching television or spending their time on the Internet! Each week the couples meet for charades and all kinds of other games. However, Max and Annie have a next-door neighbour, a very serious police officer who has just separated from his wife whom he still holds on a pedestal (although most times he is seen holding his pet dog). He is played by Jesse Plemons who seems to be the unwanted onlooker but who becomes crucial to the plot as it becomes more complicated and is also the subject of an unexpected plot twist.

The key to all the shenanigans is Max's brother, Brooks (Kyle Chandler) who seems to have been a great financial success in Europe, returns to America, wants to host a game night. He has been the bane of Max's life, tormenting him when they were children, his being the object of Max's envy – and, when the couple go to a doctor concerned about Annie not becoming pregnant, the cause of Max's stress and infertility.

While everything seems an amusing game night with role-play and abduction, it turns out to be much more – but not in the way that the audience is necessarily expecting. There are some good sequences – especially when Max is shot in the arm accidentally by Annie and she goes to the pharmacy to buy all the goods for getting the bullet out, uses her iPhone to read the instructions and pours champagne to cleanse the wound... Later, Max will be accidentally stabbed in his bullet wound!

Jeffrey Wright plays an FBI officer who may or may not be real. Then there are some thugs who knock him out who seem to be the real thing. However, the contestants in the game night think this is all part of the play. Max and Annie have a confrontation with the thugs in a bar. Kevin and

Michelle are stranded in Brooks's house. Sarah, telling Ryan, goes to the organisers of the games to get the clues.

Dexter's Michael C. Hall appears as the Bulgarian who wants his hands on the Faberge egg. Danny Huston has a cameo role as a millionaire who has the egg (and he stages Fight Club bouts in his basement which distract Ryan, though he does find the egg!)

GAUGUIN -VOYAGE DE TAHITI

France, 2017, 101 minutes Colour.
Vincent Cassell, Tuhei Adams, Malik's Zidi.
Directed by Edouard Deluc.

Paul Gauguin is best remembered for his work in French Polynesia, in Tahiti, the Marqueses. Spending some time there in the 1880s, he returned to France, was associated with Vincent van Gogh as well as many of the prominent artists in Paris. He was married, with a large number of children.

On his return, he tried to persuade artist friends as well as his wife and children to come with him again to Tahiti. The artists thought it was too far away and too difficult. His wife complained of the squalor in which they lived.

Nevertheless, he returned, rather ill but going into the mountains to find the locals, to commune with nature, to hunt and gather, to talk some of the local language, to share in French, to hear the stories of the gods and creation and to paint. His health improved. The local people also wanted him to take a wife and designated a young woman with whom he conversed, learning the different myths of the people, a testing time of one month. She then became his wife.

He then returned to the capital, his health improved, he had done some paintings and was also involved in chiselling images in wood. He had a young associate who was creative in carving, but was able to outsell his master to the passing tourist trade. The young man also had eyes for the artist's wife, following her from church one day with the artist following, angry, with his gun but not shooting.

Paul Gauguin also kept his wife inside, locked, wearing European dress, having formal meals with European food and cutlery. To get money he worked as a wharf labourer.

No money came from France so ultimately he was repatriated as a poor man. However, he was soon to return to the islands and paint for another 10 years, classic paintings but he was to die in poverty.

He gained a considerable reputation in the 20th century.

HAPPY END

France/Austria, 2017, 107 minutes, Colour.
Isabelle Huppert, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Mathieu Kassovitz, Fantine Harduin, Frantz Rogowski, Laura Verlinden, Toby Jones.
Directed by Michael Haneke.

Over the decades Michael Haneke has built up a very strong reputation. He is an Austrian, making his early films in Austria but later working in Austrian-French [co-productions](#), spoken in French. His films have featured in international festivals and his casts have won many awards. Isabelle Huppert has appeared in several of his films and won best actress in Cannes for *The Piano Teacher*. And Haneke has won the *Palme D'Or* [there](#) for *The White Ribbon* and for *Amour*.

This means that those who have followed Haneke's career in films will know that a title like *Happy End* will probably not have a happy ending – and will probably not have a happy beginning or middle either. And that is right.

Haneke's previous film was *Amour*, about an elderly couple, ageing, Alzheimer's, and issues of assisted suicide. Emmanuelle Riva won an Oscar nomination at 85 for her performance. Also in the film were Jean-Louis [Trintignant](#) and Isabelle Huppert and they both appear in this film, with similar names from the previous film although this is not a sequel.

Rather, this is a story of the different generations of a family, well off, owning a building construction firm, living in Calais with refugee servants but little connection with the infamous camps of refugees at the edge of the town.

At the centre of the film is Anne, Isabelle Huppert, the most competent member of the family and, despite her tough stances, the most likeable of the characters. Her father, Jean-Louis [Trintignant](#), tells his family that he is losing his marbles, wants to kill himself, but still has a great deal to say to the various members of the family. There is also his son, Thomas, Mathieu Kassowitz, a very able doctor who has divorced his first wife who has died of drug complications, has a young daughter from that marriage, 13-year-old Eve, Fantine Harduin, who comes to live with him and his new wife and young child. Then there is Anne's son, Pierre (Franz Rogowski), a moody young man who is to inherit the family business but seems incapable.

Haneke has always been interested in media, and now social media. An early film is *Benny's Video*. Contemporary media pervades this film, the opening credits having Eve filming her mother in the bathroom with dates and times and her commentary. Later there is video, *YouTube* [video](#), of a young musician. Thomas is involved in an online relationship, texting.

At the beginning of the film, there is an industrial accident on site and Anne has to deal with this as well as with welcoming Eve to the family, concerned about her father and his mental health, dealing with her son, dealing with meetings about liabilities and insurance because of the accident. Anne also has a relationship with a British man, Toby Jones, who eventually will meet the family.

There is some rapport between the grandfather and Eve, his being aware of her emotions, mental instability – she seems to be very depressed young girl.

Actually, there is no real end to the film, let alone a happy one. Rather, the director has invited us into this family, to observe, to react, relying on audience empathy and understanding, even for alienating characters.

INSIDIOUS: THE LAST KEY

US, 2018, 103 minutes, Colour.

Lin Shaye, Lee Whannell, Angus Sampson, Kirk Acevedo, Caitlin Gerard, Spencer Locke, Bruce Davison, Javier Botet.

Directed by Adam Robital.

It is not necessary to trust the word 'last' in this film's title. Since 2010, there have been four Insidious films and, depending on success (which does usually come with each episode), there could well be another sequel.

Clearly, this is a film for those who have enjoyed the other demonic stories and fears in the franchise. Someone coming across this episode without the previous three may well be wondering what is going on and why.

Lin Shaye as Elise Rainier has been a staple presence in the films. She is a Parapsychologist, ready to confront any demon that might tear to come her way. She is also available for casting out demons, though she has been relying in some of the previous films on two associates, Spectral Sightings, who are able to detect some demonic presence (although Elise is certainly an expert) but they are able to help with any of the physical demands. They also contribute some comic touches – which, it seems, some of the fans deemed inappropriate, even corny, for such serious enterprises. They are played by two Australians, comedian Angus Sampson, and the author of the series (as well as becoming famous with the Saw series), Lee Whannell.

This episode begins with a nightmare – but it also offers the opportunity for the audience to get to know something of Elise and her background, New Mexico, 1953, where she lives with her parents and her younger brother, Christian. Her father, a policeman, is a brute, physically harmful to his daughter, oppressive to his wife, not believing at all in his daughter's psychic powers and her ability to detect the presence of evil spirits. She leaves home, leaving her younger brother behind.

When Elise wakes up from a nightmare, it is 2010 and she has established a reputation for confronting spirits. She receives a request – and her interest and fear, as well as those of the audience, are excited because the caller is living in her old family home. She and her Spectral Sightings friends go on the road.

When Elise goes into the house, evoking severe memories, it becomes very eerie and sinister, especially the darker it becomes and she goes down into the cellar. There she discovers a young woman in captivity. In the meantime, her estranged brother, Christian (Bruce Davison), himself the father of two daughters, one of whom has the family capacity for parapsychology, come to the house where one of the daughters is captured.

In this other world of spirits, there is, of course, a frightening character, called all in the film's credits, Keyface (who can gouge out key holes on victims' bodies), and Elise offering to sacrifice herself for her niece. The two Spectral associates have to participate in all the sinister goings-on.

At this stage of her life, Elise is an expert, having saved many people, but also detached enough to offer herself. But, she is rewarded by reconciliation with the brother about whom she feels guilty because of abandoning him. It is nice for her to have a family, to have her Spectral associates, and have a happy ending to the serious if this is where the franchise is to finish.

MADAME HYDE

France, 2017, 95 minutes, Colour.

Isabelle Huppert, Romain Duris, Serge Garcia.

Directed by Serge Bozon.

Robert Louis Stevenson created a classic novel in the 19th century with his Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. It has been filmed many times and there have been many novels with variations of the plot, external respectability, inner evil let loose.

This time the basic plot has been transferred to France in the 21st-century. The setting is a school, courses for technical students and higher education courses. The principal of the school, played rather smugly and as a dandy by Romain Duris, is snobbish about the levels of education.

Madame Hyde of the story is, surprisingly, played by Isabelle Huppert. She is Marie Gequiel, something of a mousey woman, in the education system 35 years, still wanting a higher accreditation. She loves science and is a physics teacher. However, teaching is not quite the right word to describe the classes. She is timid, she lacks control, the students continually mock her, ignore her. Her husband tries to advise her about silent entrance, sitting, staring – which she follows but the students laugh at her again.

The leader of the students is a disabled young man, Malik, who excels in the mockery – but, with his walking disability is not followed outside the classroom by the students, nor are the girls attracted to him..

One night, Marie is in laboratory and there is a lightning strike. She is affected – and it looks something like a scene from a Frankenstein film – and her interior Madame Hyde is unleashed. This gives her a greater confidence though she is not quite aware of why this is so. However, at night, when she can't sleep, an inner glow transforms her, the personality of Madame Hyde. Marie is not conscious of this in itself as she wanders the streets, sits in parks, approaches the group of students – touching one and setting him on fire and killing him.

In the meantime, she does have a success with the class project, the students being interested, the inspector brought in because of criticisms of her is also very impressed. The students ask questions – and the headmaster decides to give her an award. Because Malik has identified her as the glowing presence, she rings the police, goes to class, is arrested.

The film ends six months later with Malik at another school explaining the impact of his teacher who is both Jekyll and Hyde.

OVERDRIVE

France, Belgium, US, 2017, 93 minutes, Colour.

Scott Eastwood, Freddy Thorp, Ana de Armas, Gaia Weiss, Simon Abkarian, Clemens Schick Directed by Antonio Negret.

This is not a particularly good action film. It is full of the fast and furious which most reviewers noted. Actually, the title of Overdrive could have been very well used in one of the Fast and Furious films. So, it is the car film that you have when you haven't got the popular franchise.

The setting is France, around the city of Marseille. Scott Eastwood and Freddy Thorp portray two half-brothers who are skilled in stealing cars. They are seen in plenty of sequences exercising this particular talent. Scott Eastwood is in love with Stephanie (Ana de Armas) and glamorous model in real life, Gaia Weiss, portraying a thief in Marseilles, Devon, who becomes attracted to the other brother why is not immediately evident.

The dialogue is not particularly persuasive at all – and relies on some ominous silences as well.

The brothers are involved in an elaborate stealing of a car, plenty of detail, plenty of fast driving, plenty of chases, plenty of danger. This comes to the attention of a crime magnate who sees himself as controlling Marseilles. He is played by the excellent actor Simon Abkarian, who featured in French and American films. He summons the two young men, terrorises them, and employs them to steal cars from a rival to his Lordship of Marseille, a German played by Clemens Schick. He is sinister himself and also has his focus. Both crime Lords are particularly wealthy, love hoarding vintage cars.

The two brothers and the two women become involved in a lot of double dealing, seeming to be working for Abkarian and then making contact with Schick. Whatever the truth, and the rivalry between the two gang Lords which comes to a head, the brothers enrol the assistance of a whole lot of characters in Marseilles, as well as an expert on bombs.

Plenty of explosions, gates blown open, the gang all taking a car each and driving down the highway – and the audience try to work out who was working for whom and why.

Scott Eastwood resembles his father very closely – and this is a film that Clint may have contemplated acting in in the 1950s. Freddy Thorp is rather unpersuasive as the half brother.

With its French setting, and with the focus on vehicles and speed, it will remind audiences of the Transporter series the other car action shows from directors like Pierre Morel (who was a producer of this film), Luc Besson and Louis Letterier. The present director is from Columbia.

RED SPARROW

US, 2018, 140 minutes, Colour.

Jennifer Lawrence, Joel Edgerton, Matthias Schoenaerts, Charlotte Rampling, Mary- Louise Parker, Ciaran Hinds, Joely Richardson, Bill Camp, Jeremy Irons, Thekla Reuten, Douglas Hodge.
Directed by Francis Lawrence.

Tinker, Taylor, Ballerina, Spy.

While the Cold War may well be over, there is still plenty of cold war everywhere, not least between Russia and the United States – witness the inquiries into the Russian connections for the Trump election campaign; witness the number of Russian diplomats murdered in the United Kingdom over the last decade...

While red might be obvious for Russia, who are the sparrows? According to the scenario, specially chosen young men and women undertake a rigorous training to become seductive spies. Part of their skills is to recognise the strengths and weaknesses in those they target, responding to the weaknesses, particularly sexual weaknesses. And the training is fairly explicit.

Dominika, a young Russian ballerina, a talented performer at the Bolshoi, suffers a leg-breaking accident and cannot dance any more. This actioner is a star vehicle for Jennifer Lawrence. Her uncle is a top official in whatever is the equivalent these days of the KGB. He traps her into an assassination situation – for which she is willing because she has a very sick mother at home to whom she is devoted. The Bolshoi is terminating the medical help for her mother. After the assassination, because she is a witness, her options are to be eliminated or to become a sparrow.

The sparrow training sessions are very striking because the lecturer and tutor is played by Charlotte Rampling at her commanding best.

Alongside the introduction to Dominika, the film introduces a CIA agent in Moscow, Nash, played by Joel Edgerton. He compromises a mission to protect his contact and is moved back to the United States. Because his contact seems to trust only him, he gets permission to return to Hungary to initiate contacts again. At the same time, Russian authorities decide that he would be a rather easy target for Dominika to seduce and get information from.

There are always tensions. We know that there is going to be some ambiguity, and there is. While Dominika does her job, she still resents the hold that the officials have over her and, of course, the temptation is for her to be a double agent, working for Nash and his associates, especially in connection with an American Senator's aide who is prepared to hand over sensitive discs.

One of the interesting things about this film is that it is full of cameos from a great number of strong character and actors from Jeremy Irons, Matthias Schoenaerts, Ciaran Hinds, Mary Louise Parker, Joely Richardson.

In the past, there have always been sequences in spy stories with the ways "that we can make you talk". There are some very violent ones in this film and one that will make even the hardened reviewer shudder, a torture method of removing skin, layer by layer, with a couple of close-ups.

Naturally, in this world of overt operations covert operations, double dealings and betrayal, the ending is not quite as anticipated.

The film was directed by Francis Lawrence who directed Jennifer Lawrence in several of the Hunger Games films.

For those in need of a regular dose of spy thrillers, this might be the one for the time being.

REVIEWS APRIL 2018

12 STRONG
1945
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BOMBSHELL
DEATH OF STALIN, The
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PETER RABBIT
READY PLAYER ONE

SHERLOCK GNOMES
THAT'S NOT MY DOG
TOMB RAIDER
UNSANE
WINCHESTER
WRINKLE IN TIME, A

12 STRONG

US, 2018, 130 minutes, Colour.

Chris Hemsworth, Michael Shannon, Michael Peña, Navid Negahban, Trevante Rhodes, Geoff Stults
Thad Luckinbill, Austin Stowell, Rob Riggle, William Fichtner, Elsa Pataki.

Directed by Nikolai Fuglsig.

12 Strong is based on a true story. It portrays a mission in Afghanistan after 9/11, a secret mission which was not revealed until almost a decade later. There are photos of those involved in the mission during the final credits.

This is one of those stories of American heroism. Patriotism, obviously, is one of the key themes. This is the United States, America has been attacked, America must act. In fact, the film opens with a resume of the terrorist attacks on the United States in the 1990s, various attacks on the World Trade Centre in 1993, the attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in the late 1990s, the role of Al Qaeda, the shock of 9/11 – with the images repeated at the beginning of the film to the surprise and dismay of people watching everything on television. And then we realise that this film was made 16 years after the event.

One of those watching the television, at home with his family, is Captain Mitch Nelson. We can be confident in him because he is played by Chris Hemsworth (and, in a nice touch, his wife is played by his real-wife wife, Elsa Pataky). He is a desk man, a trainer, who wants to become involved in some action after the destruction. The authorities are not so enthusiastic but one of his friends, played by Michael Shannon, is able to influence them and a Special Forces unit is set up.

They are to go to Afghanistan, make a secret journey through the mountains, meet with the Northern Alliance, make friends with some of the warlords in order to undermine and attack the Taliban.

The action we see might seem far-fetched, an incursion into Afghanistan, into fearsome terrains, encounters with hostile tribes, clashes with the Taliban, an expert estimating that such a mission would last two years. The 12 strong team accomplishes it in under 30 days. The men also survive.

There have been quite a number of films about American presence in Afghanistan in the years after 9/11, some with a touch of satire, Rock the Kasbah, Whiskey Tango Foxtrot, others more serious action films like Lone Survivor.

The screenplay sets up a conflict between the sympathetic warlord who does not approve of the American tactics and withdraws his support for a time and the very sinister-looking Taliban chief. Ultimately, there will be a confrontation between these two.

The film does not underestimate the difficulties of the mission, language, supplies, the mountain paths, the armed Taliban, the difficulties of dealing with the warlord ally. However, the Americans

can summon reinforcements for bombarding the enemy. There are injuries, there are some heroics.

This film is in the tradition of those World War II films, Vietnam films, where a unit in war is the focus of action, character development and interaction, achievement with some heroism.

1945

Hungary, 2017, 91 minutes, Black and white.

Peter Rudolf, Bence Tasnadi, Tamas Szabo Kimmel, Dora Sztarenki, Agi Szirtes, Jozsef Szarvas.

Directed by Ferenc Torok.

1945 is too grandiose a title for this film. It actually covers only one day in the life of a Hungarian village, August 12, 1945, the surrender of the Nazis now three months old, the war still waging in Asia, the dropping of the atomic bombs.

At the beginning of the film, two Jewish men arrive by train at the village, bringing some boxes which are identified as dry goods and perfumes but actually contain various artefacts which are to be buried in the cemetery in memory of the Jews who were rounded up, taken to concentration camps and killed.

This is very disturbing for many of the people in the town because they had denounced the Jews, gained documents which gave them the rights to the houses and the shops and are occupying them and are fearful of having to return them.

There is a wedding in the town that day. It is between the son of the Town Clerk and a young woman who was previously fiancée of one of the locals who went to fight in the war. The Town Clerk was responsible for a lot of the deals and is apprehensive with the return of the Jewish men. He has given the drugstore to his son who is to be married.

As the day progresses, the young fiancée has a relationship with his former friend, now has a new girlfriend and wants to bypass the wedding. But the young son, appreciating what is happening, and critical of his father's behaviour, decides to leave, to go to Budapest or to the United States.

A central character is the man who was persuaded to participate in the fraud, who is now a drinker, goes to confession to a rather unsympathetic priest who seems to be endorsing the stances the Town Clerk, the film indicating Catholic Church support of the anti-Semitism.

From the Jewish perspective, the two men go through the burial process, a challenge at the gate of the cemetery by the Town Clerk but say they have come in peace and shake hands with him. To the relief of the townspeople, they leave and go to the train along with the Town Clerk's son.

As suggested, something of an examination of conscience for the Hungarian people – and a criticism at the time of the film's release because of the Hungarian hostility to admitting asylum seekers from Syria.

ALL FOR ONE

Australia, 2017, 100 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Marcus Cobbledick, Dan Jones.

For cycling fans, this is a must-see documentary. For Australian cycling fans it is a must-must-see documentary. And, even for those who know practically nothing about cycling, there is an optimism and humanity underlying this story.

The fans will know Australian involvement in the main cycling events throughout the world – and the limited presence prior to the first decade of the 21st-century. However, a number of entrepreneurs who loved cycling, took the initiative, found the finance, to set up an Australian team, Greenedge Orica. And this is the story.

While the film has its quota of talking heads and commentary, there is a great deal of storytelling, enthusiastic promotion, and a focus on individual characters and their achievements.

The early part of the film shows the initial scouting for talent, training regimes, camps away from home, the varieties of expertise both physical and psychological. There is also a general bonding amongst the members of the team, quite a large group from whom star riders will be selected, others will be support and backup.

There is also mention of the main cycling events in Europe, starting with the Tour de France, the Spanish Tour, Italian rides focusing on Milan, and the Paris- Roubaix competition. There are many sequences throughout the film of all these events. There is the exhilaration of those in the lead. There is the crowding of riders at the start and their beginning to thin out. There is the endurance of the different terrains that have to be undergone. There are the technical difficulties. And, the film does not shy from the frightening crashes and the tumbling of so many riders onto the road.

The film's screenplay also uses the chronology, with dates on the screen, from 2012 onwards, indicating the developments, some of the successes, a number of the disappointments, the camaraderie amongst the team.

Several individuals are singled out for consideration. The first is Simon Gerrans who had established himself as a rider and as a personality, especially with the Tour de France. He had great success, supported by wife and family. There is also the moving sequence where he could have continued wearing the leader's colours but gave them to him his co-rider, Daryl Impey.

There is a focus on the two individuals. There is Matthew Heymann, older, successful but not as he would wish. There are also his injuries. The latter part of the film, that shows his almost super-human effort to overcome injuries and to compete in the Paris- Roubaix. The film shows various cyclists and managers listening to the commentary ultimately surprised and overjoyed with Heymann's final success.

There is also the story of Esteban Chavez, a young cyclist from Colombia. He had suffered significant injuries which might have put him out of professional cycling for a long time, especially without the backup and finance of an organised team. There are several scenes of him at home and scenes of his parents, grateful to Orica for giving opportunities for their son.

He is a lively character on screen, youthful, learning English (and Australian expletives), glad to be part of the unit, training, singled out by the coach (who is very direct, abrupt, taking no prisoners) and finally being encouraged to ride. The film shows his successful ride, especially an extraordinary

uphill sector and his overcoming his previous difficulties and winning.

Obviously, the story is still in progress – but the film offers an opportunity for a celebration of what could be achieved and what has been achieved.

BLOCKERS

US, 2018, 102 minutes, Colour.

Leslie Mann, John Cena, Ike Barinholtz, Ramona Young, Kathryn Newton, Gary Cole, Gina Gershon, Geraldine Viswanathan, Miles Robbins, Graham Phillips, Gideon Adlon.

Directed by Kay Cannon.

Another of the increasingly popular raucous American comedies from recent years – especially when they have ‘bad’ or ‘dirty’ in the title or mention Seth Rogen (who is one of the producers here).

This is one of those films where one needs to check one’s sensibilities and sensitivities at the door.

As regards sensibilities – whether one responds well to themes about American teenagers, their difficulties with their parents, their parents even greater difficulties with them, especially concerning sexual relationships and sexual activities.

As regards sensitivities – this always asks the question how are in the themes treated? And then adjectives like rude, vulgar, crass, raucous turn up in connection with the humour. And the treatment of the teens and their behaviour and language. (And, some commentators remark on toilet humour – though this one seems to have more of predilection for extensive vomit and for butt-chugging.

This is a story about three teenage girls, the 24 hours of preparation for the prom night, the prom dance itself and its aftermath, decisions made at the end of high school. It focuses on the girls’ expectations from the prom – certainly not the kind of prim and formal prom of the past! But they spend time discussing sexual relationships, Julie (Kathryn Newton) the central character determined that she will have her first sex experience, which has to be perfect, with her boyfriend, Austin. This involves the perfect hotel room, rose petals, music and quiet... Her best friend Kayla (Geraldine Viswanathan) is a sporting type, plainspoken and ready for random sexual activity. The other friend, Sam (Gideon Adlon) is a closeted lesbian with an eye on one of her fellow students.

That is the story for the teenage audience for the film. It is rather different for the adult audience – depending on their memories of what they were like at the equivalent teenage time.

Julie’s mother, a single mother (Leslie Mann) is hyper-preoccupied with her daughter’s well-being and intentions. Kayla’s father (John Cena) is a big, tough, traditional type. Sam’s father (Ike Barinholtz) gives the impression of being a somewhat sleazy type, but does have his better moments.

So, the action is intercut between the activities of the girls and the various adventures – and mishaps – that the parents go through with their concern, arguments about whether to intervene or not, how permissive they should be, their attitude towards love?

All in all, a somewhat raucous night with a question about the ultimate decisions of the three girls (including Julie’s mother finding herself under the bed in the chosen room in the hotel anxious about

whether she should stay or not).

This reviewer has been using for many years a phrase “The Judd Apatow Syndrome”. It refers to this kind of American comedy, seemingly raucously permissive at first but then moving to a more moralising tone. And Julie’s mother here is played by Leslie Mann who happens to be married to Judd Apatow. There is some moralising at the end but not all audiences will agree with the conclusions – and some have remarked that this is rather old-fashioned in its presumption that the girls have to be protected at all costs while the males can do what they like.

And so the question is raised, is this typical of contemporary American society? Of other cultures and societies around the world?

BOMBSHELL

US, 2017, 89 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Alexandra Dean.

Hedy Lamarr was a successful actress of the 1930s and 1940s. The PR and media title, Bombshell, was used in promoting her and her films. Film buffs will welcome this biography. Other audiences might be wondering why the life of this actress has been resurrected in the 21st-century.

The principal reason for later interest in Hedy Lamarr has nothing to do with the movies.

The film shows that, as a little girl, Hedwig Kiesler of Vienna had a scientific frame of mind, even taking apart a music box at the age of five and putting it together again. She was interested in science and maths. Science, investigation and speculation, were hobbies for her. This continued after she fled her native Austria in 1937, going to England and then to Hollywood. Howard Hughes even built a space for her that she could use as something of a laboratory.

With a musician friend, in 1942, she speculated on what was called “frequency-hopping”. (Probably better at this stage to Google this rather than including explanations in a film review!) She sent the information to the American government who examined it but decided not to use her theories. She was not aware of patent legislation (patents lapsing after five years of nonapplication) and she lost the rights to the invention. The film is very strong on what she contributed, how she was treated, a later science apology during the Vietnam war and, articles about her theories written during the 1980s and 1990s and finally an award. The film is at pains to point out that her theory was used for all kinds of ventures including Wi-Fi, GPS, Blu-ray...

Hedy Lamarr had appeared in the film Ecstasy in 1933 and appeared nude, incurring adverse comment from Pope Pius XI as well as Hitler. She tried for some film work in Austria but then was interviewed by Louis B. Mayer, rejecting his salary, trying again and succeeding – and making 19 films in Hollywood between 1938 and 1948 before her main success in Cecil B DeMille’s 1949 Samson and Delilah.

Hedy Lamarr said that glamour was simply standing still and looking stupid. But, she was not stupid although she had many failed marriages, awkward relationships with her children, eventually antipathy from the media, plastic surgery with her scientific advice on it, although there is a scene from the Merv Griffin Show in 1969 where she is asked about herself and she asks a question of her fellow guest – who turns out to be Woody Allen!

Ultimately, she lived a lonely, somewhat reclusive life – although there is an amusing moment when her son is accepting her award in 1997 and his phone goes off in the middle of his speech, his mother ringing to ask how it went and his explaining that he was in the middle of it!

A belated tribute to Hedy Lamarr and her scientific interests – and an opportunity for film buffs to consider her again and see clips from some of her films. She was not the greatest actresses – more a beautiful screen presence.

THE DEATH OF STALIN

UK, 2017, 109 minutes, Colour.

Steve Buscemi, Simon Russell Beale, Jeffrey Tambor, Michael Palin, Jason Isaacs, Rupert Friend, Andrea Reisborough, Olga Kurylenko, Paddy Considine, Justin Edwards, Adrian McLoughlin, Paul Whitehouse, Paul Chahidi, Diana Quick, Sylvie Le Touzel.

Directed by Armando Iannucci.

Cinema and television stories of the absurd, with an anchor in real life, could be a description of the work of writer-director Armando Iannucci. His satirical television series on British politics, and political minders, *The Thick of It* and the cinema version, *In the Loop*, as well as his originating the American series *Veep*, have had the ability to make people laugh and cringe at the same time.

It is something of the same here with his take on Soviet Russia, Stalin and his tyranny, the Soviet politburo, a 1953 setting, Stalin's final days and his death.

Iannucci always has a serious underlining tone to his satire. He seems to work on the principle that one way of dealing with harsh realities is to let off steam through jokes.

With Stalin, although the memories of his decades of rule of the Soviet Union are more than 60 years in the past, this film is a tale of ruthlessness as embodied in his politburo. It is all patently absurd – or is it?

Some audiences have found many of the sequences laugh-out-loud. Others have found a great deal of amusement, interior chuckles more than guffaws, and a checking on how this all relates to memories of the historical episodes and characters.

The tone is set with an orchestral concert as the opening sequence, Paddy Considine as the producer discovering, to his horror when Stalin rings asking for recording of the concert, that none was made! What to do given the military, the KGB, Stalin's own reputation? The producer brings many of the audience back into the concert hall, rounds up people from the street to fill the seats, to record high applause, to bribe the pianist Maria (Olga Kurylenko) to repeat her performance, cope with the collapse of the conductor and do a raid on an apartment to bring and alternate conductor to do the work in his dressing gown and pyjamas.

And Stalin gets the record, plays it, has a stroke, collapses and dies.

Andy McLoughlin does a good impersonation of Stalin – though his accent! And this is the case with all the characters in the film, the actors perform with their own natural accents, from American, to broken English, too harsh Yorkshire... Iannucci has said that Stalin's advisers came from all over the Soviet Union.

Then the film progresses in chapters, coping with the death, the period of mourning, the funeral, and the regulations quoted about all these events especially who is to take over power. There are several contenders. The actual deputy is the rather weak Malenkov, a good performance from Jeffrey Tambor. Then there is Molotov, of cocktail fame so to speak, played as an extreme loyalist to Stalin and the Soviet, even denouncing his wife for torture, and is played by Michael Palin. Extremely prominent, but we know what will eventually happen to him, is Nikita Krushchev played, with his American accent, by Steve Buscemi.

However, as older audiences with memories of Stalinist days and the KGB will expect, there is a central focus on the head of the KGB, Beria. He is played with intensity by Simon Russell Beale, forever making lists of people to be arrested and tortured, executed, manipulating the members of the politburo, especially Malenkov, clashing tactics and ideas with Krushchev. He also has a rather unsavoury private life.

Then there is Stalin's alcoholic and rather mad son, Vassily, played by Rupert Friend. And his rather hard daughter, Svetlana, played by Andrea Reisborough.

There are meetings, chaired by Malenkov, controlled by Beria, reluctantly agreed to by Krushchev for unanimity, the autopsy (graphic with a saw in Stalin's cranium), his lying in state, the ceremonial of the funeral, the forbidding of crowds travel by train, and guns fired at them...

And finally, the manipulation of power, the emergence of Krushchev, the arrival of the military in the presence of General Zhukov (Jason Isaacs), the type that takes no prisoners who shoots first and then makes offhand comments.

While this is all set in the past and is an ironic look at tyranny, bureaucratic struggles, ruthlessness and struggles for power, it is interesting to think about subsequent deaths and succession issues, or, perhaps, of Russia in the present, or even the 2017-2018 history of the American President and the turnover of advisers in the White House.

DEATH WISH

US, 2018, 107 minutes, Colour.

Bruce Willis, Vincent D' Onofrio, Elizabeth Shue, Camilla Marrone, Dean Norris, Beau Knapp, Kimberly Elise, Len Cariou, Wendy Crewson.

Directed by Eli Roth.

An urban vigilante story.

In fact, the original novel, Death Wish, by Brian Garfield was published in 1972. That was the year after the release of Dirty Harry, the film which made such an impact around the world about vigilante action. And the series was very popular from the 1970s into the 1980s. The film version of Death Wish appeared in 1974, starring Charles Bronson, very popular and producing three sequels into the 1980s.

There was always a lot of discussion about vigilante films. On the one hand, dreadful crimes committed against innocent victims. On the other hand, it is the rule of law and justice for retribution. And the point is always made that, when justice and law do not fulfil expectations, the vigilantes feel the right to take retribution into their own hands.

And there is further discussion about the effect of vigilante action in the mind and emotions, as well as moral judgement, of the vigilantes. Does violent retribution against injustice achieve the cathartic effect that might be hoped for? Or is the vigilante burdened by the consequences of violence in their own character?

And there is even further discussion about the effect of the vigilantes in the minds of the public. Do they cheer the person who is able to avenge injustice, ridding the world of evil perpetrators? In this film, the vigilante is praised as the Grim Reaper. And what of copycat vigilantes who can cause their own mayhem?

In fact, all of these questions are raised in the screenplay of this version of Death Wish, based on Brian Garfield's novel, written by writer-director, Joe Carnahan (Smokin' Aces, The A-Team).

One immediate difference is that Paul Kersey, the Charles Bronson character of 1974 was an architect, and is now played by Bruce Willis as a surgeon, someone whose life is committed to healing. This is a very good role for Bruce Willis who appears these days, like Nicholas Cage, in a dime a dozen thrillers each year. His sympathetic wife is Elizabeth Shue. His daughter, about to go to college and full of enthusiasm, is played by Camilla Marrone.

One of the differences for Death Wish 1974 and Death Wish 2018 is the atmosphere of social media and communication technology. This time the robbers are able to photograph the address and details of their targets when they do valet servicing of cars. When the vigilantes go into action, bystanders are able to film everything on their phones. This all then goes on to the Internet instantly, seen by millions, taken up by the traditional media, print, radio and television.

Because the actors are strong, the initial tragedy seems even more devastating. Willis, portraying a good man, begins to burn interiorly, the police (portrayed sympathetically) are unable to get leads. The surgeon, time off from work, begins to track down various leads, making discoveries, going to the gun shops (again, another contemporary issue of US gun ownership and gun usage, availability of guns...).

While the initial burglary and killing is ugly, some of the sequences in the revenge are more than ugly and violent. Perhaps this is the director, Eli Roth, who began with horror films, including the Hostel series.

The other central character in the film is Paul Kersey's brother, Frank, played by Vincent D' Onofrio, whom the police suspect and who then tries to reason with and support his brother.

And the final moral dilemma. What do authorities do when they discover the truth – arrest the perpetrator or allow for the understandable grief and let the perpetrator go free, to continue his work of healing?

THE DIVINE ORDER

Switzerland, 2017, 97 minutes, Colour.

Marie Leuenberger, Maximilian Simonischek, Sybille Brunner.

Directed by Petra Volpe.

A significant time in Switzerland, the issue of votes for women, February 1971.

Probably this piece of information will come as a surprise to most audiences. After all, New Zealand

had votes for women in the late 19th century. The suffragettes of the early part of the 20th century in the UK would have been very surprised to learn that Swiss women would not get the vote until over half a century later. And, the film adds at the end, the last Canton in Switzerland to approve votes for women did this in 1990.

To get us in a frame of mind, the film opens with the feminist movement, especially in the United States, in the 1960s and into the 1970s, glimpses of Gloria Steiner and other feminists, demonstrations and protests.

This is the story of Nora, a housewife in a remote German-speaking village where there was little awareness of feminism. But, of course, with Nora, this was to change.

The screenplay of the film cannot be described as particularly subtle. The patriarchal aspects of Swiss society are very obviously presented and, in case we don't notice, we are continually nudged to notice. While there is a touch of parody in the presentation of the patriarchal life in the village, the role of men, the acknowledgement of men as superior, The Divine Order, there is also an acknowledgement that this is and has been reality.

The women are expected to stay at home in this village, looking after the children, doing the cooking, the cleaning (and, as Nora hovers the living room and her cantankerous father-in-law sits reading the paper, raising his feet so that she can hover under them without any acknowledgement of her besides this) and continually wash socks. She has two sons – who will later assert that they are boys and therefore...

Her husband works in a factory and is summoned to a meeting by an unmarried and rather dominating woman who, surprisingly, promotes him, and then gives a speech against the impending vote about women's rights and politics. The men all agree. Later she turns up at a meeting of the women's club, asking for donations for the cause. By this time, Nora has been made aware of the campaign for women's suffrage and refuses to donate.

While this might cause and shock horror, Nora has read some pamphlets, appreciates how she is put upon by the men in the family, has a compassion for her sister-in-law who is even more put upon, and her sister-in-law's daughter who wants to get out of the village, is underage, is nicknamed the village bike and who is put into an institution and then, after escaping, into prison.

In collaboration with Vroni, an older woman in the village who was in favour of the suffrage in the 1959 campaign, who has lost the restaurant she worked in for 40 years, and with Graziella, the new owner, an Italian, they plan to have a meeting about women's rights. Even more shock horror from the men. This is compounded when the three women decide to visit Zürich to look at a protest march, get caught up in it and are photographed with a banner.

The meeting is something of a fiasco, stacked with men, the prim unmarried woman dominating the conversation and asking for a show of hands – almost unanimously against the vote for women. However, some of the women secretly agree and the movement begins to grow, leading to a Lysistrata moment (the women going on strike and leaving their husbands at home to do everything).

Coupled with this is a story about the women of the village, their ignorance about sexuality and their bodies, movements of bodily and sexual awareness (led by a Swedish expert).

On the day of the vote, the women stand outside watching while a procession of men pass through

and place their ballots. The vote for women is carried.

The film was released in 2017, the year of the Harvey Weinstein revelations, the Me Too# movement and other vigorous women's movements – which gives even more of a resonance to this heavily-messaged film.

HUMAN FLOW

UK, China, 2017, 140 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Ai Wei Wei.

Aie Wei Wei is a notable Chinese artist with exhibitions all around the world. He is also had his difficulties with the Chinese authorities and has left China, now a citizen of the world. He has had films made about his art. He is also directed a film himself. He returns now to direction, not for a film about art, but for about human rights, refugees and suffering.

He and his crew visited a number of countries around the world in 2015, 2016, photographing the refugees from a wide range of countries, photographing the groups, photographing individuals. At times the artist himself is seen in various situations, sharing the experience, interviewing some of the refugees. This personalises his concern. But the appeal is made to consciences and consciousness of the audience, to empathise with the refugees, what the conditions were at home, what they have escaped from, the hardships of their journey. And, as always, there are the hardships in dealing with the authorities, government and police border patrols from the country's where they are seeking some kind of refuge. And then there are, so often, the fences.

The film was made in European countries, Kenya, Mexico and the United States, me and Mark in Bangladesh. (There is nothing about refugees in Australia or Manus Island or Nauru – Australian audiences can draw their own conclusions.)

The photography is often very striking, the audience being taken to such varieties of countries, being asked to imagine the lives of the refugees, their past, their escapes, the hardships of the journey is, hard hearts against them, sympathetic hearts for them.

The artist includes some quotations from problems as well as a series of running headlines at the bottom of the screen reminding people of dates and places, UN resolutions, government stances against the refugees.

The following is a list of the countries where the film was made: The range of countries visited, the situations, the refugees themselves, the hardships, the repercussions, welcoming countries, hostile countries?

- Iraq, the background of the American-led invasion of 2003, later developments. ISIS, the taking of Mosul, the siege, the destruction of the streets and houses, the people, the re-taking of Mosul. Iraq and the thousands of refugees from Syria, the camps.
- Bangladesh, the Rohingya, the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. The leader and his explanations and regrets.
- Lesbos, the landing of the refugees from Syria, the numbers, their being welcomed, the camps, their journey through northern Greece, at the Macedonian border, the railway. The further walls from various countries of the Balkans? And Hungary?
- Refugees in Germany, the transformation of Tempelhof airport into accommodation, the interiors, safety, but the boredom for the children and the adults.

- Paris, the temporary shelters. The Jungle in Calais, the numbers of people, British Border Protection, jumping trucks and their being found out.
- The transition to Kenya, the enormous camp, the refugees from surrounding countries.
- Pakistan, taking of refugees from Afghanistan, for many decades. Returning the Afghan Nationals to their home country. The huge transport trucks. Their being accepted – not able to return to their home towns and villages. Living in the cities.
- Lebanon, the Palestinian refugees, the numbers - the Druze leader and his commentary.
- Jordan, the taking of the vast numbers of refugees from Syria, the Princess and her interview. The camps, and the number of refugees in proportion to the whole population.
- The Mediterranean, the Africans coming by boat, their treatment in Libya, the Italian rescue and landing in Italy.

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

US, 2018, 110 minutes, Colour.

J. Michael Finley, Dennis Quaid, Brody Rose, Trace Adkins, Taegen Burns, Madeleine Carroll, Nicole Du Port, Tanya Clarke.

Directed by Andrew Erwin, Jon Erwin.

In the United States, I Can Only Imagine went immediately into the box office Top 10 and, in its second week, was number three, after Pacific Rim and Black Panther. The audience which responded are the numerous Christian audiences, especially in the more evangelical communities and congregations.

To see the film in Australia, one has to search out cinemas in the so-called Bible areas of our cities.

This is a faith-based film, based on the story of the song, triple platinum in the US, the most popular religious song of recent decades, I Can Only Imagine. At the opening of the film, the composer of lyrics and music, Bart Mallard, is being interviewed by the popular singer, Amy Grant. He tells her that it took only 10 minutes to write the lyrics and to compose the music. Her response is that he did not create it so rapidly but the song is the result of a lifetime.

And so it is.

The film goes back to Bart has a 10-year-old, in 1985. He comes from Texas, lives with his mother and father, his father a violent and sometimes brutal man, his mother a victim of this brutality. Bart develops a hatred for his father, especially when his mother walks out on her family after taking Bart to a Baptist camp where he meets friends, is encouraged to journal, has religious experiences – and he writes “the best week of my life”.

Bart’s father is played by Dennis Quaid, giving a strength of performance to the film. The young Bart is played by Brody Rose. The older Bart is played by J. Michael Stickley in his first film. As we hear him sing, especially when he is persuaded by a teacher, very much against his intentions, to play Curly in Oklahoma and he sings ‘Oh, what a beautiful morning’, we hear a very fine singing voice. (And learn that Michael Stickley has appeared in many Broadway productions.)

When Bart escapes from his father and from the town, he works as a technician which leads him to contact with an aspiring band who are lamenting that they have no singer. And, when Bart joins them as the singer, they begin to have great success, travelling around Texas, drawing youth audiences, responding to the ‘secular’ style of the performance but also to the tone of religious

lyrics.

As is often the case in these stories about music, the connection is with Nashville, to an agent (Tracy Adkins rough and ponytailed) who is taken by the performance and organises concerts – but record company representatives feel that Bart is not good enough and the suggestion is that he go deeply into himself and discover what emerges.

This requires him to go back home, leave the band for a time, meet up with his father again and, disbelieving, finds that his father has discovered God. The challenge is for him to forgive his father – something which he had written in his camp journal when he was little. And, so a transformation begins, in Bart, in his father. And, always in the background is the young girl that he always cared for, Shannon (Madeleine Carroll) who goes to college rather than joining him on the road.

And, forced back into himself, and religiously inspired, Bart writes his significant song. The agents are impressed, they contact Amy Grant who is prepared to launch the song but, with Bart in the audience, she invites him up to sing – and, it would seem, he has never looked back after the success of the song and testimonies to its inspiration in people's lives, marrying Shannon, reunited with his mother, rejoining his band, Mercy Me, 21 hits – and his performing at a White House Breakfast in 2017.

Critics are wary of the word “inspirational” in descriptions of films because they think/fear that this actually means “manipulative”. But there are many audiences who respond to the inspirational, who want to be moved, and find Bart Mallard's story does this for them quite powerfully. Because the American evangelical tradition is quite extrovert, more introverted individuals and more introverted religious communities might find it a bit much even while they admire what it is doing.

IN THE FADE

Germany, 2017, 106 minutes, Colour.

Diane Kruger, Denis Moschitto, Numan Acar, Samir Muriel Chancrin, Johannes Krisch, Ulrich Tukur, Ulrich Brandhoff, Hanna Hilsdorf.

Directed by Fatih Akin.

This is very much a film of contemporary times in Europe. It deals with issues of refugees and migrants from middle Eastern countries. It deals with hate crimes from groups of neo-Nazi sympathisers.

The writer-director himself, Fatih Akin, was born in Germany but has a Turkish background. This is very important for his films for the last 15 years, especially his award-winning (including Ecumenical Award in Cannes 2007), *The Edge of Heaven*.

The film opens in a prison, a tall, long-haired, prisoner is being cheered by all the men standing outside their cells. He is being freed, obviously having become a celebrity inside. On leaving, he is met by young woman and the next scene is of their being married. Already, the audience is being challenged in their attitudes towards the man, his appearance and behaviour, the marriage.

But, the film goes forward six years and everything is respectable. Nuri runs a business, he and his wife, Katia, have a small son. The boy is a perky young fellow, sparring with his mother, enjoying the company of his father. Katia leaves her boy with her husband as she goes with a friend for an afternoon at the sauna, returning to pick them up only to find that a bomb has exploded outside the

office and husband and son are dead.

The film is divided into three sections. The first is called The Family, obvious enough. This is a couple who has made good, bringing up their son well, only for devastation. Katia's mother, a rather unsympathetically aggressive woman, has been critical of her daughter's marriage. Katia later reveals to the police that the two met when she bought marijuana from a dealer when she was at college. Nuri's parents, upset, intend to return to Turkey and want to take their son's body. Katia refuses.

The next section is called Justice. Most of the takes place in the courtroom. Katia had been able to give testimony about a young woman with a bicycle whom she encountered just after she left her son at the office. The young woman and her husband are arrested, rabid racists and Neo-Nazis². Katia is defended by a good friend who expects the obvious justice to be done. On the other hand, there is a very skilful defence lawyer, visualised as rather sinister and sounding sinister in his cross-examinations as well as his defence of the accused.

There are various legal complications in the hearings. Katia at one moment loses it and attacks the accused. When the verdict comes in, it is unexpected.

The third section of the film is called The Sea. One of the witnesses called to support the accused couple is a Greek who lies about his not being in Germany at the time of the attack. Katia has tracked him down, goes to visit his house by the sea in Greece, discovers that the two accused have come by caravan and are enjoying a holiday.

So, here comes the moral dilemma. Justice has not been done or seen to be done. Does Katia have the right to execute justice on the couple? Does she let hatred and anger consume her and ruin her life? In this last part of the film, the audience is put on the spot, morally. Are the couple so loathsome that they deserved to die? Has Katia the right to execute justice? (Even her going to a store and buying the ingredients for a nail bomb similar to what the couple used for their sabotage?)

The questions are asked – but answered, ultimately, in a way that is comprehensible but has not necessarily been anticipated.

The German Academy award nominee for 2017, with Diane Kruger winning the Best Actress award at Cannes 2017.

ISLE OF DOGS

US, 2018, 101 minutes, Colour.

Bryan Cranston, Koyu Rankin, Edward Norton, Liev Schreiber, Greta Gerwig, Bill Murray, Jeff Goldblum, Bob Balaban, Scarlett Johansson, Courtney B. Vance, Konichi Nomura, Tilda Swinton, F. Murray Abraham, Frances Mc Dormand, Fisher Stevens, Harvey Keitel, Ken Watanabe, Yoko Ono. Directed by Wes Anderson.

An animated allegory written and directed by Wes Anderson, whose 20 year career has provided an enormous range of genre films, serious undertones, humorous overtones, all kinds of comedy and parody. He also ventured into animation with The Fantastic Mr Fox. Audiences will have their different favourite Wes Anderson films This reviewer remembering happily the Royal Tennenbaums

and, especially, The Grand Budapest Hotel.

The animation in this film looks a bit rough and ready, all to the film's advantage. There is no smooth drawing for characters most of whom are dogs. The movements of the characters are not smooth either, but humorously jerky and angular. There is a great deal of attention given to the backgrounds, especially the wastelands of the actual island where the dogs are exiled. This is not a pretty-pretty location film. Which means that just visually, there is a great deal of edge.

And the voice cast! It is led by Bryan Cranston and Koyu Rankin. Many of the cast have appeared in other Wes Anderson films and are welcome back, some having much more to say than others – and, some silent!

The film has a Japanese setting – which some would-be purists object to, Americans capitalising on Japanese characters and themes. But, this seems to be too much objection. One of the writers, who voices the Mayor in the film, is Japanese. And the central character, a young lad of 12, is reminiscent of and probably a tribute to the many animated films from Studio Ghibli and other studios.

The dialogue is certainly worth listening to, full of humour, full of spoof, full of parody – but, with quite an underlying seriousness.

The film goes back into earlier centuries with history of the status of dogs in Japanese households. It leads to a revolution where the population turn against their dogs, preferring cats, and the powers that be of a leading family decree the exiling of all dogs to an island off the coast. The population seeming to agree complacently and all the dogs are rather brutally rounded up and even brutally deposited on the island where they have to survive, make do, scrounge, break friendships, fight amongst each other.

The life of the dogs on the island is often very amusing, often very challenging. The key event is the arrival of the adopted son of the Mayor taking a plane and crash landing on the island to find his pet dog. So, the film becomes something of a quest, the outlaw dog, voiced by Bryan Cranston, becoming a friend and an ally. There is also a show dog, voiced by Scarlett Johansson, who has an interesting history and contributes to the quest.

Most of the reviewers spent their time talking about the animation, the cast, the humour, Wes Anderson's perspective. But, when one comes to think about it, the film serves as a contemporary social allegory, getting rid of the dogs seems to be an allegory of any ethnic cleansing. Those who are ethnically cleansed have to move into exile as do the dogs on their island. The critique is also of the wealthy, their corrupt use of wealth and power, manipulation of the public.

This means that Isle of Dogs works on two levels, that of popular entertainment – but, very seriously, an allegory of contemporary social injustices.

KANGAROO: A LOVE-HATE STORY

Australia, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Kate Mc Intyre Clere, Michael Mc Intyre.

For audiences who want to see close-ups of kangaroos, front on, profiles, individuals hopping, groups hopping, mothers with Joeys in their pouch, this film offers many opportunities.

But, a warning, this is a very strong documentary about kangaroos and their treatment in Australia, especially the hunting down of kangaroos, their being seen as “pests and plague” and their being culled, shot, not always immediately killed, and some brutal bashings.

As can be seen by the title, this is not only a partisan documentary about the kangaroo situation in Australia but it is quite militant. The directors have spent a great deal of time travelling around Australia, photographing the kangaroos, getting photos of night culls, and interviewing a great number of people.

There is great deal of reflection on the symbolism of the kangaroo and the new and the ironic comments that these two symbols, on our coins, notes, symbolically above the new Parliament house, have a history of being eliminated. Some of the Americans interviewed the film cannot understand this, offering the opinion that kangaroos a great tourist draw. And, probably for many city Australians this is true as well.

The film also traces the history of the use of kangaroo as meat, for pet food in past decades, then to using restaurants, the issues are exporting kangaroo meat and some of the bans that have occurred, for instance in Russia and in California (and subsequent Australian lobbying in both territories). It also traces the history of the use of kangaroo hides and kangaroo leather, with some testimony by David Beckham about football boots and English and other teams choose to the use of this leather in their countries.

So, there are a lot of visuals which are particularly disturbing – especially taken by a couple in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales where they had set up a free zone farm but are bordered by farmers who eliminate the kangaroos. And some of this testimony film has been presented to governments, especially New South Wales – with regretful comments that enquiries have been closed down. Significant in the film is the Upper House politician, Mark Pearson, staunch supporter of animal rights.

The talking heads in the film are not completely partisan. There are a number of farmers who give their views, indicate the destruction of grazing country by the kangaroos, seeing them as a pest to be eliminated in the area. There are also parliamentarians who speak about farmers rights as well and is emphasising the importance for kangaroo meat and trade connections.

The directors have lined up a significant group of talking heads to alert the audience about the role of kangaroos, the value of the statistics/or not about their being pest and plague, on conservation, preservation. They include Tim Flannery, strong spokesman on the environment. There is also Peter Singer noted for his comments on animal welfare. There is Terry Irwin speaking about zoos. There is a character from outside Alice Springs who calls himself Kangaroo Dundee who does tourist tours for kangaroo-seekers. Other speakers include politicians as well as tax expert, Kevin Henry.

So, the love-hate of the title is well to the fore in the film.

Documentaries like this, while they promote a cause, can foster conversations, changes of mind and attitude, appeals to the public, possible political changes and economic changes.

Not always easy to sit through, but a significantly provocative documentary, especially for Australian audiences.

THE LAST GOLDFISH

2017, 80 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Su Goldfish.

This is an arresting Australian documentary.

Su Goldfish, has explored her origins, finding a lot of film footage and photos from the past, especially from her photographer father. But his background has been a mystery to her.

She knows that her father came from Germany, a refugee from World War II. He finished in Trinidad where he met his wife after the war, marrying, his daughter being born. He seemed to have prospered, especially with music at the time in the West Indies. However, with moves towards independence, he moved his family to Australia, living there for many years.

Su Goldfish herself led a rather flamboyant life, involved in the arts, in gay and lesbian activities, finding her partner, working in filmmaking.

The film is interesting in her exploration, her discovery that her father was married in Germany, had a family, and taken his wife and son to Trinidad and divorced there. His ex-wife and children moved to Canada. Gradually, Su gets more information, travels to Germany, finds places that correspond to the photos in the collection, discovers identity of family members. She also communicates with the family in Canada, eventually meeting some of them and visiting Canada.

For Su, this is fulfilling, knowing more about her father, filling a sense of belonging with an extended family. At the end, she discovers more family connections, members who have changed their names.

This kind of family exploration is a rich source for documentary filmmakers, exploring the past while throwing light on contemporary situations – something which director Sophia Turkewicz achieved with her documentary about her mother, *Once Her Mother* (2013).

LOVE, SIMON

US, 2018, 110 minutes, Colour.
Nick Robinson, Jennifer Garner, Josh Duhamel, Katherine Langford, Alexandra Shipp, Logan Miller, Keiynan Lonsdale, Jorge Lendeborg Jr, Talitha Eliana Bateman, Tony Hale.
Directed by Greg Belanti.

Simon is a 17-year-old high school student, popular, living at home with his devoted parents and his sister (who is determined to be a chef and does a lot of practising in the kitchen). It seems the picture of an ideal family, American style.

But, very soon, it emerges that Simon is deeply preoccupied, a problem about himself, a problem about his identity. He knows that his orientation is gay. However, it is a secret from everyone and he has not thought realistically about coming out.

Love, Simon is based on a book which has the evocative title, *Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, by Becky Albertalli. It is well written, creates characters effectively, some very seriously, some with a touch of caricature. And it invites the audience to identify with Simon, as a person first of all, then

with his dilemma about revelation or not and its consequences. While his father is genial, he is also prone to wisecracks and the audience anticipates that he may find Simon's coming out difficult to cope with. Simon's mother, however, is a psychologist.

At school, Simon has a very loyal group of friends whom he picks up in his car each morning. There is Leah (Katherine Langford), who is obviously devoted to him. There is Abby (Alexandra Shipp), new to the neighbourhood and to the school. And there are two black friends, Nick and Bram (Jorge Lendeborg Jr, Keiynan Lonsdale, who is an Australian actor), They have classes, do the ordinary things at school, several of them participating in the school production of Cabaret, the MC being played by an annoying school friend, Martin (Logan Miller).

The main comic element in the film, which lightens the seriousness times, is in the personality of the vice principal, Mr Worth (Tony Hale) who is forever in the corridors, commenting on everybody as they pass, especially as he confiscates their phones. He chatters, is friendly with the students – and has to be ready for whatever problems arise.

When word goes around the school that somebody is gay, the reactions are a mixture of acceptance, intolerance, mockery.

The device that the screenplay uses for Simon to act on his struggle is finding an email message from an unidentified student, Blue. Simon impulsively replies, using the code name Jacques. He does get a reply from Blue, then finds himself thoroughly preoccupied at school, in class, at home, at meals, talking with his friends, waiting for messages from Blue. Simon begins to pour out his heart, empathising with Blue, indicating his problems and, impulsively, realising it only after he has pressed "sent" that he has signed his message, Love, Simon.

Blue has his own personal struggles and the screenplay indicates three possible characters who might be Blue.

While the audience is drawn into Simon's story, hopefully understanding or, if not understanding or, even, disapproving, the film explores the repercussions of coming out. What was difficult in past years is still difficult but the community has, generally, more empathetic response.

Because Simon seems so ordinary in his daily life, the coming out is a surprise for most people. And the film shows how they deal with it, especially because Simon gets entangled with his emotions then, with somebody tapping into his emails, there is always the risk of the unwelcome outing.

Whatever one's approach to issues of sexual orientation, this is a film well worth seeing and discussing, a testing out one's moral framework, of one's emotional response, of empathy and understanding.

Love, Simon is an unexpected cinema invitation for thoughtful response to characters and issues.

MARSHALL

US, 2017, 118 minutes, Colour.

Chadwick Boseman, Josh Gad, Kate Hudson, Sterling K. Brown, Dan Stevens, James Cromwell, Keesha Sharp, Roger Guenveur Smith, Derek Baskin, Ahna O' Reilly.

Directed by Reginald Hudlin.

This is quite an impressive film and to be recommended.

Justice Thurgood Marshall may be well-known in the United States but is less known throughout the world. But he and his career are well worth knowing. He was first African-American[?] to be appointed to the American Supreme Court, in 1967, serving until 1991.

The part of his story that is told in this film takes place in the early 1940s, at the time of America's entry into World War II. Thurgood is a lawyer – and has a powerful back story about his studies, acceptance and not at universities, and later suing the university that would not accept him. Strong-minded, he is sought after all over the United States, but especially in the South, to give advice in court cases. He is a member of the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The film introduces him in action and being successful and acclaimed in his legal advice. The other character who is introduced is a Jewish lawyer, insurance lawyer, Sam Friedman. He is an interesting counter-foil to the character of Thurgood Marshall, especially when he is dragged by Marshall into collaborating with him in the defence of a young man who is accused of rape. Friedman has to rely on Marshall's notes.

The screenplay is interesting just in the exploration of the case, the characters involved, the complexities of the action, lies that are told in the motivations behind the lies. It takes place in the comfortable white city of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

There is also the tension of racial prejudice, the prosecutor being an arrogant young white man belonging to social clubs in the town, the judge giving the impression of being impartial but with racist presuppositions.

And the cast is very strong. Chadwick Boseman had already portrayed Jackie Robinson and baseball in 42, James Brown and music, Get It Up. He was about to become to T' Challa, Black Panther. He makes Thurgood Marshall an earnest, highly self-assured legal expert, presumptions of winning cases, not hesitant in using and manipulating people for his legal purposes. Josh Gad provides a strong counterpoint as the Jewish lawyer. Dan Stevens is the arrogant prosecutor. James Cromwell is the judge. Sterling K. Brown is the accused man with Kate Hudson as the allegedly wronged wife.

It is a pity that this film was not more widely seen, contributing to the history of African- Americans and their heritage, the move from slavery and racial prejudice and the consequent struggles, the significance of the and a NAACP and its role in American society and promotion of African- American issues, and the atmosphere of the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement, the influence of Martin Luther King and the appointment of Thurgood Marshall to the Supreme Court.

Audiences will be caught up in the momentum of the court case – and tension moments when Marshall's wife suffers a miscarriage and a compelling sequence where Marshall briefs Sam for his summation (Marshall having to move on to his next case) and Friedman's convincing delivery.

The film is directed by Reginald Hudlin, better known as a director of comedies and television series, some of which starred Eddie Murphy. This is definitely a change of pace for him and well worthwhile.

THE MERCY

UK, 2018, 98 minutes, Colour.

Colin Firth, Rachel Weisz, David Thewlis, Ken Stott, Mark Gattis, Andrew Buchan, Simon Mc Burney.
Directed by James Marsh.

This film is based on a true story, the experience of sailor, Donald Crowhurst, in 1969. For those who know how the story ends, it is an interesting unfolding of the events. For those who do not remember the story, it is something of a suspense film.

The film opens with a speech by Sir Francis Chichester who broke a record of sailing around the world alone. The British Sunday Times then suggests a competition for sailing around the world, non-stop. It is to be a media event.

In the coastal city of Teignmouth, Donald Crowhurst is something of an inventor who also enjoys sailing with his wife and children. We first see him at a show trying to persuade people to buy an invention which would help in establishing locations while at sea. He fails. Crowhurst makes quite an impression on screen as he is played by Colin Firth. Rachel Weisz is his wife.

However, he is quite excited by the Times competition and decides that he will participate. This means making his own boat, catamaran style. It means that he has to raise money, relying very much on a local businessman played by Ken Stott. He also has an agent-friend, David Thewlis, who helps him with the planning, with the finances, with public relations. The voyage will take at least six months.

The first question raised is why would Donald Crowhurst undertake such an adventure. Did he really think he would win? Was there something missing in his life that this voyage would compensate for? As we listen to Crowhurst talking with his wife and his sponsors, we realise that he was at a stage of life where he needed something to prove himself, to himself and to others.

There are many scenes at sea, sailing successfully, becalmed, storms. Not all his equipment works perfectly. And he keeps in radio contact with his wife and family and with those backing him at home.

He experiences a crisis, his sailing progress not as much as he anticipated. And he experiences a crisis in himself, whether he is as good as he thought, whether he can persevere, what would he do if he did not make as much progress as hoped for.

It soon appears that he is not succeeding. His temptation is to alter his log, to create a false impression, to keep going – not necessarily to win, actually realising that had better not, but, at least, complete the course. This is exacerbated after long weeks of sailing because The Times becomes more interested.

The scenes at sea are punctuated by some flashbacks, some scenes of family at Teignmouth, his PR man and assistant doing their best, and the media, somehow rather, getting to hear about him and his becoming something of a headline.

The moral dilemma begins to consume him – and whether there is any mercy or forgiveness for his deception.

A film of endurance, of some heroism, and of some moral ambiguity.

PACIFIC RIM: UPRISING

US, 2018, 111 minutes, Colour.

John Boyega, Scott Eastwood, Cailee Spaeny, Burn Gorman, Charlie Day, Tian Jing, Jin Zhang, Adria Arjona, Rinko Kikuchi.

Directed by Steven S. De Knight.

A reviewer remarked that there was a transition from the original action and mystery, post-apocalyptic horror of the original Pacific Rim to just a noisy action in this sequel. There was also a remark that the film was geared to an audience of 10-year-old boys. This reviewer, having missed the preview, found himself sitting, unintended, beside to 10 plus or minus boys. The film held their attention all the way through, rapt, sometimes comparing notes.

Which meant that their reactions were sometimes more interesting than what was happening on the screen. Not that there wasn't a lot happening up there. Probably too much. Giving too much time to think about other things...

And, one of the thoughts was that this is something of a combination of Godzilla and The Transformers. And the sound engineering seemed like a combination of that from both films.

In the original film, there is a crack in the bottom of the ocean allowing alien monsters, rather gigantic, to emerge into our world. The early minutes of this film do a resume for us in case it wasn't in the forefront of our memories – even with a visual tribute to Idris Elba as the hero of that film. What they did in the past was to create gigantic creatures, engines of war, with humans inside, physically moving the creatures forward, working out the strategies and executing the tactics.

And, there is a great deal of this in the sequel. Lots of fights between the aliens and the human creations.

And the humans? John Boyega, known now as Finn from the new Star Wars films, is the son of the earlier film's hero, living a rather easy life because there is peace in the world, although he is not above leading on gangs who want to plunder some of the past technology. He encounters a young woman who has been honing her skills on re-creating the attacking creatures. They are all called up because of an imminent threat. And the officer in charge is played by Scott Eastwood – with everybody commenting that he seems a 21st-century uncanny embodiment of his father, in look, in whispering voice, in action and heroics.

There is some training. There are clashes within the troop. But, then they will have to go into action, Boyega and Eastwood inside the main attacking machines, running on the spot to propel the creation forward... there are also risks, no damsels in distress because the young woman can outmanoeuvre the men at times.

And, perhaps in memory of Godzilla, there is a huge destruction of a metropolis as in most of these films, but this time it is Tokyo. The aliens are on their way to Mount Fuji to get rare earths for their own strategies. Where better to have a climax than on the slopes of Mount Fuji and its volcanic crater? While it is not a Pacific Rim, it is a rim for derring-do.

Perhaps those 10-year-olds went out of the cinema eager for a sequel. It will probably depend on their box office contributions ...

THE PARTY

UK, 2017, 77 minutes, Black and white.

Kristin Scott Thomas, Timothy Spall, Patricia Clarkson, Bruno Ganz, Cherry Jones, Emily Mortimer, Cillian Murphy.

Directed by Sally Potter.

Over the decades Sally Potter has made quite a number of interesting, often offbeat films, remembering Orlando, The Man who Cried, Rage, and Ginger and Rosa.

In this film, photographed in very effective and sharp black-and-white, she also shows how much material can be condensed into 77 minutes of running time.

It is something like this: Sally Potter has called on several top actors, three British, two Americans, an Irishman and a German, written them some very sharp and telling dialogue, directed them to interact with each other, mounting tension as the film goes on, many in the audience remembering the effect of this kind of social drama in the confines of a meal as in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.

The film opens with Janet, Kristin Scott Thomas, opening the front door and raising a revolver. We have to wait only about 75 minutes to know what this is all about – and be surprised. Kristin Scott Thomas portrays a politician who has just been announced as an opposition minister, for health, having campaigned long and hard and put her socialist principles into practice. This is the other meaning of the Party, the political party. Then we see Bill, her husband, sitting depressed and forlorn, rather haggard and not with it, listening to music, waiting for the guests for a celebratory meal. He is played by Timothy Spall.

The first visitors to arrive are April and Gottfried, Patricia Clarkson and Bruno Ganz, an unlikely couple, she very sardonic, even cynical, American, close friend of Janet, full of opinions and certainly in no way hesitant to express them, some offhand, some calculated – and often the calculation is to upset and hurt. On the other hand, Gottfried is a genial German who admires April immensely even though she expresses the desire to separate from him and keeps putting him down in front of everyone. He is a personal coach, anti-Western medicine, interested in breathing, self-help, self-healing, and considering doctors' diagnoses the equivalent of voodoo or curses.

The next couple to arrive and Martha and her partner Jinny, Cherry Jones and Emily Mortimer. Martha is an intellectual, university professor, trendy in many ways, common-sensed. Jinny is much younger and is about to announce that she is not only pregnant but is expecting twins, more than a shock for Martha.

Another couple is expected, husband, Tom, Cillian Murphy, and Maryann who does not arrive. He easily breaks out in a sweat despite his very dapper suit, and relies on cocaine fixes in an attempt to calm his anxiety. He has also brought a gun but decides to throw it into a garbage bin.

This review, having introduced the characters, will leave the rest for the audience to experience, be surprised at, sometimes laugh, sometimes be dismayed, wonder about human nature and its follies and foibles.

Each of the characters has a story. Many of the stories are intertwined and cause quite some surprise and anxiety, outbursts of affection, outbursts of violence, and the problem whether Janet

will continue in her role as the new minister.

In fact, a well-written, well-directed, well-acted, contemporary issues drama.

PETER RABBIT

US/Australia, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.

Rose Byrne, Domhnall Gleeson, Voices of: James Corden, Elizabeth Debicki, Margot Robbie,
Directed by Will Gluck.

Peter Rabbit is one of the most liked characters from the Tales by Beatrix Potter. Her children's stories have the touch of the genteel – but Peter, in this version, could in no way be called genteel. He is something of a trickster, something of a leader of the other rabbits, shrewd and often cunning.

This version of Peter Rabbit story is a blend of animation, the drawings very much like the illustrations in the Beatrix Potter books, and live-action. There are some striking scenes of London and its landmarks. But, most of the rest of the film was made in New South Wales, standing in for the English countryside.

Part of the amusement of the film is the recognition of the voices, especially James Corden who voices Peter with a touch of mischief. His sisters are voiced by Margot Robbie, who also narrates the film, Elizabeth Debicki and Daisy Ridley. With the film being made in Australia, there are assorted Australian voices throughout the film including Ewen Leslie and, for a rather dapper mouse who guides the rabbits around London, David Wenham. Peter's parents are seen in the picture in Bea's house – they have words of wisdom for Peter, voiced by Rachel Ward and Bryan Brown.

The setting for the film are the English woods as well as a country house with an artist studio attached. This is where Bea, an artist, played by Rose Byrne, does her work. Nearby is a vegetable garden worked on by a very crotchety old man, Sam Neill. He is the target for Peter and the rabbits, tantalising him and, of course, plundering his vegetable garden. When he dies, his nephew who has suffered a breakdown working at Harrods in London, Alexander, played by Domhnall Gleeson, comes down to get the uncle's mansion ready for sales. Like his uncle, he is very wary of the rabbits, trying to block up every possible entry, every hole, every fence, every gate.

But, Bea has more than a soft spot for the rabbits and, despite being attracted by Alexander, is upset at his anti-rabbit tactics, especially when there are explosives around the fields. This is not helped at all when Peter actually detonates some of the explosives and one of them uproots an enormous tree which crashes down on Bea's studio.

So, a visit to London, to find Alexander at Harrods. Peter goes with Benji, gets a tour of London, encounters Alexander trying to do his best again at Harrods but they cause absolute mayhem.

The only possible result is that they all go back happily to the countryside, Alexander returning and is reconciled with Bea – and there is free access for the rabbits to the vegetable garden.

There is probably enough to amuse a children's audience but there is a lot of frantic action, the old man seen dying on screen, explosions – and a couple of rather rude jokes.

POP AYE

Thailand, 2017, 105 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Kirsten Tan.

A film from Thailand. A film about an elephant. And the name of the elephant's Pop Aye.

This is a very quirky film – although, audiences are not used to see quirkiness from Thailand. It will have a local appeal and, apparently, international audiences have responded very well to the star, the elephant.

We are introduced to a middle-aged man leading an elephant along the road in country Thailand. He needs a rest, hails down a truck with the audience watching how an elephant, lumbering but elegant, steps onto the back of the truck. But soon, the man clashes with the truck driver and is left on the side of the road again. Which means that the audience is wondering what this is all about.

Throughout the film there are a number of flashbacks so we are able to build up the story of the man and his past and his encounters with the elephant. In fact, he first met the elephant as a child, when its mother was shot, and his uncle took the elephant in (while the kids were watching cartoons of Popeye on the television). Later, the elephant was part of a circus.

The man is having something of a midlife crisis, seen on television being interviewed about demolishing of buildings in Bangkok, the building of new high-rise buildings, the achievement of the man in the past – but, the younger generation is coming up, not telling the man that a board meeting was in the morning when he thought it was the afternoon. And, there is tension between himself and his wife.

At this stage, he happens to see the elephant in the street and is moved. He is actually moved to buy the elephant with the quest to take him back to his uncle in the countryside.

Which means that this is what might be called “an elephant road movie.” There are various people to meet along the way. There is a sympathetic beggar and the man takes compassion on him. There is a bar where he is taken by the police who accuse him of having forged papers for the elephant. There is a transgender prostitute, a female prostitute. Then the beggar is found dead on the road and the man decides to take his body to a Buddhist temple (where the monk is interested in the fee and has a Visa card ready as well as a camera to take pictures of the elephant). There is the dead beggar's love from long ago, she and the man scattering the ashes in a ritual by a tree. Finally, Pop Aye getting back home.

While these are the high points of the story, what matters is seeing the them, appreciating their quirkiness, wondering what will happen to the man and his wife as well as to the elephant.

READY PLAYER ONE

US, 2018, 140 minutes, Colour.

Tye Sheridan, Olivia Cooke, Ben Mendelsohn, Mark Rylance, Lena Waithe, T.J. Miller, Simon Pegg, Philip Zhao, Win Morisaki, Hannah John-Kamen, Susan Lynch, Claire Higgins.

Directed by Steven Spielberg.

Immediately after his intelligent political drama, *The Post*, based on the 1971 publishing of the

Pentagon papers and the consequences for Richard Nixon, Watergate, the Washington Post, Spielberg went back into the atmosphere of the 1980s, the decade where he achieved such great success with the Indiana Jones films as well as ET.

This film is based on a book by Ernest Cline, Ready Player One, which is subtitled “a Pop Culture Odyssey”. While it is set in the future, it harks back to the music, films, computer games, atmosphere of America in the 1980s. In fact, the setting is Columbus, Ohio, 2045, said to be the fastest growing city in the world but, it has an ugly futuristic look, especially for those who live in The Stacks, crowded accommodation.

But, for many of the inhabitants of Columbus, that is far less important than their goggles which serve also as masks, which take them, almost all the time it would seem, into virtual reality – or, what seems virtual unreality.

It may be all right for computer game fans, but many of the audience may be thinking to themselves that Columbus, 2045, is not where they would like to live. For those who know that the running time of the film is 140 minutes, something like an atmosphere of dread starts to prevail. (This probably applies to a rather older demographic.)

But, while the younger audiences will enjoy identifying with the central characters, their participation in the virtual reality, the competition and quest that opens up for them, the clash with an evil villain who wants to possess the main virtual reality, it does get more interesting for those older audiences.

The hero of the film is a teenager, Wade, played by Tye Sheridan. He is in the care of his aunt and her obnoxious boyfriend. His area of virtual reality, so popular in Columbus, is The Oasis. He goes there at every opportunity and has created an avatar, Parzifal, not entirely unlike himself. Theme: a Grail seeker. He has a number of friends in The Oasis, with avatars that owe something to Game of Thrones. One of the puzzles for Wade is wondering what the avatars that he has come to like, relying on, fight with, look like in real life. (Spoiler: not as good as their avatars!) The main friend is Samantha, avatar Artemis.

While there are lots of references to past pop culture, many movie buffs will enjoy an episode which recreates the hotel scenes from Stephen King’s The Shining.

It seems, that the creator of The Oasis, was a loner, living in his own reality which was created by pop culture. He also had a partner with whom he fell out. Interestingly, the creator is played by Mark Rylands (who won his Oscar for his appearance in Spielberg’s Bridge of Spies and was also the BFG). Simon Pegg plays the partner.

The basic setup is a competition, the creator of The Oasis hiding three keys which will give ownership to the virtual reality paradise. There are clues, rather obscure. Wade and his friends decide that they will try to find the three keys. In the meantime, there is a villain. He is played by Ben Mendelsohn, ruthless in his decisions but something of a wimp in his personal character and reactions, compensating by a rather gigantic and fierce avatar and a tough henchwoman.

There is very little doubting about how it will all turn out. But, at the end, there is some reality-unreality moralising. The fact that virtual reality is virtual rather than real. Whether that will impress diehard games players may be debatable.

ROMAN J. ISRAEL

US, 2017, 122 minutes, Colour.

Denzel Washington, Colin Farrell, Carmen Ejogo, Linda Gravatt, Amanda Warren, Hugo Armstrong, Tony Plana.

Directed by Dan Gilroy.

Roman J. Israel is an unexpected title for a film featuring Denzel Washington. It must have been a role important for him because he is one of the producers of the film.

This is a film very much for an American audience. It presupposes an interest in American law and its interpretation – not so interesting or comprehensible by other audiences, even those from English speaking countries.

However, it must also have hit an American nerve because Denzel Washington was one of the five nominees for Actor in a Leading Role for the 2017 Academy Awards. (The winner was Gary Oldman for Darkest Hour.)

The film opens arrestingly, if somewhat mysteriously, with Roman Israel accusing himself of acting outside the law and general legal and ethical principles. It then goes back three weeks to portray what Roman had done and then returns to his self-accusation and self-condemnation.

Roman J. Israel, Esq – his explaining that Esquire ranks between a name and knight – works in a law office, the partner of his former professor whom he admires. However, the partnership has not prospered financially and the professor suffers a stroke and soon dies. All might have been well if Roman was an ordinary character. However, he is recognised by other lawyers as something of a savant. He is absolutely methodical, generally uses old-fashioned methods of recording cases and finding them. His knowledge is extensive, well-informed, full of detail about legal information.

Another student of the professor, much younger, George (Colin Farrell) is sent in to take charge on behalf the previous manager and the professor's wife. Courteous but firm, he takes an initially dim view of Roman's methods, cases and his personality. Which means that Roman has to look for another job, meeting a sympathetic lawyer who invites him to give a talk to students (some of whom mock him for his old ideas and manner). She is Maya, played by Carmen Ejogo, who admires Roman and is influenced in her own career by his principles.

Roman is very sympathetic to the accused, working hard on their cases and defence. George realises his qualities and does employ him.

Then Roman undergoes a moral crisis – about which the audience will have to speculate, why it happens, what is the trigger... He chooses to become respectable, get rid of his old clothes and buy smart suits and shoes, leave his old apartment and inspect a very fashionable new building, trim his Afro, a transformation that makes him look like her expectations of Denzel Washington.

The occasion for the change it is his giving information about a murderer and receiving the large reward.

The repercussions on Roman are forceful, affect his work, his conscience, feeling a threat to his life.

Which brings us back to the self-accusation and George and Maya becoming aware of what he had done.

And the film has a rather sombre ending. It was written and directed by Dan Gilroy who wrote and directed the very effective thriller with Jake Gyllenhaal, Nightcrawler.

SHERLOCK GNOMES

UK, 2018, 86 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: James Mc Avoy, Emily Blunt, Johnny Depp, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Jamie Demetriou, Mary J. Blige, Dexter Fletcher, Michael Caine, Maggie Smith, Julie Walters, Matt Lucas, Ozzy Osbourne, Stephen Merchant, Richard Wilson.
Directed by John Stevenson.

We all know Sherlock Holmes. We have read the stories by Conan Doyle. We have seen the films, going back to the 1930s or to Basil Rathbone. We have seen a variety of actors portraying Sherlock Holmes and we have seen the television series with Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman. There is a certain fascination in anticipating an animated feature film where Sherlock is the protector of all the garden gnomes of London.

But, what about the children who are the target audience for this film. Do they recognise the name? Do they know anything about Sherlock Holmes? Probably not. So, what is the attraction? The filmmakers have prepared a base by making a film some years ago with the garden gnomes, Gnomeo and Juliet. And Gnomeo and Juliet are here again, easing the way into the Sherlock story. Clearly, this is an opportunity for children to learn about the great detective and for parents and adults to explain and share their memories and experiences of Sherlock Holmes.

The setting is this: garden gnomes are being transferred to a London house with a very limited and scruffy garden which horrifies them. They are in the home of Lord Redbrick and Lady Blueberry (voiced momentarily by Michael Caine and Maggie Smith). When the couple go out, the garden gnomes (and a large amorous frog) come alive.

The gnome Capulets nominate in Gnomeo and Juliet as leaders of the gnomes and they work beautifying the garden. However, danger is at hand, and the gnomes are all abducted.

Who would do such a thing? Conan Doyle fans will immediately come up with the name: Moriarty. We are introduced to the clash between Sherlock and Moriarty (who appears on screen in the likeness of the baby doll). They clash in a museum where Sherlock and Dr Watson rescue some of the gnomes. The dinosaur bones collapse and Moriarty is presumed dead. Not a bit of it. He then abducts all the gnomes of London, hiding them in a cavernous area at the base of Tower Bridge, all decked out, and glued to their seats, to form a being colourful capital M.

Sherlock is, as always, self-assured, arrogant in his manner, very superior, even to Dr Watson, upsetting him with the result that Watson wants to prove himself but makes the situation worse. Gnomeo and Juliet are not abducted and they participate in tracking down the gnomes and in the rescue. Moriarty intends destruction – when the bridge opens to let shipping through, the mechanisms will go down on and crush the gnomes.

This means that there is quite a lot of action in the film, searching and sleuthing, Holmes and co aboard a large ship, a helicopter flight, two rather dumb live gargoyles, like dragons, as Moriarty's assistants, scaling the heights of Tower Bridge, gnomes falling, soap and water to free the glued

gnomes, last-minute rescues – but, Dr Watson's walking stick having a rope and arrow to help escapes...

And, while Juliet has been very bossy, she appreciates more and more than Gnomeo's love for her. And, Sherlock comes to his senses and apologises to Dr Watson. And as for Moriarty... will he return? (And there is also a guest appearance, courtesy of Mary J. Blige as Irene Adler, but on side this time.)

Very colourful, colourful gnomes, and lots of voices – James Mc Avoy and Emily Blunt as Gnomeo and Juliet, Chiwetel Ejiofor as a very dignified Dr Watson, Jamie Demetriou as Moriarty – and, rather surprisingly, Sherlock, superior accent and all, Johnny Depp voicing Holmes.

THAT'S NOT MY DOG

Australia, 2018, 89 minutes, Colour. Shane Jacobson, Ron Jacobson, Paul Hogan, Steve Vizard, Jimeoin, Fiona O' Loughlin, Paul Fenech, Christy Whelan, Tim Ferguson, Stephen Hall, Russell Morris. Directed back to Dean Murphy.

in many ways, it might have been a very good idea for comedian Shane Jacobson (best known as Kenny) to invite a number of his friends, well-known and lesser-known comedians, to a party at his house with the request that they have some jokes ready to narrate. Other critics have suggested that it is not a very good idea and that it is not cinematic, something rather for presentation online or some kind of series.

Many people will see the title of the film, see Shane Jacobson's name and possibly some of the of the cast and decide that this is an Australian comedy for them. However, a caution.

This is for an audience which might be called broad-minded. There are many jokes focusing on sex – which they are entitled to. However, a number of them are pretty coarse, what used to be called "dirty jokes".

This means a warning to audiences who might be cautious about broad humour, about sex jokes, and, especially, about frequent coarse language – and it is frequent in this film. This is a matter of sensibilities and sensitivity – and while many of the jokes are certainly G or PG rated, quite a number of them M-rated, which might mean not suitable for more fastidious sensibilities.

Shane Jacobson wants to throw a party for his father, Ron Jacobson, who actually initiates the jokes and the tone. And he recurs during the film with a number of other jokes as does Shane himself. Later in the film, there is a pause from the jokes with a rather more tender scene between father and son, the son paying tribute to his father and his humour when he was young and this party as a possibility for repaying him.

The film shows the preparation for the party, an evening party on the property. It shows the various guests turning up.

It means then that for almost an hour and a half there is a continued succession of jokes, some of them funny, others of them funny enough but probably better told in small groups rather than up there on the big screen. And there is also the distraction of the cast laughing far more heartily at the jokes than the audience is. Occasionally, there is a strong outburst of laughter from the audience, but often the audience will be just sitting there, perhaps laughing interiorly.

For those who like play on words, there is a recurring chorus with Steven Hall (well known for his

variety of impersonations in Shaun Micallef's Mad as Hell) exchanging a fair number of corny but amusing word plays.

In the background, quite a number of Australian musicians and singers are playing, which does make the film something of a musical.

And the guests? Apart from the now-familiar face of Shane Jacobson himself, some of the big names invited include Paul Hogan (who does know how to tell a yarn), Steve Vizard, looking more ample he did in television days, with audiences recognising Jim (Anthony Lehman) from Utopia. Tim Ferguson is in his wheelchair and does tell a wheelchair joke as well. Some of the other faces might be familiar but not their names – and there is a very strong cast list with a sketch of each of the end with their name.

By and large, there is enough amusing material to entertain an undemanding audience – it is directed to Dean Murphy and he and others receive a credit for “joke wrangling”. If there is to be a sequel, the joke wranglers need to be much more selective of high quality jokes (whether rude or not).

TOMB RAIDER

UK, 2018, 118 minutes, Colour.

Alicia Vikander, Dominic West, Walton Goggins, Daniel Wu, Kristin Scott Thomas, Derek Jacobi, Jaime Winston, Nick Frost.

Directed by Roar Uthaug.

Those in the know about the title Tomb Raider will immediately think of Lara Croft. She is the heroine of computer games. Those who don't play computer games but who like action movies, will immediately think of Angelina Jolie and the two films where she played Lara Croft. Surprising to find another Lara Croft story so soon.

This time Lara Croft is played by Alicia Vikander, Swedish actress who has performed in quite a range of films from Denmark to the UK to Australia (twice) to the United States. She won an Oscar for her supporting role in The Danish Girl. Some audiences might be surprised at the casting but, in fact, she has appeared in Seventh Son, Jason Bourne, The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

The plot is not dissimilar from Angelina Jolie's Tomb Raider. Lara is wealthy but is disappointed by her father's leaving her and for his disappearance, now presumed dead. We see her involved in action training, delivering food by bike around London, participating in a fox-hunt bike chase, recklessly, through the streets. She is taken out of custody from the police by her guardian, played with icy friendliness as usual by Kristin Scott Thomas. Then there is Derek Jacobi as the lawyer for her to sign the papers acknowledging her father's death and her inheritance.

However, there is, as always, a mysterious key. Then there is a mysterious basement. And mysterious information about his mission to go to an island off Japan to find the tomb of an evil queen and investigate her curse and prevent Trinity, the evil power conglomerate, from destroying the world. (Spoiler: she does achieve all this!)

While London looks good, she gets help in Hong Kong which also looks good. She enlists the son of the captain who took her father to the island (Daniel Wu). They are shipwrecked, separated, the Chinese man taken into a labour camp, Lara rescued by the leader of an expedition, Vogel (Walton

Goggins).

We see Lara's motivation with scenes from her as a little girl, with her devoted father, the death of her mother, his departure, always calling her Sprout and a kiss with two fingers for her forehead. Vogel tells her that he has killed her father.

Vogel is in the employ of Trinity and communicates by phone with a mysterious employer. When Lara escapes from his clutches – emulating the best traditions of Tarzan leaping through the forest, diving into rivers, hanging on to wrecked planes to save going over the rapids... she sees a mysterious figure who, of course, is her father who has been surviving in caves for seven years, trying to sabotage Gogel's attempts to find the Queen's tomb.

Vogel has been searching in the wrong area but, with the capture of Lara and her father, the whole enterprise moves to the real location.

What goes on inside the tomb, the dangers, the threats, the various devices for floors to open, walls to close in will remind most audiences of Raiders of the Lost Ark. Perhaps a bit too similar?

A Chinese friend keeps guard in order to rescue her if necessary, vocals of the slaves support him.

The tomb is found, there are images in hieroglyphics, John Croft has misinterpreted aspects of the message, the Queen communicates an infection and destroys some of Vogel's thugs – and, a final split-second timing for Lara to escape with her father urging Sprout to run, the two finger kiss on her forehead, and his sacrificing himself.

Meanwhile, back in London, Lara discovers some secrets about Trinity, who the head might be (as if we didn't guess) and goes to the pawnshop where she tried to get money earlier in the film from Nick Frost and Jaime Winstone in cameo roles. She buys two guns – to be ready for a sequel.

UNSANE

US, 2018, 98 minutes, Colour.

Claire Foy, Joshua Leonard, Juno Temple, Jay Pharoah, Amy Irving, Matt Damon.

Directed by Steven Soderbergh.

Do we actually use the word "unsane"? Is it something of a mixture of sane and insane? Can it imply that somebody can be sane and insane at the same time?

Director Steven Soderbergh, with a strong career in films, Cannes award for Sex, Lies and Videotape, and an Oscar for Traffic, decided that he would stop making films and turn his attention to television. His decision for a new direction in work did not last long and in 2017 he released Logan Lucky and in 2018, Unsane.

The star of the film is British Claire Foy, who made such an impression as the Queen in The Crown and appeared also in Breathe. We first see her in her office at a bank, in a Pennsylvania city, treating a phone client with some severity. The worker in the next desk comments on her harsh approach. However, Seymour (she explains her name, that she was called after her maternal grandfather) is a success at work, praised by the boss, suggesting she travel with him to a conference in New Orleans – though she seems to have a quizzical response, suggestive that he is being suggestive.

Then, she goes to a bar, meeting up with a man whom she had contacted through an app, seemingly permissive but then suddenly stopping. So far, perhaps so ordinary.

However, she has been troubled by a stalker for two years, moving away from her mother (Amy Irving) and from Boston. She decides to go to a therapist and explains her fears and answers questions about contemplating suicide. Suddenly, she is interned in an institution for 24 hours, the staff suspicious of her responses, rather Cuckoo's Nest in their application of rules and regulations. She finds herself in a dormitory, tormented by the young woman in the next bed, Allison (Juno Temple).

An explanation is given that institutions like this are dependent on insurance income and can keep intended patients as inmates for as long as companies are prepared to pay the insurance. (To be a particular interest for Soderbergh who explored the exploitation of medication and institutions in his film, *Side Effects*, 2013.)

As the film develops, and Seymour finds herself confined, she denounces one of the workers as her stalker. The authorities say that he has been definitely checked and, in fact, he is in charge of the distribution of the medication each night.

At one stage, we might have been suspicious that all this was going on in Seymour's head, that she had imagined the stalker. Yet, here he is (Joshua Leonard) and sometimes in charge of Seymour.

She does make friends with another inmate, Nate (Jay Pharoah) who tells her about the insurance scams and lends her his mobile phone so that she can make contact with her mother who hurriedly drops everything at home and hurries to her daughter, making demands, taking strong stances.

The plot does get quite complicated as it goes on, Seymour and her dealings with the alleged stalker, his behaviour, his interactions with Nate, his plans for a happy life with Seymour.

There is plenty of melodrama here, especially in a final confrontation, police investigations, media investigations into the ethics of the institution...

And, with Seymour returning to work, and some of her behaviour, we begin to wonder what has really happened...

WINCHESTER

Australia, 2018, 99 minutes, Colour.

Helen Mirren, Jason Clarke, Sarah Snook, Finn Scicluna- O' Prey, Tyler Coppin, Angus Sampson, Bruce Spence.

Directed by the Spierig Brothers.

The poster looks arresting. Helen Mirren in the centre, dressed in 19th-century black, lace and veil. Who is this mysterious woman?

In fact, she is based on actual character, Mrs Winchester, the wife of the inventor of armaments, especially the well-known Winchester rifle. This means that Helen Mirren has the opportunity to play the Grande Dame that she does so well.

The poster also highlights that this is a film by Michael and Peter Spierig, originally from Germany, settling in Australia, making a number of films especially the acclaimed vampire thriller, *Daybreakers*, and, one of the most intriguing Australian films, *Predestination*, about time, identity, gender identification. The most recent film was a continuation of the *Saw* series, *Jigsaw*. Expectations were high from horror fans. However, they seem to have been somewhat disappointed, expecting more blood and gore and fears and frights. After all, it is, in fact, a film about a haunted house and ghosts.

The interesting premise (and tourists can go to see the Winchester house in San Jose, California) is that Mrs Winchester was conscious of the number of people who had been killed by the armaments. Over the decades, she extended her house with ever-increasing rooms in memory of or, perhaps, locations for the spirits of those who had been killed.

Needless to say, the board of the Winchester Company, who were extending their franchises into skateboard-making, are concerned about her mental health and send a doctor, Jason Clarke, who has his own regrets about his dead wife, subsequent drinking, to assess Mrs Winchester. At the house, he encounters her niece, Sarah Snook (who was excellent in *Predestination*) and her son who is prone to have preternatural experiences.

The film actually looks very elegant, is set in 1906, is more of a period piece than a horror film. However, there are things that go creak and bump in the night in the house, a sense of the presence of spirits. This is particularly true of one of the servants (who can be seen only by the doctor) and who turns out to have a bizarre history, his brother killed in the Civil War by Winchester, the violent consequences for the servant going berserk, his reaching out to possess the boy, to confront Mrs Winchester.

Perhaps it could be better said that this is a film of atmosphere rather than horror action, though there are the confrontations with the ghost at the the end. For those who enjoy being immersed in a period with an eerie atmosphere, it is an interesting venture.

A WRINKLE IN TIME

US, 2018, 109 minutes, Colour.

Oprah Winfrey, Reese Witherspoon, Mindy Kaling,, Deric McCabe, Chris Pine, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Zach Galifiniakis, Michael Peña, Andre Holland, David Oyelowo.

Directed by Ava Du Vernay.

A Wrinkle in Time is based on a popular novel by Madeleine L' Engle. It was filmed in 2004 as a Canadian miniseries.

This is a story with physics, maths, fantasy, mysticism – with the original novel having aspects of religion. These are not explicitly present in this screenplay although there are elements of religious symbolism.

The book has been very popular for decades but the film version, released by Disney, has not been kindly reviewed – and skimming through the bloggers' comments on the IMDb, there is practically no one who liked the film, many boasting of walking out, using the word "disappointing"...

If you come to the film without having the background of the book, you will indeed find it rather strange. But, it is a fantasy and is to be interpreted as such.

Meg (Storm Reid) is devoted to her scientist father (Chris Pine) who works with his academic wife (Gugu Mbatha-Raw). And Meg is very intelligent. Then we see her at school, the victim of quite obnoxious bullying, sad because it is the fourth anniversary of her father's disappearance (and the bullies saying that she should do the same). At home, Meg now has a little brother, Charles Wallace (Deric McCabe), aged six, and even more intelligent than Meg. He has a strong and articulate presence.

Then the film turns into fantasy with three women, called the three Mrs (Whatsit, Which, Who) arriving with strange messages, basically urging Meg and Charles Wallace to search for their father. Conducting experiments, and wanting to shake hands, as he said, with the universe, he is now lost in the universe. A pleasant youngster from school, Calvin (Australian Levi Miller) is also in the house and joins in the journey.

And here comes one of the great oddities of the film: costume design and make up for the three Mrs. At times, they look as if they have come from an op shop and not been too discriminating in what they wear, or how make up as been applied (odd-coloured lips and bejewelled faces). And, one of them, Mrs Which appears at first in a rather gigantic form – but later comes to normal size. And the three Mrs are portrayed by Oprah Winfrey (as the giant Mrs), Mindy Cailing as the more ordinary Mrs and Reese Witherspoon, still something of an apprentice and appearing as rather ditzy.

Then it is a move through the wrinkling time, space travelling to other planets, time travelling, under the guidance of the Mrs until their capacity for "Tessaring" (the ability to move through the wrinkles) begins to fade. Then the three are on their own, relying on Meg's determination and Charles Wallace with his insights and abilities.

It is here that something of the religious dimension does come in. There is a pervading evil presence in the universe. It is described as "It". It is very much like a satanic presence, is one diabolical pervading of the universe, tempting and testing the youngsters, and taking possession of Charles Wallace. Which means that the three Mrs are like something of a Providence or of guarding Angels. But, it is up to the children to confront and destroy the evil It.

So, there is quite a range of adventures, some friendly planets, some frightening planets which grow instant high trees and provide cliffs, an odd version of a "little boxes" suburb where children and their mothers are automatons. And the Darkness of the It.

The children's being reunited with their father is not without a great deal of turmoil, and his having to admit that he had abandoned his family to search for the meaning of the universe. However, goodness pervades as well as happiness – and even the bullying girl next-door neighbour changing heart.

The film does have a lot of ingredients – and a pity that so many people were not drawn into it but, in fact, were repelled. Perhaps a wrinkle in filmmaking judgement.

REVIEWS MAY 2018

AUORE

AVENGERS, The: INFINITY WAR

BARRY JONES IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME – A STORY IN FILM

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AURORE

France, 2017, 89 minutes, Colour.

Agnes Jaoui, Thibault de Montelamebert, Pascale Arbillot, Sarah Suco, Lou Roy -Lecollinet.

Directed by Blandine Lenoir.

This is a drama, with some comic touches, that will resonate with a women's audience. In fact, a men's audience may well find itself more immediately observing rather than empathising which, it is hoped, they eventually will do.

Aurore is played by Agnes Jaouoi, who has also written and directed films in the past. This time, however, the screenplay has been written by women and the director is a woman. Aurore has two friends as well as some close women friends.

At the opening, Aurore is suffering from hot flushes, not quite understanding, realising that this is a period of menopause – with some visits to the doctor which enables the screenplay to explain aspects of the menopause, physiological, psychological, one Aurore and to the audience.

Aurore is also divorced and has no job, but hurrying to an interview at a restaurant where she is old enough to be the other applicants' mother and whom the owner of the restaurant whimsically wants to call Samantha – more attractive to customers, he thinks. She has two daughters, one being pregnant, which disturbs Aurore who advises her not to make mistakes as she did in her past, something which the daughter interprets as her being a mistake in her mother's life. The other daughter lives at home and is studying but has a sometime live-in boyfriend.

There is also Aurore's close friend, Mano, full of exuberance, unmarried, prone to some cosmetic surgery, a real estate agent who invokes Aurore's help in promoting apartments she is trying to sell. At one such meeting, Aurore meets the boyfriend of her past, Christophe, who has never married and, we realise, has been hurt by Aurore's ignoring him when he was on his military service in Germany and has subsequently married his friend.

The audience is not wrong in seeing where this might be going. They have some meetings, a meal in a restaurant where there are singing waiters who do some fine operatic excerpts. In the meantime, there are problems with her younger daughter wanting to go off to Barcelona with her boyfriend and give up studies, comforting her pregnant daughter, going to a school reunion and feeling rebuffed by Christophe.

Will Aurore find a new life with an older friend? Will Christophe overcome his long-held hurt? Will the daughter stay in Barcelona? Will the other daughter give birth?

In many ways, Aurore, her family and friends live ordinary lives in a contemporary city. And in some ways, their problems are very ordinary. However, the audience is drawn into the characters' lives – in a story which promises happy endings.

AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR

US, 2018, 149 minutes, Colour.

Robert Downey Jr, Chris Hemsworth, Mark Ruffalo, Chris Evans, Scarlett Johansson, Don Cheadle, Benedict Cumberbatch, Tom Holland, Chadwick Boseman, Zoe Saldana, Karen Gillan, Tom Hiddleston, Paul Bettany, Elizabeth Olsen, Josh Brolin, Anthony Mackie, Sebastien Stan, Idris Elba, Danai Kurira, Peter Dinklage, Benedict Wong, Pom Clementieff, Dave Bautista, Vin Diesel, Bradley Cooper, Gwyneth Paltrow, Benicio del Toro, Chris Pratt, Sean Gunn, William Hurt, Terry Notary, Stan Lee.

Directed by Joe Russo, Anthony Russo.

A Superfluity of Superheroes!

A distraction during the early part of this almost over-epic adventure. It is from what is now called the Marvel Universe, the universe familiar to the millions of fans all around the world who will not take any notice of a film review because they want to watch this Avengers chapter just because it is there and they like it. And, in its first week it set a box office record everywhere. (Just as Black Panther was setting records, this one has gone beyond but, of course, T' Challa is one of the Avengers.)

With all the superheroes coming and going, and sometimes long delays before we saw some of them again, the opening phrase of this review led to some mind wandering verbal distractions:

As Stupefaction of Stunts,
a Glut of Galaxies/Guardians,
an Effulgence of Effects,
a Multiplicity of Moods,
and, indeed, a Plethora of Plots.
They are all there.

One of the questions this film raises is what might be called the Hierarchy of Heroes/Heroines. And whom do we like best and whether they appear sufficiently in the film, and whom do we like least. This review puts in a vote for Thor, Chris Hemsworth always dignified, getting an eye-replacement, flying around the galaxies in a spacecraft driven by a talking raccoon whom he calls Rabbit. And he has a substantial role in the confrontation with the arch-evil villain, Thanos (Josh Brolin). A vote to for Robert Downey Jr as Tony stark, always nonchalant, always with a way with sardonic words.

Poor old Mark Ruffalo excessively straining himself as Bruce Banner to try to get Hulk to emerge and go into action. Poor old Vision, Paul Bettany, seems to be on his last legs. While Scarlett Johansson does have some action, Elizabeth Olsen outdoes her in devotion to Vision and her firepower is. The Guardians of the Galaxy gang seems more enjoyable in this one than in their own films! And who is least on the list? This time Dr Strange.

And then, we arrive at the final encounter with the whole heroic population going into battle.

As has been noted, this Avengers adventure is critic-proof.

BARRY JONES IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME – A LIFE IN FILM

Australia, 2018, 124 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Garry Sturgess.

Writer-director, Garry Sturgess, was interested in labour politics and made some documentaries. He was attracted to the character and personality of Barry Jones.

Barry Jones has spent decades in the Australian consciousness. A precocious boy, he appeared as a young adult on the very popular initial question on television, Bob Dyer's Pickabox. He appeared on over 200 sessions, being stopped in the street at that time and afterwards because he was such a popular identity, answering all the questions – and even questioning the questions.

During the 1960s, after abandoning studies in law, he headed up a committee against capital punishment. This organisation and Barry Jones himself were very prominent in their campaigns and in their arguments against the Premier of Victoria, Sir Henry Bolte, a fierce, often aggressive, supporter of such punishment. This came to a head with the last man hanged in Victoria, Ronald Ryan, in 1967, Bolte attacking Barry Jones and Jones resigning from the committee because, he said, he did not want to be paid by the same fund that paid Bolte.

Barry Jones became a Labour member of Parliament and was Minister for Science for most of the 1980s in the Hawke Government. Once again, he became well-known from his points of view, his media communications, his innovative approaches.

All this might make for a cinema portrait-biography, but there is much more to this film which makes it all the more interesting – and most especially for film buffs.

Barry Jones proves himself an avid film fan, listing his favourite films at the beginning of this film. However, he and Sturgess have chosen quite a large number of film clips, mainly from American films but from the UK, France and beyond. So the title, where an 84-year-old Barry Jones is being interviewed about his recollections of times past, with each comment accompanied by a clip in the background, sometimes in the foreground, illustrating his particular perspective. And quite a range it is, from Buster Keaton to Citizen Kane to Psycho and, with his love for the writings of Marcel Proust, Time Regained. There are a number of clips from the film, Quiz Show, an expose of cheating on American quiz shows which enables him to reflect on his own experiences.

While there is a great deal about Barry Jones and his family, a Victorian, life in Melbourne, Caulfield, Geelong, there is practically nothing on his private life after he emerges as a public figure.

Jones is a Renaissance man and there is quite some emphasis throughout the film on his love of music, visual art, literature (also well illustrated). Newspapers figure as well with quite a number of highlights of headlines and articles. And, at the end, he has reflections on the meaning of life, and admiration for Jesus and his being outgoing towards others, as well as a victim of capital punishment.

Audiences will appreciate having a portrait of Barry Jones but many will relish the objective/subjective correlatives of the film clips, his film story.

THE BOOKSHOP

Spain, 2018, 113 minutes, Colour.

Emily Mortimer, Bill Nighy, Patricia Clarkson, Honor Kneafsey, James Lance, Hunter Tremayne, Frances Barber, Reg Wilson, Michael Fitzgerald, Nigel O' Neill, Harvey Bennett.

Directed by Isabel Coixet.

A title like *The Bookshop* seems a box office risk. With the closing of so many bookshops, with the reliance on Internet, social media, online books, the title seems, despite so many readers' regrets, something of an anachronism.

However, Spanish writer-director, Isabel Coixet, is certainly an admirer of books. In 2007, she made a film with the evocative title, *The Secret Life of Words*.

While the director is Spanish, she has made quite a number of films in English, in the United States, in England. This one is very much in England, though the location photography for the British coast was done in Ireland.

The setting is 1959. Florence is a war widow, still grieving and unsettled but who now decides to fulfil an ambition to open a bookshop in a small town on the coast. She feels she is ready. She loves books. She has legal advice, she has financial advice. Could it go wrong?

The answer lies in a character of a local grande dame, exercising power in the town, seeing herself as the leader of the town. She is the wife of a retired general, Mrs Gamart. She is played, all stops out, as very British by American actress, Patricia Clarkson. While Florence had taken possession of an empty residence, The Old House, Mrs Gamart had intended the house to be used as a local arts centre.

The film shows Florence's exhilaration in setting up the bookshop. She is helped in the store by a young local girl, Christine (Heather Kneafsey), quite outspoken, quite determined, but, as she says, not a reader, although she enjoys geography and maths. Another ally for Florence is the local recluse, Edmund Brundage, played effectively and quietly by Bill Nighy. Edmund makes contact with Florence and she supplies some books, getting him interested in the works of Ray Bradbury (especially *Fahrenheit 451* and the story of bookburning) and asking his advice as to the literary quality of *Lolita* and whether she should stock it.

The atmosphere of this film is very British, old-style. And audiences who appreciate going back into the lives of 20th century Britain will enjoy this. The performances are excellent, Emily Mortimer charming and determined as Florence, Bill Nighy, Patricia Clarkson, Heather Kneafsey, all quite persuasive. There is a local cad played by James Lance.

The film is told in voice-over, the voice being that of Julie Christie. And, at the end, it is revealed who her character is.

As with so many British stories, there are bittersweet tones in the film which also make it engaging if sometimes saddening.

BPM/ 120 BEATS PER MINUTE/ 120 BATTEMENTS PAR MINUTE

France, 2017, 143 minutes, Colour.

Nahuel Perez Biscayart, Arnaud Valois, Adele Haenel, Antoine Reinartz, Felix Maritaud, Ariel Borenstein.

Directed by Robin Campillo.

This is a film about AIDS.

It is a French film, screening at several festivals, winning awards including several Cesar awards in France, for the film and for performances.

The setting is the 1980s in France. It is the period when the public, especially in Western countries, was apprehensive about the rise of AIDS and its spread. It is a period when celebrities were revealed as both gay and as infected by AIDS, especially film star, Rock Hudson. There were demonstrations about AIDS and the role of government in responding to the health situation. There was a lot of study going on, research for cures for AIDS and some exploitation by pharmacy companies.

This film opens with a focus on a French group of protesters, ACT UP. They are quite vehement at their meetings, allowing each member to speak but being controlled by the facilitator, agreement being expressed by vigorous snapping of fingers. The film audience is invited to listen to the points being made by the speakers, the passion with which they speak, the effect of the infection and the consequent illness, issues of sexual orientation and behaviour.

The group also goes on various demonstrations, especially targeting politicians as well as invasion of the offices of the pharmaceutical companies, with containers with fake blood which they throw at parliamentarians or throw on the walls of the offices.

Some of the protesters work on organisation for protest and some kind of control. Others are impulsive, especially the young, causing repercussions with the police, with the media and public opinion.

At the initial meeting, the key central characters are introduced so that the audience sees them, hears them, is able to identify with them and/or to criticise them.

One of the most vigorous protesters is Marco (Nahuel Perez Biscayart), a young man from Chile present in Paris with some care from his mother. He is befriended by a newcomer, Nathan, and the two fall in love, living together, working on the protests. The audience sees quite a number of the characters, especially in their dealings with Marco and Nathan.

Eventually, Marco succumbs to the infection, becomes quite ill, hospitalised, then living at home with the care of Nathan and his mother.

Marco's death and funeral bring the characters together, some kind of reconciliation, still some kind

of antagonism between the various members of the protest.

While the film recreates its period, the audience is watching it with the knowledge of the history of AIDS in the succeeding decades, the toll that it took in terms of death and illness, the advances made in medical help, the overcoming of prejudice against AIDS and fear of any blood contact, the commitment of support groups and human rights.

BREATH

Australia, 2017, 115 minutes, Colour.

Samson Coulter, Simon Baker, Elizabeth Debicki, Ben Spence, Richard Roxburgh, Rachael Blake, Jacek Koman, Megan Smart.

Directed by Simon Baker.

The immediate interest in *Breath* is that it is based on a novel by celebrated author, Tim Winton. It is also a celebration of Western Australia, Tim Winton's home state.

This is a beautifully crafted film, especially with its theme of surfing and the spectacle of the waves in the Indian Ocean on the south of Western Australia's coastline. The surfing is a reality of the lives of the central characters but it also serves as a metaphor, challenge, achievement, excitement and exhilaration, a contribution to personal development and, in the case of adolescents, their journey towards manhood.

The director is Simon Baker (himself a competitor in surfing in his younger days). Having directed some television episodes in the US, he makes an auspicious film debut as a director at home. He also contributed to the screenplay along with veteran writer, Gerard Lee (sometimes a collaborator with Jane Campion) and Tim Winton himself – who also supplies the voice-over narration for the film.

This is the 1970s. On the one hand, life in Western Australia seems fairly conventional, a traditional home, pleasing mother and father with their son – which does contrast with a dysfunctional home, an alcoholic father who is abusive to his teenage son. The boys go to school, rather formal in its way, everyone in school uniforms, and looking forward to a rather proper social, and teenage dancing. The son has a quiet relationship with his father, a sympathetically gentle performance from Richard Roxburgh – and some sadness that, ultimately, he does not or cannot confide in his father or his mother, Rachael Blake, quietly in the background.

Yet, with a focus on the central character, a 13-year-old boy, Bruce Pike, nicknamed Pikelet, this is a story of growing up, friendship, sexual education, disappointments, physical and psychological challenges, self-knowledge, possibilities for failing and success. His friend is Loonie (Ben Spence). This is Samson Coulter's first film. He is completely convincing as is Ben Spence as Loonie.

Simon Baker is Sando, a surfer, a man of seemingly independent means whose life and exhilaration is riding the waves. Sando is a sympathetic character, meeting the two boys who have taken to the surf and enjoying it, offering them his shed where they can leave their boards as they go home. He becomes a mentor to them, bonding, affirming, challenging. At home, in house which Loonie describes as hippy, there is Sando's wife, an American, Eva, played by Elizabeth Debicki. A skier, she has been hurt in an accident and has moved as far away from snow in Utah as possible. Initially she seems an enigmatic character, somewhat distant, even to her husband.

At the core of the story is the relationship between Eva and Pikelet. He is intrigued by this woman,

beginning with an adolescent crush, moving to infatuation. There is a seduction sequence, an affair, enthusiasm moving beyond puppy love – and the inevitability of the relationship coming to an end.

Watching these sequences, while knowing that they take place in the 1970s, audiences can bring a contemporary sensibility, an adult exploiting an underage adolescent, seeing this kind of behaviour now as criminal. In some ways, the screenplay seems to indicate that this is possibly normal behaviour. It raises the question of seduction, who seduces whom, who exploits whom, and the question of the younger participant's willingness to be exploited. In fact, further questions could be asked from 21st-century hindsight about Sando when he takes Loonie on a long trip to surf in Indonesia, unaccompanied.

And the title? The film opens with holding one's breath underwater, understanding that breath is life, the sound of gentle snoring by Pikelet's father as he sleeps, the control of breath in surfing, being toppled by waves and emerging to the surface, and a sequence of sexual hyperventilation with plastic bag and belt, the risk of suffocation and loss of breath.

Complex, a significant contribution to Australian cinema.

EARLY MAN

UK, 2018, 89 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: Eddie Redmayne, Tom Hiddleston, Maisie Williams, Timothy Spall, Richard Ayoade, Mark Williams, Miriam Margolyes, Rob Brydon, Nick Park, Johnny Vegas.

Directed by Nick Park.

Audiences may not know the name, Aardman Studios. But they recognise the animated characters in their films, especially Wallace and Gromit. Over the decades, director, Nick Park, has provided humorous entertainment for audiences worldwide.

Early Man is the latest film from Aardman. It is amusing – but rather slight in scope than a number of the previous films.

And, there is the question of the title and exclusive language, Early Man. And that is what it seems like for the first part of the film. A mother does appear amongst all the cavemen – but soon, there are movements towards gender equality as a young girl, skilled in sport, comes to join the community. And, in the final confrontation in an arena, the ruler is exposed as something of a booby and avaricious while his queen takes command. Early Man and Early Woman.

Actually, the film opens in the Neo- Pleistocene age, rugged to rains, cavemen fighting each other, prehistoric animals fighting each other. But, down from the clouds comes a meteor destroying the landscapes – but leaving a fiery box which burns the cavemen's fingers and feet as they touch it, causing them to pass it, kick it around. Perhaps it is an open question but it may be that the origins of football/soccer are prehistoric. This theory is reinforced by the caption that the action in this very ancient world takes place "near Manchester" and "around lunchtime".

These original football players bequeath their memories to cave art.

Then moving forward a couple of millennia and Ages, the film takes us to the Stone Age. The terrain this time is rather lush. The Stone Age characters are what we might imagine (perhaps thanks to the Flintstones), they are certainly Aardman characters with their protruding teeth and voices from top

British actors, with Timothy Spall as the Chief, Eddie Redmayne as the hero, Dug, and the young girl, Goona, who proves herself an ace at soccer, Maisie Williams.

Part of the activities in the Stone Age is hunting – but, as in the previous Aardman film, there is a rabbit, not a Were- Rabbit but a wary rabbit who is able to outwit the hunters (and who actually has the last laugh of the film).

But, armoured warriors from the Bronze Age invade the cavemen, rounding them up, threatening them with work in the mines. However, these Bronze Age invaders sound as if they come from the continent (even though the Lord is voiced by Tom Hiddleston and his queen, rather like Edith Evans in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is voiced by Miriam Margolyes).

And these continental fops, exceedingly vain, are champion footballer's. The plan is made that they should play the cavemen, with cavemen to lose and being sentenced to all work in the mines. The Lord is persuaded that this match would be worthwhile because he sees all the coins coming in as revenue. Dug is enthusiastic, tries to train his fellows – leading to a lot of bumbling comedy. But, Goona comes to the rescue.

Just when the depressed Dug is about to forfeit the match, the team all arrives on a huge flying duck/goose. The continental Bronzes are a bit shocked when the visitors score. While the match is enjoyable to watch, the parallels with contemporary football matches in England are very amusing, not only a score board, but an hourglass for the timekeeping, a replay courtesy of puppet figures and two commentators in a box, one English, one Scot, both voiced amusingly with jokes and puns by Rob Brydon.

We can guess the result of the match, the final tensions, the victory, the expose of the Lord, the taking command by the Queen and a happy ending prior to the advance of the next prehistoric Age.

(Nick Park voices, a character called Hobnog, a pig who thinks he is a dog and wants to play football! And Park also reminds audiences that the screenplay was in preparation long before Brexit nationalism and voting!)

THE ENDLESS

US, 2017, 111 minutes, Colour.

Justin Benson, Aaron Moorhead, Tate Ellington, Callie Hernandez.

Directed by Justin Benson, Aaron Moorhead.

The Endless is a small-budget horror/terror film. It has received favourable reviews – a horror film that is different.

The film is the work of two friends, Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead who have worked together on other films, starring in this film as well as cowriting and co-directing.

At first, the narrative seems to be fairly straightforward. We are introduced to Justin and Aaron (using their actual names) who play brothers. The older brother, Justin, is protective of his younger brother. They work together. But, it emerges that they spent some years in a commune, described as a cult, 10 years. But Justin has left, spoken to the media, denouncing the cult. However, Karen who is younger and enjoyed his life at the cult tries to persuade his brother to return, at least for a day, to see the place again, to meet the people again. On the way, they pass the place where their

mother was killed in a car accident and they were rescued.

Audiences may react immediately to the idea of a cult, condemn in-group attitudes to a community which isolates itself from society, has a group-think attitude towards life, with a leader who exercises too much power and influence.

When the audience accompanies the two brothers to the cult, it does not seem quite as bad as the isolationist religious cults that proliferate in the United States. The members seem more normal than other cult members although there is a leader, who explains that he is not really a leader, Hal. There are some members that the brothers have known in the past, especially a woman who looks younger than she actually is – as does Hal. While the group wants isolation, drinking is permitted, they meet in a bar and play cards, but there is little sexual activity it would seem.

While visiting again, Justin goes jogging and encounters some unusual characters as he runs. There is also a mysterious woman who doesn't join the group so much but is seen weeping.

With this kind of alerting, the screenplay moves into the more mysterious, seeming repetitions of events, people being in two places at once (one living but also seen hanging).

Justin wants to escape back to ordinary life, Aaron is reluctant but eventually agrees.

For audiences who do not know much about the plot, a reviewer should stop here and simply indicate that there is quite a meaning in the title, endless indicating that people might be trapped – although it might have been more realistic to have cycle or cycles in the title. But, obviously, there is much more to it than that...

GURRUMUL

Australia, 2017, 97 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Paul Damien Williams.

In July 2017, the death, at age 46, was announced of Northern Territory musician and singer, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu. There were tributes from all around Australia as well as from overseas. He had developed an enormous reputation worldwide.

This documentary is a tribute to Gurrumul. It is also something of a portrait, a slight biography of a very private person, an invitation to share his music, his playing, the pleasing sound of his singing voice.

Directors and photographers had filmed extensively from 2008 to the time of his death, scenes from his home island in Arnhem Land, his performances in travel, and his friendship with Michael Hohman, a close ally, a genial man, Gurrumul's representative, a manager of a promotion company, musician himself, speaking Gurrumul's local language, able to present him to his audiences.

And, this is most important as we remember that Gurrumul was born blind. At times the screen goes dark, inviting to share Gurrumul's experience of not seeing but hearing, and the uncertainties of what he is hearing, the vastness of the space outside himself in which he has to move. This is where Michael Hohman is most helpful, physically guiding Gurrumul in the spaces, on stage, an acknowledgement of audiences. And, Gurrumul himself is very private, shy, rather prone to non-speaking.

The film sketches aboriginal life on the island, comments by his sister, showing the pride of his father, the love and care of his mother and his grief at her death. There are plenty of scenes of adult aborigines and their life, children playing, many especially during the final credits until we come again to Gurrumul's profile.

He was gifted as a child, a love for music, playing the guitar upside down because he was left-handed. He played a number of instruments. And he appeared in bands Yothu Yindi.

But it was his songs and his singing, traditional songs with acknowledgement of the Rainbow Serpent myth, families and their relationship to the land and to nature. His songs were in native languages, flecked with animal sounds and cries. He also sang sometimes in English – with a scene in the film duetting with Sting.

When he went solo, he began a career but was not particularly interested in fame, money. His records were popular, going to the top of charts, even in the US, receiving Aria awards in Australia, walking the red carpet, but neglecting to go on a pre-planned tour of the United States.

The film builds up his musical repertoire, scenes of orchestras including Michael Hohman playing. And the culmination is his orchestral suite, his beautiful singing, all performed in the Sydney Opera House.

A most significant indigenous man. A most significant Australian.

THE GUERNSEY LITERARY AND POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY

UK, 2018, 124 minutes, Colour.

Lily James, Matthew Goode, Jessica Brown Findlay, Michiel Huisman, Katherine Parkinson, Tom Courtenay, Glen Powell, Penelope Wilton, Bronagh Gallagher.

Directed by Mike Newell.

With several Churchill films, with Dunkirk, with Their Finest, and with popular films for seniors like the Exotic Marigold hotel films, there seems to be a deep cinematic nostalgia in Britain. Which asks the question about Brexit and the U.K.'s focus on itself.

This film belongs to that group.

It is certainly a mouthful of a title. But it tells us that we are in the island of Guernsey, that there is a literary society, that has something to do with potatoes and potato peels. The setting is the island during World War II and the occupation by the Germans. There are also many sequences about the post-war life on the island, especially 1946.

The opening sets the tone. One night on the island during the occupation, a group of rowdy men and women come bumbling through the woods and are bailed up by German sentries. They have been enjoying an illicit dinner, consuming a pig that had been fostered in secret. A bit tipsy, they explain to the sentries that they are part of the society which gathers for reading. They are asked to register the next morning and realise that they had better keep up the pretence and make it a reality. For almost 4 years, they meet regularly, escaping from the occupation into the land of the imagination and literature.

After the war, a successful author, Juliet, played by Lily James, managed by Sydney, Matthew Goode, receives a request from Guernsey for a copy of Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare as well as a box of memorabilia from the island. As she goes through the material, she becomes more interested in the literary society and decides to go to investigate personally and use this as a basis for an article commissioned by The Times.

It doesn't quite work out that way. Juliet experiences the hardships after the war, makes friends with the farmer who had the pig and the little girl that he looks after like a father, makes friends with the post office head and his grandson, enjoys the company of an island woman who makes complex gins. But she is received in quite a hostile way by an older woman who does not want the society to be written about, especially for the papers. A group of British character actors portrays this group, Michiel Hausman is the farmer, Tom Courtenay in the post office, Katherine Parkinson with her distillery, and Penelope Wilton is the hostile Eliza.

As she gets to know more about the members of the society, especially another woman, Elizabeth (Jessica Brown Findlay) who has disappeared from the island, the other members begin to fill in the background, the question of a relationship with a German soldier, with a child, with arrests and internment in concentration camps...

Juliet has accepted a proposal by an American soldier (Glen Powell) but, it is clear to us before it is clear to her, that she will be attracted by the farmer. The American is instrumental in finding out the fate of the woman who disappeared, a sad and generous fate, and comes to the island and immediately senses what has happened.

This is British nostalgia at its most attractive, dignifying of the past, wartime heroism, disappointments and oppression, and romance.

It would be surprising if this film is not a great hit with its target, older, audience.

I FEEL PRETTY

US, 2018, 110 minutes, Colour.

Amy Schumer, Michelle Williams, Tom Hopper, Rory Scovel, Adrian Martinez, Emily Ratajkowski, Busy Phillips, Lauren Hutton, Naomi Campbell.

Directed by Abby Kohn, Marc Silverstein.

The title is a commonly used phrase but, it gets a bit of prominence by its presence as a lyric in West Side Story. In this film, comedian Amy Schumer (she would probably agree that she is not "pretty") gets a chance to feel pretty well not appearing as pretty!

One of the morals of the story is that being pretty is merely an external quality. The more important thing is "beauty" which, even if it is not on the outside, is very much on the inside.

This rather sounds like a bit of moralising at the beginning of a review. However, the screenplay does become more and more didactic as it goes on with Amy Schumer as Renée practically giving a homily on this theme at the end of the film.

Renee works in a narrow little room as a contact for a huge cosmetics company which has a skyscraper block of offices in Uptown New York City. She yearns to be pretty, going to a gym for exercising in bike riding (being embarrassed by the receptionist questioning her about the size of her

shoes), peddling like mad, surrounded by ultra sleek pretty models, and then crashing off her bike. When she does this a second time, it affects her head and her mind. As she looks in the mirror, we seeing her as she still really is, she believes she is ultra-pretty and proceeds to follow this delusion.

So, the point is being made, with comedy touches, verbal and visual, that many women pay too much attention to prettiness, believing marketing and advertising, setting up an unreal ideal for themselves and disappointed if it is not achieved.

But, for the moment, it does give Renee some confidence as she applies for the receptionist job in the main office, glamour rising herself, treating all visitors (although ultimately committing the sin of ignoring those were not pretty) with charm and supplying them with their favourite drinks. She also encounters the granddaughter of the founder, Avery (Michelle Williams in a comic role and sporting a very squeaky voice and low self-image). She is in charge of a new line, Diffusion, which is aimed at the “ordinary woman” who shop at places like Target.

Lauren Hutton, a top model for the last 50 years, plays the grandmother founder of the company.

Renee has good friends who are what are commonly called “plain”, one of them a bit heavier than she might want to be. Since they see her as normal, they can’t understand what is transforming her and a are very hurt. She also encounters a man at the dry cleaners and completely misinterprets the conversation, her thinking that she sees her as very glamorous which leads to dates and an initial good company but final disappointment.

Perhaps there is something to be said of people falling on their head, because it happens to Renee again and, as she looks in the mirror, she is aghast at seeing she is back to normal.

As has been noted, there is a moralising homily at the end of the film and an affirmation of being beautiful even when you are not pretty!

ISLE OF DOGS

US, 2018, 101 minutes, Colour.

Bryan Cranston, Koyu Rankin, Edward Norton, Liev Schreiber, Greta Gerwig, Bill Murray, Jeff Goldblum, Bob Balaban, Scarlett Johansson, Courtney B.Vance, Konichi Nomura, Tilda Swinton, F. Murray Abraham, Frances Mc Dormand, Fisher Stevens, Harvey Keitel, Ken Watanabe, Yoko Ono. Directed by Wes Anderson.

An animated allegory written and directed by Wes Anderson, whose 20 year career has provided an enormous range of genre films, serious undertones, humorous overtones, all kinds of comedy and parody. He also ventured into animation with The Fantastic Mr Fox. Audiences will have their different favourite Wes Anderson films This reviewer remembering happily the Royal Tennenbaums and, especially, The Grand Budapest Hotel.

The animation in this film looks a bit rough and ready, all to the film’s advantage. There is no smooth drawing for characters most of whom are dogs. The movements of the characters are not smooth either, but humorously jerky and angular. There is a great deal of attention given to the backgrounds, especially the wastelands of the actual island where the dogs are exiled. This is not a pretty-pretty location film. Which means that just visually, there is a great deal of edge.

And the voice cast! It is led by Bryan Cranston and Koyu Rankin. Many of the cast have appeared in

other Wes Anderson films and are welcome back, some having much more to say than others – and, some silent!

The film has a Japanese setting – which some would-be purists object to, Americans capitalising on Japanese characters and themes. But, this seems to be too much objection. One of the writers, who voices the Mayor in the film, is Japanese. And the central character, a young lad of 12, is reminiscent of and probably a tribute to the many animated films from Studio Ghibli and other studios.

The dialogue is certainly worth listening to, full of humour, full of spoof, full of parody – but, with quite an underlying seriousness.

The film goes back into earlier centuries with history of the status of dogs in Japanese households. It leads to a revolution where the population turn against their dogs, preferring cats, and the powers that be of a leading family decree the exiling of all dogs to an island off the coast. The population seeming to agree complacently and all the dogs are rather brutally rounded up and even brutally deposited on the island where they have to survive, make do, scrounge, break friendships, fight amongst each other.

The life of the dogs on the island is often very amusing, often very challenging. The key event is the arrival of the adopted son of the Mayor taking a plane and crash landing on the island to find his pet dog. So, the film becomes something of a quest, the outlaw dog, voiced by Bryan Cranston, becoming a friend and an ally. There is also a show dog, voiced by Scarlett Johansson, who has an interesting history and contributes to the quest.

Most of the reviewers spent their time talking about the animation, the cast, the humour, Wes Anderson's perspective. But, when one comes to think about it, the film serves as a contemporary social allegory, getting rid of the dogs seems to be an allegory of any ethnic cleansing. Those who are ethnically cleansed have to move into exile as do the dogs on their island. The critique is also of the wealthy, their corrupt use of wealth and power, manipulation of the public.

This means that *Isle of Dogs* works on two levels, that of popular entertainment – but, very seriously, an allegory of contemporary social injustices.

JULIUS CAESAR: NATIONAL THEATRE LIVE

UK, 2018, 120 minutes, Colour.

David Calder, Ben Whishaw, David Morrissey, Michelle Fairley, Adjoah Andoh.

Directed by Nicholas Hytner.

This is a film version of the production by the National Theatre, at the new Bridge Theatre, the play being staged in the round, the audience becoming participant in the play, especially for crowd scenes.

There is a prologue, a rock concert in the theatre, uniting the audience and their response. While this may have worked very well in reality, unless the audience is really tuned into rock 'n' roll, this 10 minutes is rather something of an ordeal – but redeemed by the fact that the players all move into the performance as significant characters.

The film has a very strong cast. It is set in the present day with contemporary dress. It also is rather multiracial in the selection of the cast, Asian background for Calpurnia, Octavius is black, as are some

of the rock band and performers. There are several changes from male characters into female characters, most significantly Michelle Fairley as an excellent Cassius.

The principal men very strong. David Calder is an excellently arrogant Julius Caesar. Ben Whishaw, something of a whisp of a man, rises to strong stature as a scholarly Brutus. David Morrissey is a man of the people as Mark Anthony.

There is a very full use of the text and, with the cast, it is expertly spoken, clearly, the verse seeming natural rather than contrived, powerfully dramatic.

The theatre in the round is also used very effectively with the help of lighting, different parts of the stage, enabling wide sequences as well as movement. This is helped for the screen version by judicious use of close-ups and wider shots. This means that there is a powerful focus on the characters, their features, their body language as well as their speeches.

Swords are eliminated as weapons and there is a use of guns – with one verbal change from sword to bullet. There are quite substantial special effects, light and sound for the experience of war – and, if Shakespeare were watching today, he would possibly be very envious of these effects.

For those familiar with the play, they will be very satisfied with this performance. For those not familiar with the play, it serves as an excellent introduction.

The audience is immersed, despite the contemporary costumes, in the atmosphere of ancient Rome, the background of the power struggles, triumvirate, the role of Cicero, the role of Caesar and his foreign wars and conquests, his vanity, the offering of the crown by Mark Anthony and his seeming to refuse it. And, he is warned against the Ides of March. He is seen in triumph, warned by Calpurnia not to go to the Senate, his being persuaded by fellow senator to go. A red cloth is passed over the top of the audience indicating blood just before the assassination – by shooting. Caesar also has the opportunity to lie in state and appear as a ghost to Brutus before the battle of Philippi.

In the early part of the film are strong character is actually Cassius, hostile to Caesar and his ambitions, in earnest discussions with Brutus to persuade him to action. There is an introduction to the conspirators, especially Casca (an attention-grabbing performance by Adjoah Andoh). The audience is able to understand the ideology behind the coup against Caesar and his authoritarian ambitions.

Mark Anthony comes rather later into the play, friend of Caesar, popular, often with his accent becoming very much one with ordinary people. However, David Morrissey's performance of the Friends, Romans, Countryman speech reminds audiences of how persuasive the speech is and its effect on the Roman people.

In some performances, the latter part of the play seems something of an anti-climax focused on Brutus and the sense of failure, his doubts, Cassius and self-assertion, the presence of Mark Anthony and Octavius and the imminent defeat of the conspirators. Ben Whishaw makes this part of the play quite vivid as does the appearance of Cassius, doubts, deaths, but Brutus is unable to kill himself but relying on the servant Lucius (who has provided some background as well as some comic touches earlier).

This version is a reminder of Shakespeare's dramatic skills and the quality of Julius Caesar as a play.

LBJ

US, 2016, 98 minutes, Colour.

Woody Harrelson, Michael Stahl- David, Richard Jenkins, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jeffrey Donovan, Bill Pullman, John Burke, C.Thomas Howell, Brent Bailey.

Directed by Rob Reiner.

Lyndon Baines Johnson came to the American presidency as the result of the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963. In recent years, there have been a number of films where he has been a significant character, especially in the films about John F. Kennedy including *The Killing of Kennedy* (2013) and *Jackie* (2016). There was a significant film biography, *All The Way*, (2017) with Bryan Cranston excellent as LBJ and with Melissa Leo as Lady Bird Johnson.

This film was directed by Rob Reiner, better known as a director of light comedies and dramas but also of such films as *The Princess Bride* and *Misery*. He was to go on to make *Shock and Awe*, set in 2003 with issues of American politics and wars in the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The film is well worth seeing for Woody Harrelson's portrayal of Lyndon Johnson. He is not immediately recognisable, made up to resemble Johnson but, when he laughs, clearly Woody Harrelson. Jennifer Jason Leigh has a good role as Lady Bird Johnson. Jeffrey Donovan is JFK and Michael Stahl- David is a young, arrogant and abrasive Robert Kennedy. Bill Pullman is a progressive senator while Richard Jenkins is excellent, as usual, as the racist politician from the South, yearning for a way of life that is gradually disappearing.

At the centre of the film, with recurring images and development of this subplot, is the Kennedy visit to Dallas, the presence of Johnson and his wife, the motorcade, the shooting of the President, the reaction of the security guards in shielding Johnson, the death of the President and Walter Cronkite's television announcement.

In a sense, Kennedy is also at the centre of the film. If the film is looked at in linear fashion, from the campaign for presidency in 1960 to 1968 with Johnson's decision not to stand for re-election, Kennedy is most significant. He is the unlikely Catholic candidate for the Democratic party. He is presentable, charismatic, from a wealthy family. He is also shrewd in his political ideas as well as his deals (though the film does not treat of the Bay of Pigs nor the Missiles of October, 1962). But he is passionate about Civil Rights.

Which means that Johnson was somewhat in the shadows though he did accept nomination as Kennedy's running mate. His belief was that he made every office that he accepted a powerful influence in politics. He is seen in discussions with progressive senators, advocating compromise and yielding to get results. He is also seen with conservative Southern senators, also proposing concessions and compromise.

In the film, Johnson seems genuinely shocked at becoming president, personally disturbed but trying to maintain government, especially with advice from Robert Kennedy who is continually hostile. He treats Jackie Kennedy well allowing her to stay in the White House. He takes the oath of office in Dallas and then returns to Washington.

There are a lot of footage of Civil Rights demonstrations and protests, along with some police brutality. Johnson had opposed Civil Rights' legislation but decided to follow the Kennedy inspiration (though there is nothing of Martin Luther King in this film). He invites Kennedy speechwriter, Ted Sorensen, to write a speech for his inaugural address to the Congress. In this he continues the spirit

of Kennedy, especially for Civil Rights, gaining a great deal of support from Democrats but the hostility of members from the South, especially Richard Russell who felt he was being betrayed.

The film ends with the stirring speech which Johnson delivered with some passion, deciding to go ahead with Kennedy's vision.

There is further information about Johnson's achievement in social issues, the questions of the involvement in Vietnam and his being less liked and deciding not to stand for the presidency in 1968 (with the consequent disasters of the Nixon era).

LOVELESS/ NELYUBOV

Russia, 2017, 127 minutes, Colour.
Maryana Spivak, Aleksey Rozin, Marina Vasili.
Directed by Andrey Zvyagintsev.

With a title like "Loveless", audiences would not necessarily be expecting a cheerful entertainment. And, since the film comes from Russia, that might be another indication for very serious themes and treatment. And for those who know the films of the director, Andrey Zvyagintsev (The Return, Banishment, Elena, Leviathan), they would appreciate that for 15 years he has been looking very seriously at a Russian society, the post-Soviet era and the transition from totalitarian socialism to the impact of capitalism and individualism in society and, especially in this case, in the family.

The film opens and closes with beautifully bleak fixed camera gazing at forests, lakes, snow – and then the glimpsing of high-rise buildings in the background. We are in a Russian provincial city, the usual location for Zvyagintsev's films. After this invitation to contemplation and reflection, the camera gazes at a building – then doors suddenly burst open, children running out from school, and a focus on one young 12-year-old, walking solitary, finding a long piece of material and tossing it up into a tree branch. This is Aleksey who is then seen at home, doing his homework, finding prospective buyers of the family apartment inspecting. His parents are divorcing. We can see that he is angry, even resentful.

This is compounded when we see his mother and father and the audience is made observers, unwilling participants, in their constant and loud, bitter bickering – with a boy outside the door, weeping.

The film then spends quite an amount of time building up the characters of the mother and father, and the terrible flaws in those characters. There seems to be nothing redemptive about the mother, resenting her marriage, her unexpected pregnancy, her wanting to have an abortion, especially with her harsh mother's advice, her husband persuading her against it, her feeling her life has been ruined, that she deserves some happiness and comfort – and is willing for her husband to take custody of the son whom she resents. The father, on the other hand, seems a milder character, says that he wants his son to stay with his mother because she is the better nurturing parent for him at that age. She disagrees, saying a father is better for the son.

The next step is to find that each of them is in a new relationship. This is a threat to the father because his company, with leaders who take more fundamentalist Christian approach to morals, does not tolerate divorce. He has also taken up with a young woman, a rather clingy woman who is long-term pregnant. On the other hand, the mother is in a relationship with an older man, wealthy, divorced, with adult children.

While the parents might have forgotten their son, the audience has not. Then the news comes that he has disappeared.

The bulk of the rest of the film is concerned with the details of the search for the boy – rather intense, perhaps a bit long for many audiences who might find this section somewhat drawn out. There are volunteers for the search, groups combing through the woods, calling out the boy's name, searching a warehouse and basement, printing posters to be put around the city...

There is some suspense, of course, as to whether the boy will be found. And we are made privy to the reactions of mother and father, still some bickering between them, going to the boy's grandmother who is a severe and condemnatory woman.

In fact, with the atmosphere of the film, it is a microcosm of Russian society, and, of course, a microcosm of world society showing its self-centredness. A pervading atmosphere of lovelessness.

Oscar nominee for 2017, a powerful portrait, depressing and challenging.

ON BODY AND SOUL/ EL TESTROL EL LELEKOL

Hungary, 2017, 117 minutes, Colour.

Mrocsanyi Geza, Alexandra Borbely.

Directed by Ildiko Enyedi.

On Body and Soul is quite a striking film, Hungarian in its storytelling and perspectives but with a powerful universal impact.

The film is set in an ordinary city, scenes of people's apartments, restaurants, but most of the action taking place in an abattoir.

With the abattoir and the focus on the cattle, penned, prodded, close-ups of their eyes, their deaths, the carcasses and the blood, the hanging meat, the workers going about their tasks calmly, the abattoir as something of an image of life and human experience. While there is a lot of detail of the abattoir – and the final credits note that animals were harmed during the filming but not by the film crew because they simply photographed an abattoir at work – it is not confined to the slaughter but also to the range of members of the staff, Finance Director, Human Relations director, supervisor, as well as the various women in diverse domestic jobs.

At the film begins with another image of animals, beautiful shots of a stag and the doe in the snowy forest, their instincts, their meeting, moving towards each other and an animal affection. As it turns out, these are the animals in the dreams of the two central characters, therefore highly symbolic. Peter is the finance director at the abattoir, Maria is a supervisor and inspector. When he first sees her, standing aloof and alone as she usually does, he is fascinated, meets her in the dining room, begins a conversation – but she is very awkward in responding. As we can see almost immediately from her behaviour, she is both compulsive and obsessive in the detail of her work, in neatness, in remembering sequences and dates in exact order.

An event in the abattoir, the stealing of some pharmaceuticals, leads to a psychologist visiting and questioning all the workers, rather intrusive questions about sexual behaviour, the nature of dreams... Peter is very offhand whereas Maria is absolutely precise. It is here that the audience sees

that the two have the same dreams, the psychologist thinking this is a joke and Peter not disillusioning her. Interestingly, she actually does pinpoint from her examination who the culprit is.

Quite a deal of the film focuses on Maria, her attempts to begin some kind of communication with people, getting advice from the rather raunchy old lady who cleans on what to wear and how to walk, buying a mobile phone which she has never had, contacting Peter, having conversations which lead to a theoretical intimacy. She also goes to a music store, listening all day to records but finally buying that recommended by the woman at the counter.

Peter, meanwhile, dislikes one of the workers, warning him about having care for his work on the animals, suspecting him of the theft – and later apologising when the man is not the thief. Peter has an injured arm, lives alone quietly, a slapdash kind of life. Maria brings something out of him but, both of them being awkward, there are some misunderstandings – which will almost lead to tragedy.

The film is very well acted, the dialogue always interesting, the situation is identifiable with, the exploration of human nature, human bodily illness, the reality of the soul. This all makes *On Body and Soul* a film of high quality.

The film won the Golden Bear at the Berlinale, 2017, as well as the prize of the Ecumenical Jury and the jury of the International Film Critics.

THE OTHER SIDE OF HOPE

Finland, 2017, 98 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Aki Kaurismäki.

The Other Side of Hope is a humane film looking at the refugee situation in Europe during the years of the civil war in Syria. There were national crises in various countries of Europe, especially in Eastern Europe, with borders being blocked. On the other hand, refugees were welcomed in Germany as well as the more northern countries, especially in Scandinavia.

It is being directed by one of Finland's pre-eminent directors, Aki Kaurismäki, who has had a long career, sometimes with comedies and music, sometimes with films about relationships, and often with a social conscience.

It is clear where the director's stance on refugees is as we look at the title.

The film opens dramatically at a wharf in Helsinki, the camera focusing on a cargo of coal and a man emerging from the coal, covered in soot, but making his way out of the ship, walking the streets, finding a place to shower, and then handing himself into the police asking for asylum status. In fact, the police seem sympathetic and help him with his situation. Soon there are sequences where he is being examined by immigration officials and we hear his story, a mechanic in Damascus, returning home to find his house flattened and his parents dead, getting help from his boss, the father of his dead fiancé, to pay people smugglers to get himself and his sister out of Syria, into Turkey and across to Greece.

At the closed border of Hungary, he is separated from his sister and has spent a great deal of time and effort travelling around the Balkans and into Eastern Europe to find her. He is helped onto a ship and finds himself in Finland.

The central character, Khalid, is a very sympathetic young man and the audience is on his side hoping that he will be given refugee status – but one of the hard aspects of the film is hearing the presiding official in the court declaring, despite the audience seeing the bombings and terrible suffering in Damascus on the television, that it is safe for him to return to Syria. He effects an escape and disappears.

The film has also introduced us to a businessman, a salesman packing and leaving his wife who is alcoholic. He sells his stock of shirts and decides to buy a restaurant, and in the under-the-counter kind of deal, the previous owner takes the money and literally runs to the airport, not paying his staff. But, since the central characters of this film are quite genial, a situation arises where the owner takes out the rubbish and finds Khalid huddling in the street. It is not hard to guess where this is going to lead, with Khalid getting a job in the restaurant, getting a forged passport rather easily, dealing with the eccentric members of the staff who provide touches of comedy in their performances. There is also some comedy as the restaurant owner tries out different ways of generating business including turning the restaurant into a sushi centre with Japanese tourists and then a curry centre...

With the story being gentle on the whole, it should mean that there is a sympathetic audience, ready to appreciate the refugee situation. And this is added to by the picture of various groups of neo-Nazis, bashings and the ugly face of bigotry.

This is a film of its time touching on the sensibilities and sensitivities, especially of Europeans, but of all people facing the mass migrations of the early 21st century and those intent on closing borders.

PAUL, APOSTLE OF CHRIST

US, 2018, 107 minutes, Colour.

James Faulkner, Jim Caviezel, Olivier Martinez, John Lynch, Joanne Whalley.

Directed by Andrew Hyatt.

This biblical film was released in the same month as Garth Davis' Mary Magdalene with Rooney Mara as Mary and Joaquin Phoenix as Jesus.

Mary Magdalene was produced by a production company that was not overtly religious. Paul, Apostle of Christ, by contrast was produced by a company for faith-based films, Affirm. The screenplay, which has strong elements of realism in its presentation of Rome, is also quite devout in its presentation of its central characters in the early Christian community, their way of speaking, their faith, their outreach to the persecuted, their mutual support. Many audiences may find this too devout for their taste

This story of Paul has been made for specifically Christian audiences, the whole range of denominations. Its appeal to non-Christian audiences will be in its depiction of ancient Rome in the mid-60s, the aftermath of the fire, the rule of Nero, his persecution of Christians, their being burned as human torches in the Roman streets, their being sent into the arena to be killed by wild beasts. In this, the film is successful, providing a rather vivid picture of the times, Roman rule and oppression, the small Christian community, persecutions.

The Christian audience will also be interested in this depiction of Paul (played by James Faulkner) in his later years, a prisoner in the Mamertine prison, oppressed in his cell and flogged, given some

reprieve at the end, though finally, with great dignity and decorum, beheaded. The other central character of the film is Luke (Jim Caviezel), having written his gospel, visiting Rome to see his friend, Paul, and to continue writing of Paul's mission, ultimately, The Acts of the Apostles.

As a biblical film for a faith audience, there is much to commend in its depiction of the times – and it does incorporate into the screenplay a number of gospel texts and, especially, quotations from Paul and his epistles - with the interlude in the prison writing and listening to Paul's memoirs and dictation.

The film presupposes a great deal about the life of Jesus, his gospel message, as well as the mission of the early apostles and disciples – though there are some scenes of Paul as Saul, persecuting the Christians, especially a re-enactment of Stephen's martyrdom, with Paul's subsequent conversion, his retiring to Arabia for several years to absorb the gospel message.

The film also presupposes some knowledge of Paul and his mission, his journeys, the various communities which received his letters, their message and their tone.

A classification caution – very early in the film there are scenes of the Christians being mounted on poles in the Roman streets and being set alight and burning. Later, more by suggestion than actual scenes, the martyrdoms in the amphitheatres have gruesome overtones. Which means that the film, which might have been helpful for children and learning more about Paul and Christian history, has a more serious adult rating.

In older decades, a lot of religious instruction was done through catechisms and, especially for some Catholic schools, Bible History stories as well as those of the early church, text and drawings for the students to imagine and memorise their Bible History. In some ways, this version of Paul, Luke, the early Christians and Rome is a cinema equivalent of this kind of Bible History instruction.

(There have been some television films featuring Paul, especially the 1980 Peter and Paul with Anthony Hopkins as Paul and Robert Foxworth as Peter.)

A QUIET PLACE

US, 2018, 90 minutes, Colour.

Emily Blunt, John Krasinski, Millicent Simmonds, Noah Jupe.

Directed by John Krasinski.

It is difficult to find the right words to recommend A Quiet Place to an audience that does not usually like horror films. Recommending it to an audience which does like horror films, the best thing is to do is to highlight the monstrous creatures and the special effects, their attack on the humans.

John Krasinski is best known as a television actor, especially for the American version of The Office. In films, he has a good range, from romantic comedies to war films. In real life he is married to Emily Blunt. They worked together for this film, Krasinski developing the story, cowriting the screenplay, taking the central role as the father of the family, and showing skill in directing. Emily Blunt, always a strong screen presence, plays the mother.

This is a post-apocalyptic story. However, there is practically no explanation of the situations, the background of the disaster. We see newspaper headlines highlighting news that people are fleeing New York. The film opens in an abandoned countryside, looking attractive, but in no way populated.

The family go into a deserted supermarket, stocking up on supplies.

But, there is eerie silence.

There is a jump-out-of-your seat-moment concerning the youngest child in the family who has picked up a toy and started to make a sound. The father takes the battery out of the plane and then leads the whole family, single file, further out into the woods. When the little boy puts the battery in again, the father is anxious, runs to save his boy but...

The situation is that there are monsters around. They are attracted by noise and attack the humans. Which means then that not only is the countryside eerily deserted but it is eerily quiet. No one can speak. They have to tread softly. And to communicate they have to use sign language. In fact, the oldest daughter is deaf and mute – played by Millicent Simmonds who in real life is also hearing-impaired. The younger brother is played by Noah Dupe who was the little boy's friend in the film, *Wonder*.

Eventually, the family settle in a country house with a big barn, the father setting up protection, a string of lights, a warning system when they turn red, and continuing to experiment with implants for his daughter's hearing.

Though without sounds and talk, life continues in a somewhat ordinary vein, the mother teaching her son maths, the father working, his taking his son fishing and going to a waterfall where, in fact, they can talk and even shout, the daughter, however, feeling alienated. She feels she is not loved, has moments of resentment, goes out to the memorial place for her little brother.

As they have lived some time and in the countryside, we see that the wife is pregnant.

This means that the film has set up the situation well for some kind of final confrontation. It is heightened when the creatures invade the house, the little girl seems lost, father and son are returning from the waterfall, the mother's waters break and birth is imminent.

Horror fans will appreciate seeing the vicious monsters, their sweeping, stalking, threatening brother and sister in a corn silo. Other audiences who are experiencing the film as a terror film, identifying with the family, may prefer that the monsters were suggested atmospherically rather than their being so ugly and visible.

The film has received very good reviews from the critics and, within 10 days had made \$50 million at the US box office. Not bad for a 90 minute film, a terror drama with touches of horror, the story of a family in peril.

RAMPAGE

US, 2018, 107 minutes, Colour.

Dwayne Johnson, Naomi Harris, Malin Akerman, Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Jake Lacey, Joe Manganiello, Marley Shelton.

Directed by Brad Peyton.

Rampage lives up to its name. However, the advertising tagline is somewhat misleading, "Big meets Bigger". It really should be "Big meets Biggest" or even "Big meets the Biggest Biggest". Even the title could be Rampagest.

In the old days, this kind of matinee material would have been enjoyed as what was then called “a hoot”. It is action-packed, does not really let up until the final credits.

In fact, in the opening five minutes, there are some rather spectacular space vistas, a spacecraft laboratory, experiments gone wrong, explosions, phials hurtling to earth, an explanation about “Genetic Editing”, its failure to cure humans, one being banned by the American government in 2016, then a mini-safari in the San Diego Wild Sanctuary, an encounter with an albino gorilla, whose name is George, and some sign language dialogue between George and the local primatologist, Davis, played by Dwayne Johnson. A fairly full introduction!

In the meantime, there are two very nasty villains, brother and sister. They run the company behind the spacecraft experiments, wanting to develop samples that would affect animals and be able to use them as weapons. She is ruthlessly intelligent, no redeeming features, Claire, played by Malin Akerman. Her brother, Brett, Jake Lacey, is a bit of a nincompoop.

As you might expect, George is infected, grows larger and larger, more and more violent, has to be caged, but then breaks out. Actually, a wolf in Wyoming is also infected as is an alligator in the bayous of Florida.

The primatologist is bewildered but a scientist who has been involved in the experiments, Kate Caldwell, played by Naomie Harris, hears the news and hurries to the sanctuary. She is not believed – and when a special agent, with a more than emphasised Southern drawl, Russell, played by Jeffrey Dean Morgan, turns up, both Kate and Davis are under suspicion, bound and put on a plane along with George. Because George has been so personal with Davis and their mutual signing, with some humour, it means that the audience identifies with George all the way through. Obviously, the military overestimate their capacities and mayhem is let loose on the plane, but the three central characters, Russell being rescued on Davis’ back, escape and are parachuted to earth.

What aggravates the situation and leads to destruction upon destruction is that Claire is determined to have the animals come to the Chicago office, setting up a sonar on the top of the Sears building, uniting the gorilla and the wolf in their quest, no holds barred. The military is disturbed, trying to curtail the progress, delaying in evacuating Chicago, dismayed as the rampage continues and George goes beyond King Kong, climbing and destroying buildings in Chicago, with the wolf able to fly and swoop. And city destruction by Godzilla also comes to mind.

Naturally, there is a deadline which leads to split second timing for the solution to all the problems. This involves Davis and Kate going to the Sears building, confronting Claire who is completely unlikable and, when she dies spectacularly, the audience is tempted to cheer loudly.

The action is non-stop, the special effects very exciting, a lot of deadpan dialogue with Dwayne Johnson as usual self-deprecating and some dialogue like “don’t die on me” or “off to save the world...”.

Rampage is critic proof. However, it does what it set out to do, action entertainment for 10-year-old boys (of any age) and this time, with female scientist and female arch-villain, for 10-year-old girls (of any age).

The film to see if you are after an entertaining hoot.

TRUTH OR DARE

US, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.

Lucy Hale, Tyler Posey, Violet Beane, Sophia Ali, Landon Liboiron, Nolan Gerard Funk, Sam Lerner, Hayden Szeto.

Directed by Jeff Wardlow.

How to review this film? Probably the best way is to respond to the challenge of the title, truth or dare. In this scenario, those who tell the truth generally benefit. Those who dare are asked to do something impossible and/or immoral and suffer the consequences.

So. One of the truths is that this film is geared towards a young adult audience. The main characters are all in their final year at college, going on their Spring Break. It is the 20 plus or minus age group that is the target for the marketing of Truth or Dare. Perhaps those a little older may think it reminds them too much of their past and they would be happy to forget aspects of it. For those even older, the film may seem even younger!.

This is one of those horror films that emerge in rather great numbers every year. There is usually a group of young men and young women, a mysterious character, and they are asked to be involved in something that they normally would avoid – in this case to play a game of Truth or Dare while visiting the ruins of a mission in Mexico. Not a good sign.

In fact, the writers of the screenplay have enjoyed themselves with a whole lot of hocus-pocus. It claims that diabolical entities which can be called up – in this case, Mexican evil entities – can possess not only people but objects and ideas. This time the evil spirit is possessing the game of Truth or Dare.

And, there is a religious dimension to the hocus-pocus. The setting is a Catholic mission set up in the 19th century. There has been something of a massacre in the mid-1960s – where a group of young women had become novices in a religious order and were under the guidance of the local priest (seen only in a photograph and then his face fading from the photograph) who was something of a sexual predator. The spirit was called up so that people might be freed but, in fact, the spirit possesses the game and, from game to game, a player is possessed and continues to find friends who might be able to liberate them – all for them to be in turn possessed and destroyed.

Which means that the group on spring break, having a somewhat wild time drinking, dancing, flirting, are persuaded by their very serious friend, Olivia (Lucy Hale) to respond to the invitation of a mysterious young man to play the game.

Some rather blunt truth is told, and the game follows them home or, perhaps, more realistically, has taken possession of them. What happens is that those who tend to tell the Truth continue to survive whereas those who try the Dare initiative die, gruesomely.

This raises even more tensions amongst the group, their trying to work together, overcome some disastrous truths which are revealed, contact a woman who had been part of the game and whom the audience has seen setting fire to a woman in a supermarket at the beginning of the film. They talk with the police. They also track down one of the original novices from the Mexican mission – who had called up the spirit, cut out her tongue in order to eliminate the presence of the spirit, has a formula for incantation by which the spirit can return from whence it came.

Needless to say, it doesn't quite work out that way which is part of the entertainment value of this

kind of horror exercise. Who will survive? Will anyone survive? Is the spirit still possessing the game somewhere or other in California?

UNSANE

US, 2018, 98 minutes, Colour.

Claire Foy, Joshua Leonard, Juno Temple, Jay Pharaoh, Amy Irving, Matt Damon.

Directed by Steven Soderbergh.

Do we actually use the word “unsane”? Is it something of a mixture of sane and insane? Can it imply that somebody can be sane and insane at the same time?

Director Steven Soderbergh, with a strong career in films, Cannes award for *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, and an Oscar for *Traffic*, decided that he would stop making films and turn his attention to television. His decision for a new direction in work did not last long and in 2017 he released *Logan Lucky* and in 2018, *Unsane*.

The star of the film is British Claire Foy, who made such an impression as the Queen in *The Crown* and appeared also in *Breathe*. We first see her in her office at a bank, in a Pennsylvania city, treating a phone client with some severity. The worker in the next desk comments on her harsh approach. However, Seymour (she explains her name, that she was called after her maternal grandfather) is a success at work, praised by the boss, suggesting she travel with him to a conference in New Orleans – though she seems to have a quizzical response, suggestive that he is being suggestive.

Then, she goes to a bar, meeting up with a man whom she had contacted through an app, seemingly permissive but then suddenly stopping. So far, perhaps so ordinary.

However, she has been troubled by a stalker for two years, moving away from her mother (Amy Irving) and from Boston. She decides to go to a therapist and explains her fears and answers questions about contemplating suicide. Suddenly, she is interned in an institution for 24 hours, the staff suspicious of her responses, rather Cuckoo’s Nest in their application of rules and regulations. She finds herself in a dormitory, tormented by the young woman in the next bed, Allison (Juno Temple).

An explanation is given that institutions like this are dependent on insurance income and can keep intended patients as inmates for as long as companies are prepared to pay the insurance. (To be a particular interest for Soderbergh who explored the exploitation of medication and institutions in his film, *Side Effects*, 2013.)

As the film develops, and Seymour finds herself confined, she denounces one of the workers as her stalker. The authorities say that he has been definitely checked and, in fact, he is in charge of the distribution of the medication each night.

At one stage, we might have been suspicious that all this was going on in Seymour’s head, that she had imagined the stalker. Yet, here it is (Joshua Leonard) and sometimes in charge of Seymour.

She does make friends with another inmate, Nate (Jay Pharaoh) who tells her about the insurance scams and lends her his mobile phone so that she can make contact with her mother who hurriedly drops everything at home and hurries to her daughter, making demands, taking strong stances.

The plot does get quite complicated as it goes on, Seymour and her dealings with the alleged stalker, his behaviour, his interactions with Nate, his plans for a happy life with Seymour.

There is plenty of melodrama here, especially in a final confrontation, police investigations, media investigations into the ethics of the institution...

And, with Seymour returning to work, and some of her behaviour, we begin to wonder what has really happened...

WALKING OUT

US, 2017, 95 minutes, Colour.

Matt Bomer, Josh Wiggins, Bill Pullman, Alex Neustadedter, Lily Gladstone.

Directed by Alex Smith, Andrew J. Smith.

The title is to be taken very literally – not a walking out on someone or some difficult situation but rather a frontier story, people trapped in the wilds of nature, and having to walk out for survival.

The setting for this frontier film is the state of Montana, the Rockies and its mountains, the snow and ice, and the billboard at the local airport proclaiming that this is 'Big Sky' country.

A 14-year-old boy is on a small plane, with his phone playing computer games, of course, coming up from Texas where he lives with his mother to have an annual holiday with his father who works as a hunter in the region. Josh Wiggins gives a convincing performance as the boy, David.

His father, Cal, is played by Matt Bomer (who doesn't look and seem quite ruggedly grizzled enough to have grown-up in the area and to be hunter in such terrain).

Clearly, this is going to be a film about father-son bonding, the 14-year-old rather unwilling (and having to give up his computer game playing), the father loving but demanding. David is to shoot his first moose. The boy is not such a good shot and, even practising shooting birds, misses more than hits.

This is even more than a father-son relationship film because there are continuous flashbacks throughout the film to Cal and his father, Clyde (Bill Pullman). Cal remembers being a little boy with his father but also as a 14-year-old and, eventually, revealing his own experience in shooting at a moose.

It has to be said that the scenic photography is beautiful, even when it is threatening.

Cal is very careful, noting tracks, instructing his son, confrontation with an elk, coming across a grizzly bear, later finding some wounded cubs. There are talks – and there is a moose (as well as carefree and callous tourists who just shoot for the sake of shooting and leave carcasses around, a contrast with Cal and his believing that hunting is for meat and supply).

Since the title indicates walking out, we know that there will be some difficulties encountered and, at times, these are graphic. In fact, the walking out aspect of the film is very visual, endurance for father and son which makes some endurance demands on the attention of the audience.

The experience is the making of the boy, not as we might have expected at the beginning, but the

boy helping his father, appreciating his father more, which means that in future father-son relationships, David will have much to hand on to his son.

The directors of the film, Alex and Andrew J. Smith, are originally from England but clearly have made their home in Montana.

WESTWIND: DJALU'S LEGACY

Australia, 2017, 86 minutes, Colour.
Djalu Gurruwiwi, Larry Gurruwiwi....
Directed by Ben Strunin.

At the same time as there was the documentary, Gurrumul, the life of the famed Arnhem land musician and singer, Geoffrey Gurrumul Unupingu, there was this documentary, also from Arnhem Land, about another musician, Djalu Gurruwiwi and his son, Larry.

One of the main breakthroughs for the indigenous people of Australia is in the field of music, song and dance. This film also has a focus on the indigenous musical instrument, the didgeridoo.

It comes as something of a surprise to find that Djalu has been on several international tours over the years and is seen in this film playing in Florence, in Paris, at the British library in London.

Djalu is an elder, taught by his father, attempting to hand over the traditions to his son. However, the son, who at times was a significant footballer, was not so much interested in what his father had to offer but, rather, started his own band, leading it as a popular singer. In later years, there is much more rapport between father and son.

The screenplay offers a lot of information about the tradition of song lines, aboriginal myths – dramatised by a very colourful animation of the rainbow serpent moving through the countryside. Djalu's wife, sister and other relations provide the talking heads and the comments about the importance of song lines and the holding on to language and traditions.

Djalu is also the maker of didgeridoos. There is a lot of information and visual presentation of the finding of the trees, the chopping down of the trees, the hollowing of the trees, the planing of the surfaces, the range of instruments and the quality of the sounds of the didgeridoo.

The contemporary singers and musicians, Larry and Gottye, visit Arnhem land and they share the musical experiences, the playing of the didgeridoo, the lyrics of songs, their combining in singing the songs. It is a humane meeting of minds and hearts, between Blacks and Whites, through music. And this culminates with the group performing to an enthusiastic audience at the Adelaide music Festival, Womade.

This is a film for the indigenous people to be proud of, Djalu and his talent and achievement. This is a film for the latecomers to the land to see and to appreciate the mythical and music traditions that were here before them.

REVIEWS JUNE 2018

AMANT DOUBLE L' / DOUBLE LOVER

BROTHERS' NEST
CARGO
CHAPPAQUIDICK
CROOKED HOUSE
DEADPOOL 2
DISOBEDIENCE
EXCEPTION, The
GATEWAY, The
GRINGO
LIFE OF THE PARTY
LOST IN PARIS/ PARIS PIEDS NUS
MY FRIEND DAHMER
OCEAN'S EIGHT
SOLO, A STAR WARS STORY
SONG KEEPERS, The
TEA WITH THE DAMES
TULLY

L'AMANT DOUBLE/DOUBLE LOVER

France, 2017, 104 minutes, Colour.

Marine Vacht, Jeremie Renier, Jacqueline Bissett, Myriam Boyer.

Directed by François Ozon.

A more than suitable and informative title for this film might have been *Unsane* – but Steven Soderberg had taken it for his psychological thriller about a young woman caught up in her psychological problems, clashes with psychologists, and the audience wondering what was real and what was happening in the young woman's mind.

This time a young woman, in Paris, Chloe (Marine Vacht), is physically ill but her doctor recommends her going to a therapist. She chooses a male therapist, Paul Mayer, who is an intense listener rather than intervening as she explains her life and her problems. However, she becomes infatuated with him, he with her and the therapy has to end. Paul moves in with Chloe. He now works in a hospital and she gets a job in a museum as one of those men and women who sit for security sake observing the visitors. (The paintings and sculptures are more than a touch of weird.)

So far, so psychological. However, coming home by bus one evening, she sees Paul talking to a woman outside a building where she knew he would not be present. She goes back to the building and finds a psychiatrist there, Louis Delord, Paul's true surname but which he had changed. She begins some therapy with him. He is the opposite to Paul, abrupt, intervening, demanding and very conscious of collecting his fee. She becomes more and more involved and deceiving Paul who by now is truly in love with her and proposes.

One of the features of Chloe's life is her dreams, planning to go to a dream therapist but going to Louis instead.

Once the relationship between her and the two men is established, she has more and more vivid dreams, erotic dreams, and the audience at times is not too sure which is dream and which is reality – too far-fetched to be real.

The film offers a lot of reflections on relationships between twins, bonding, rivalry, hatred – and a physiological theory that in the mother's womb, one of the twins can absorb the life of the other.

And this is compounded by Louis admitting that he and Paul are twins (which the audience immediately realised, although Jeremie Renier does good work in making the two similar but different) and there is enormous sibling rivalry. The name of a young woman from the past is mentioned and Chloe goes to visit her, finding her the victim of a car accident, helpless in a wheelchair, looked after by her mother (an interesting French-speaking role for Jacqueline Bissett).

And, just as we might have been sorting out what was really happening to Chloe and in her dreams, there are even more complications. As with Soderberg's *Unsane*, some reviewers have been very critical of the difficulties in following the plotline, seeming to think that this is all a narrative presented realistically. However, realising that this is a blend of reality and fantasy, where life and dream (and we have to keep checking if we can appreciate which is which), the film becomes quite intriguing, at one moment everything seeming to be reconciled, at the last moment the audience wondering whether this is true or not.

The film was directed by François Ozon, who for 20 years has been making a range of quite striking and varied French films.

BROTHERS' NEST

Australia, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.

Shane Jacobson, Clayton Jacobson, Kym Gyngell, Lynette Curran, Sarah Snook.

Directed by Clayton Jacobson.

Especially with the comedy film, *Kenny*, and, with other film and television appearances, Shane Jacobson is by now strongly associated with Australian comedy.

But, caution. Not here.

As the film opens, we see Shane Jacobson and his brother Clayton as obvious lookalike brothers, cycling outside the town to a used-car dump and to a house which belonged to their parents. They change into boiler suits, start cleaning the house, Terry (Shane) rather bemused his wary about following the lead of his older brother, Jeffrey (Clayton). Terry is rather laid-back but Jeffrey seems to be rather obsessive, sitting down with his brother early in the morning of their visit to the house with an extraordinarily detailed timetable for their activities for the day.

If this was a first review of *Brothers' Nest* [?](#) that someone were to read, the review should end here except to add that it is sometimes frightening, sometimes very black, some sardonic humour, and a bit of a shock film for the Jacobson brothers to be in.

But, many other reviews will indicate that the brothers have murder in mind and that this preoccupies them for most of the film. We learn their reasons, their deceptions, their alibis, their being upset at their father's suicide, their love for their mother (Lynette Curran) who is dying of cancer, acknowledging that their mother's new husband, Rodger (Kym Gyngell) loves their mother but has usurped the place of their father.

So, as the day goes on, the brothers realise that meticulously planned murders need to be more meticulous than they anticipated. So much can go wrong. So much is unforeseen.

When Rodger arrives at the house, there is an effective dramatic sequence when the brothers, especially Jeffrey, vent their angers on Rodger. There are also some tense dramatic sequences when their mother comes into the house and is bewildered by what she finds.

As has been suggested, to get away with murder, careful planning beyond careful is needed. And, who knows what the reactions will be if two people are part of the plan and begin to differ.

At the beginning of the film, the name of Sarah Snook appears in the opening credits. Just to reassure audiences who may be wondering when she is coming in, it is best to say that she comes in at the end, giving the audience an opportunity to think over what their reactions have been to the events, to the two brothers, to Rodger and the brothers' mother, and see what has happened through her questioning eyes.

Of its kind, which may not appeal to gentler sensitivities, this story of murder in mind is intriguing and effective.

CARGO

Australia, 2017, 105 minutes, Colour.

Martin Freeman, Anthony Hayes, Susie Porter, Caren Pistorius, Kris McNQuade, Natasha Wanganeen, Bruce R.Carter, Simone Landers, David Gulpilil.

Directed by Yolanda Ramke, Ben Hollows.

Were one to ask the average filmgoer whether they wanted to see a zombie film or not, the answer, most likely, is not. On the other hand, a younger demographic might well answer that they would. And, whatever the age or generation, aficionados of the long spate of zombie films, especially in recent decades, as well as television series like *The Walking Dead*, might well rush to say that they definitely would.

Best to say immediately, *Cargo* is a zombie film.

Best to say immediately afterwards, *Cargo* is not your usual zombie film and it could well have a much wider appeal than just for zombie fans.

It began life as a seven minute short film. The writer, Yolanda Ramke decided to expand the short into feature length and joined with fellow-director, Ben Hollows, to make this feature. They went out into the landscapes of South Australia, choosing desert landscapes, bush landscapes, the Murray River... All of which are filmed beautifully using helicopters and drones. This is a very attractive countryside for the living dead. Not that we see so many of the living dead. That is one of the more relaxing features of watching this film.

The focus throughout is on Andy, played with quite some sensitivity by British actor, Martin Freeman (best known for, take your pick, the Hobbit or Dr Watson to Benedict Cumberbatch as Sherlock Holmes). As with the quiet horror film, *A Quiet Place*, the setting is post-Apocalyptic, an epidemic not explained at all, decimating the population and turning many into the living dead. Andy is on a boat on the Murray with his wife Kay (Susie Porter) and their one-year-old baby, Rosie. They are in search of food, the parents wanting to protect their daughter at all costs.

It is not really a spoiler to say that Kay becomes infected and dies, leaving Andy to travel through the

bush, trying to find food and shelter, with a wristband counting down 48 hours since he potentially became infected.

At the opening the film, a young aboriginal girl, Thoomi, is seen running through the desert. She will later appear again and become an important character in Andy's journey to safety. In fact, with white paint on her face, she has been feeding her transformed father and is in search of the Cleverman who has the power, she thinks and hopes, to heal her father.

Andy meets very few people along the way, only a smattering and scattering of the living dead. He gets to the small town and meets a former teacher who is very hospitable (Kris McQuade) who urges him on. He rescues a man pinioned by cylinders, Vic (Anthony Hayes) who has been working on a gas line who takes him to his temporary home where he finds the wife of one of the workers, Lorraine (Caren Pistorius). One of Vic's pastimes is to put a zombie in a cage which then is a taunt to the other living dead to come to consume it, meanwhile firing his rifle to destroy as many zombies as possible. He urges Andy to learn to fire a rifle and join in.

Time is running out, and Andy wants to find a safe place and sympathetic people to look after Rosie. He does encounter a family – but that turns out tragically for the family. He persuades Thoomi that she has done her best for her father and she then serves as a guide and protector for Andy and Rosie.

What makes this film different from so many other zombie films which concentrate on the horror and gore and the dangers of infection and madness, is a deep humanity in Andy, audience response to the care for the baby, and Martin Freeman's very sympathetic performance as is that of Simone Landers as Thoomi.

The aboriginal theme pervades the film, the latecomer to the land being infected, some aborigines, who are able to listen to the land, escaping infection and providing shelter and hope among them for the little white baby. The film released in cinemas in Australia but was booked for almost immediate screening on Netflix.

CHAPPAQUIDICK

US, 2018, 107 minutes, Colour.

Jason Clarke, Ed Helms, Jim Gaffigan, Kate Mara, Bruce Dern, Olivia Thirlby, Clancy Brown.

Directed by John Curran.

It is surprising to find that this episode in the life and career of Senator Edward Kennedy, the last remaining son of tycoon and diplomat and powerbroker, Joseph Kennedy, has not been the subject of a feature film before this. Many documentaries, inquiries. In June 2019, it will be 50 years since the events portrayed.

Audiences have varied responses to members of the Kennedy family. There is great sympathy for President John F. Kennedy, the appeal of his personality, the speeches of idealism despite bungling of some of the confrontations, especially with Cuba in the 1960s, the impact of his assassination. Robert Kennedy also made a great impression as attorney general, advisor to his older brother, and then the impact of his assassination. The oldest brother, Joe, whom his father had destined for the White House was killed in action in World War II.

For many in the audience, 1969 will be something of past history if not ancient history. For those

who remember the times, they may have strong views about Ted Kennedy and his behaviour at Chappaquidick. Audiences may not remember that the events and the death of political aide, Mary Jo Kopechne, happened at the very time of the moon launch and Neil Armstrong walking on the moon, a fulfilment of John F. Kennedy's hopes, the seeming beginning of a new era for the human race – but was also a time of political unrest, Richard Nixon's presidency, disaster for Americans in Vietnam, a transition from the enormous social changes of the 1960s.

The action of the film takes place over a week. Australian actor, Jason Clarke, with touches of make up that make him sometimes uncannily look like Ted Kennedy, and with his New England accent, gives a strong performance of a man who, at this stage of his life in crisis, seems a weak man. Ed Helms has a good role as his cousin and adviser, Joseph Gargan. Kate Mara has some scenes as Mary Jo Kopechne, Jim Gaffigan as the Massachusetts Attorney General and an advisor, Clancy Brown dominantly ruthless as Robert McNamara. Bruce Dern communicates the strong personality of Joseph Kennedy despite his being inarticulate, chair-ridden, because of a stroke.

The situation is re-created, an evening party, Ted Kennedy still morose about the death of his brother a year earlier, the memories of the President, the expectations of his father (which seem to be rather low). Some drinking, some brooding, giving a lift to Mary Jo Kopechne, the bad turning onto the bridge, the car going over the bridge, his escaping from the car and sitting on the bank, Mary Jo Kopechne drowning after some time trying to breathe the remaining air in the car. While the episode was an accident, Ted Kennedy's behaviour was that of the hit-run driver, in denial, going to get friends to try to remedy the situation, promising to report the accident to the police but failing to do so, going to bed, having breakfast at the hotel with friends until he is confronted and has to act.

The screenplay has him saying to his friends as they arrive at the scene of the accident that he won't be President in 1972. And, with ups and downs, with phone calls to his father, with a visit to his father, with all the legal advisers and political bosses trying to make the best of the scenario, continually sabotaged by statements released by the police to the press, changes to the story, and even Joe Gargan advising him to do the right thing and resign, he is weak.

The theme of the film is summed up by Gargan telling Ted Kennedy that his television broadcast to the people of Massachusetts in which he accepts responsibility for leaving the scene of the accident, should be seen as a situation of integrity and not of opportunity.

The film ends with people being interviewed about their views on Kennedy and his broadcast. There is a great deal of sympathy for the family. How much to forgive? How much to forget? In fact, Kennedy was re-elected to the Senate and the end of the film reminds us that he finished as being the fourth longest serving senator, contributing to the politics of the United States.

Chappaquidick raises issues of responsibility and blame, of authenticity in people from privileged backgrounds, issues of human weakness and possibilities for redemption.

CROOKED HOUSE

UK, 2017, 115 minutes, Colour.

Max Irons, Glenn Close, Stefanie Martini, Honor Kneafsey, Christina Hendricks, Terence Stamp, Julian Sands, Gillian Anderson, Christian Mc Kay, Amanda Abington, Preston Nyman, John Heffernan, Jenny Galloway.

Directed by Gilles Paquet-Brenner.

Another Agatha Christie murder mystery.

This is one of her stand-alone novels, a young private detective involved in an investigation, not relying on her super-sleuths Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple. The setting is England in the late 1950s.

The film opens with the news of a murder, the private detective, Charlie Hayward (Max Irons) seeing the newsreel about the death of a millionaire from Greece who came to settle in England. His granddaughter, Sophie (Stefanie Martini) who had had a romance with Charlie Hayward in Cairo but broken it off, comes to his office (a bit poor and seedy with few clients) and invites him to come to investigate the death – the audience having seen only a hand an alarm in the filling a syringe and it being inserted into the old man's arm in bed.

The first part of the film, as expected, is the detective going to the mansion where three generations of the family live. It gives the opportunity for him to meet each of the suspects and for the audience to get some information, begin to get suspicions, start to make a preference list of who is the most likely murderer and who the least likely.

He meets the grand dame of the family, the dead man's sister-in-law, Edith De Haviland. We are already on familiar ground because she is played by Glenn Close, at times rather similar to her sinister presence as Cruella de Ville. There are the dead man's two sons, one bailed out of a bad gambling debt, Philip (Julian Sands) who now lives at the mansion with his would-be actress wife, a sardonic dilettante and alcoholic Magda (Gillian Anderson). The other son is Roger who manages the family business, although ineptly, (Christian McKay) and his somewhat disgruntled wife, a scientist, Clemency (Amanda Abingdon). Magda has three children, Sophia, her very young little sister, wise beyond her years, Josephine (Honor Kneafsey). She tells the detective that she too is doing her detective work and writing everything in her diary. There is also a handicapped son, Eustace (Preston Nyman), rather bitter and offhand. The millionaire's young wife, Brenda (Christina Hendricks) whom he met as a dancer at a casino he owned in Las Vegas also lives in the house, resented by everyone, except by Laurence Brown, Eustace's tutor, (John Heffernan) who is obviously in a relationship with Brenda. Finally, there is the family nurse who looks after Josephine (Jenny Galloway).

And there we are. Whodunnit?

It is rather old-fashioned in its visual style, dialogue (with Julian Fellowes, the Downton Abbey, is one of the writers).

Each of the characters, of course, has suspicious moments. The film consists of a lot of interviews with each of the characters, and there are some red herrings about the dead man's links with the CIA and anti-Communist movements.

Terence Stamp also appears as a detective from Scotland Yard. He has ups and downs with Charlie Hayward but, eventually, there are some arrests. Or are they wrong arrests?

The payoff and the murderer is not bad – depending on how high the suspect was on your list of most probable released probable.

Perhaps best recommended as an entertaining Agatha Christie night out for those who are more senior rather than those who are more junior.

DEADPOOL 2

US, 2018, 119 minutes, Colour.

Ryan Reynolds, Josh Brolin, Julian Dennison, Marina Bacarin, Zazie Beetz, Brianna Hildebrand, TJ Miller, Terry, Rob Delaney, Alan Tudyk, Eddie Marsen, Leslie Uggams, cameos: Brad Pitt, Bill Skarsgaard, Matt Damon, Terry Crews.

Directed by David Leitch.

The original Deadpool was very well received by the public. It was something of an acquired taste which moviegoers were eager to acquire. While it derives from the Marvel Universe, so-called, its characters are really at the periphery (although the film does open with a joke about Logan, a little statue impaled, with Deadpool speaking derogatorily about Wolverine – who does get the chance to appear in Hugh Jackman form at the end of the film – and uncredited, so many of the characters popping in from the X-Men [series](#)).

Deadpool is certainly an example of pop culture. However, with its tone of parody, with a variety of spoofs and send ups, with the in-references to movies and actors and actresses, with the sudden appearance of Barbra Streisand singing Papa can you hear me from Yentl, a CGI fight with Dolly Parton singing 9 to 5 in the background, with a buildup to a climax with the singing of Tomorrow from Annie, Deadpool might be considered and is an example of “flip-culture”. (Trivia, like that in the film: Barbra Streisand is Josh Brolin’s stepmother – and she thanked in the credits for giving permission to use the song and clips from Yentl.)

As regards plot! Prior to the initial credits, Deadpool, with his costume on, confronts an enormous range of villains from Hong Kong to the US with all kinds of martial arts and stunt work. And then, in a moment of quiet, he visits Vanessa “Morena Bacarin) and they discuss domestic possibility of having children. Not to be. An assassin intervenes and Deadpool, unmasked and his remnant-of-burns face is tearful.

Actually, the initial credits are examples of the flip culture with all the technical aspects being parodied by descriptions rather than by actual names, the director being referred to as one of those who were responsible for deaths in John Wick (which actual director, David Leitch, was).

And who would believe that the centre of the main plot would be a 15-year-old, chubby, New Zealander called Russell? It must mean that The Hunt for the Wilderpeople served as a marvellous audition and an entree for Julian Dennison, is able to make strong rapport with his audience, to become an international star. He has superpowers of fire in his hands but is confined to a sinister orphanage, presided over by Eddie Marsan, who parodies Gospel Beatitudes with “blessed are the wicked...” And there is a whole atmosphere that he and his staff are paedophiles.

Enter Cable, Josh Brolin taking time off from being Thanos in the Avengers series. He can time travel. He has experienced disaster in his own life, knows how the world is going to end (badly!) And wants to prevent Russell from becoming a killer. This leads to a prison break, Deadpool and his friend Weasel (TJ Miller) auditioning their own X-Force [of](#) rather inept heroes, one of the funnier and gruesome sequences in the film being their skydiving and their various spectacular demises.

The screenplay is very conscious of equality for women, so Domino (Zazie Beetz) is now black, is an extraordinary truck driver (she says her talent his Luck) and her commandeering the truck, driving through the metropolis, an enormous smasheroo sequence with probably more cars destroyed in

this film than the body count!

In one sense, the final confrontation to liberate Russell is fairly low key – but, a lot is made of it with Deadpool's heroics (which he remarks to the audience he hopes have been filmed in slow motion) combined with a giant fight between the metallic Colossus (on Deadpool's side) against the even bigger and gigantic Juggernaut (the enemy).

If this film is successful, as initial box office seems to indicate it will be, there are all kinds of directions it can go in for a sequel – time travel and remedying the past certainly enables all possibilities. (And, in the final credits, Ryan Reynolds who has made Deadpool his own, with the heroics and the deadpan references and talking to the audience, suggests that The Green Lantern isn't his most favourite film.)

Ordinary cinemagoers will have to adjust fairly quickly to the tone and style of the film. Aficionados will want more.

DISOBEDIENCE

UK/Ireland, 2017, 114 minutes, Colour.

Rachel Weisz, Rachel Mc Adams, Alessandro Nivola, Alan Corduner, Bernice Stegers.

Directed by Sebastian Lellio.

Not quite a title that would entice legions of fans into a cinema. But, for those who are interested in the title, this is quite a strong drama with impressive portraits of the central characters. It has been directed by the Chilean director, Sebastian Lellio, who has made an international impression with Chilean stories, Gloria (which he has remade in the US with Julianne Moore) and The Fantastic Woman as well as a significant American story, Jackie, dealing with the First Lady and the assassination of President Kennedy.

The theme is presented powerfully in the opening sequence, a London synagogue, strongly, sometimes fiercely, Orthodox, the men with tassels, vests, hats and Scriptures, the women separated. The old rabbi gives an interpretation of creation, highlighting that angels are pure spirits whose wills are directed to God, contrasting with the beasts who are part of creation but have no will. In the middle are humans, with free will, with the possibility of choice – and with the possibility of sinning, incurring judgement, being disobedient. He then collapses and dies. However, at the end of the film, the rabbi designated as his successor recalls this explanation of choice at the old rabbi's funeral. By then, the significance of the title and the theme of will and choice has been interestingly explored.

We are introduced to Ronit (a strong performance by Rachel Weisz), a photographer in New York City receiving a mysterious phone call to return home to London. She is the late rabbi's daughter. It emerges that she has been ostracised by the local community – and it soon emerges why. She goes to the home of the rabbi's adopted son, Dovid, Alessandro Nivola, friendly but strict in his interpretation of Orthodox customs, even to women not touching men. Ronit is surprised that he has married – and even more surprised when she meets Esti, Rachel McAdams, who was significant in Ronit's past and is now married to Dovid.

Ronit is very much an independent woman, defying the local critics of her and her behaviour, wanting to sell the rabbi's house only to find that he bequeathed it to the community. The important part of the drama is Ronit's relationship with Esti, passionate in the past, the reason for Ronit's exile,

and the dilemma for the relationship now that she has returned to England. While there is pressure on Ronit, there is even more pressure on Esti and her marriage. She is part of the community, happily teaching at a school, but disturbed by Ronit's presence.

While much of the drama is about relationships, especially about same-sex relationships and the attitudes of the community, the drama is also about independence and – with the reprisals of the rabbi's initial sermon and the focus on choice, the issue for the resolution of the drama is whether Esti will have a choice.

This is a film of emotion, sometimes passion, sometimes sadness and disappointment – and the dilemmas of obedience, disobedience, constraint, freedom and choice.

THE EXCEPTION

Belgium, 2017, 107 minutes, Colour.

Lily James, Jai Courtney, Christopher Plummer, Janet Mc Teer, Ben Daniels, Eddie Marsan.

Directed by David Leveaux.

The title for this drama, quite worth seeing, is not at all exceptional. However, the title of the novel on which it is based, *The Kaiser's Last Kiss*, is more evocative.

There always seems to be an audience for British films or films from the continent which deal with World War II. Some are based on fact. The screenplay here is based on a novel but grounded in fact.

The setting is Holland in 1940. The Nazis have just invaded Belgium and Holland. One of the principal residents of Holland is the former Kaiser, Friedrich Wilhelm, living in exile after his resignation in 1918 in a mansion in the Dutch countryside, living with his wife and an entourage. He keeps out of the way, working on the property, proud of his collection of military uniforms, feeding the ducks. He is still ideological, fixed in rather aristocratic ways (after all he was one of the many grandchildren of Queen Victoria), longing for a restoration of the monarchy.

In Berlin, a young officer, Captain Brandt, wounded in battle, reacting against an officer who had massacred many people in a village, now has a desk job but is assigned to be head of security for the Kaiser and his wife. On arrival in the town, he encounters the local security officials, the officer who manages the Royal household, the Dutch staff, including a very attractive maid.

This is a fictional story about the Kaiser and his wife but it some commentators have indicate close relationships to facts.

The Kaiser is elderly and portrayed excellently by Christopher Plummer. Janet Mc Teer is certainly very good as his wife, more ambitious than her husband, with connections in Berlin, machinating behind the scenes so that the couple will be restored to their status by Hitler.

The captain does not seem at first a particularly interesting character. He is initially seen back in Berlin with a prostitute. He is immediately seductive of the maid. He is played by Australian Jai Courtney. She is played by Lily James.

There are power struggles in the mansion, the Princess rather haughty in her manner and proud of her household, Sigurd (Ben Daniels) is the proper officer who protects the couple, making sure that the Kaiser is not indiscreet in any outbursts, especially about the Third Reich.

There is news of a British spy in the village and audiences do not have to be particularly astute to realise that it will obviously be Mierke, the maid. While she is in a relationship with Captain Brandt, she steals off to the village to meet the pastor who sends messages to Britain and receives instructions. And the captain follows into the town.

He begins to doubt his loyalties in his relationship with Mierke but there is to be a significant event. Himmler announces that he is to visit the Kaiser and his wife and dine with them. Eddie Marsan and has only a few sequences as Himmler but makes the most of them and the sinister dialogue, especially a dinner table anecdote about experiments on young children and poisoning them. The Kaiser and his wife are in fact quite repelled. Captain Brandt then questions his loyalty to his country – with the Kaiser advising him to ask what his country really is.

The possibilities raised for the Kaiser and his wife to go back to Berlin – but Himmler throws doubt on the idea. The security agents track down the radio signal and so, as you might imagine, the finale of the film is how to get the spy out of the mansion, out of danger after the pastor has been arrested and tortured. What is the Kaiser's attitude towards the maid and her behaviour? What will Captain Brandt do?

And so, there is action adventure, symbolic of the microcosm of the film and World War II focused on small Dutch village and the Kaiser's mansion.

This film, and its cast, should appeal to those who enjoy World War II stories, fact or fiction.

THE GATEWAY

Australia, 2018, 90 minutes, Colour.

Jacqueline Mc Kenzie, Myles Pollard, Hayley Mc Elhinney?, Shannon Berry, Ben Mortley, Ryan Panizza, Shirley Toohey, Troy Coward.

Directed by John V.Soto.

The Gateway was not anything like what was expected. There was talk of science fiction, horror, making it sound like one of those selections for the B-Budget? films at horror festival.

Not so.

Yes, it certainly is a science-fiction film but focused more on laboratory work, experiments with teleportation, discussions about multi-universes and parallel worlds, some science-fantasy. However, the film is also something of a domestic story, of tragedy in a family. It then moves towards more psychological drama, menace and threat in a marriage. And, all the time, exploring the possibilities of moving in and out of the parallel worlds.

The film was made in Western Australia on a small budget but generally looks very effectively and efficiently made. Perhaps the laboratories are somewhat simplified and might be said that security looks very lax! However, Jacqueline Mc Kenzie gives a strong performance as Jane Chandler, in charge of the teleporting experiments, assisted by a genially geeky Regg, Ben Mortley, and under threat from the powers that be with deadlines and budget cuts.

At home, Jane has a very nice husband-author, Matt (Myles pollard) and teenage son and daughter

(not so very strong in acting for performance, undermining the family impact).

In the lab, the experiments concern the teleporting of an apple from one vehicle to another. But, when the apple disappears, Jane suspects it has gone somewhere else in the world and, trying to find out how and where, discovers that it has gone to one of those parallel universes. Contact is made. The locations in each world are the same, the persons are the same, real cases of alter egos.

All this moves briskly along but is jarred by Matt's death in a road accident. So, when Jane gets to the lab in the other world, she meets the other Regg, and then meets the other Matt (with Myles Pollard doing quite a significantly different Matt while remaining the same).

Since this is a dramatic thriller, and Matt comes back to her own world with Jane, it will not be smooth sailing – although that is what it seems for some time, the family keeping the secret of his still being alive.

The climax moves to a combination of Jane being menaced, moving from one world to another, trying to deal with the different Matt, getting the help of the new Regg, even her getting to visit another parallel universe.

This works well enough as an interesting entertainment – although the final 30 seconds are somewhat disconcertingly unnecessary. Best to forget about them and just remember the dynamic of the film itself.

GRINGO

US, 2018, 111 minutes, Colour.

David Oyelowo, Charlize Theron, Joel Edgerton, Sharlto Copley, Thandie Newton, Amanda Seyfried, Harry Treadaway, Yul Vazquez, Bashir Shallahuddin.

Directed by Nash Edgerton.

Back in the day, Gringo was one of those white Americans who ventured into Mexico or other Latin American countries, the term of identification but not necessarily complementary. This film breaks through that barrier. The central Gringo in this film is African- American with a family coming from Nigeria. To the Mexicans, he is a Gringo.

Much of this film is set in Mexico and, as often with action films, shows us the evil and violence of the drug cartels. The cartels, their chiefs and their thugs, the murders, the attacks on the police, might seem an exaggeration until we read the headlines of contemporary Mexico and the statistics about deaths, the statistics of murders in connection with the drug cartels.

So, with this as a basis, Gringo begins in California but soon moves to Mexico. The context is pharmaceutical companies in the US and their double dealings, and one of the executives, being victimised, and sent down to Mexico – the film opening sequence having him phoning the bosses in America, screaming that he has a gun at his head, and that his attackers want \$5 million. Actually, this is rather unexpectedly enjoyable when we finally overcome the “two years earlier” flashbacks and come to the scene itself. Not as expected.

The star of the film, David Oyelowo has tended to have serious roles, Martin Luther King in Selma, the King of Botswana in A United Kingdom. His agent may have sent him this screenplay and encouraged his desire to do some comedy as well as something in an action show. He is Harold,

working for the pharmaceutical company, with a Joel Edgerton as his boss as well as Charlize Theron as his cold, calculating partner. Harold does not realise his own marriage (with Thandie Newton) is on the rocks. He suspects there is something wrong with the company, is able to download some files, he is sent to Mexico on business but to be scapegoated. Which leads to the opening sequence not being as expected!

So, there are cartel bosses, ruthless thugs, go-betweens from the company to the cartel, torture, killings, the whole Mexican cartel thing...

Meanwhile, a young Englishman is caught up in local drug deals and is sent to Mexico to recover some samples – from a prison, but originating from that pharmaceutical company. He works in a music shop and decides to invite the salesgirl to Mexico with him. They are played by Harry Treadaway and Amanda Seyfried. And their connection with Harold? They happened to be staying in the same hotel where he is hiding out... and then some!

The comic and the serious are blended together with Harold trying to escape, the cartel capo thinking that he is actually the boss of the company and therefore trying to abduct him, Harold using his wits and sometimes a gun and a car crash to elude capture. In the meantime, his boss's brother, thuggish but involved in Christian charitable works, is hired to bring Harold back to the US. The brother, again serious and comic, as well as having a long discussion with Harold about Jesus and the relative betrayals by Judas and Peter, is played by Sharlto Copley.

More accidents, more tangles, the young woman helping Harold, her boyfriend in trouble going to the prison, and exposes and double-dealing in the office in the US – with Charlize Theron, both icy and seductive, almost auditioning to be Lady Macbeth, while Joel Edgerton does his usual reliable performance.

Entertaining in its roughhouse way, as well as its comic way, as long as you don't take it too seriously while, in fact, the underlying issues in real life are very serious.

The film was directed by Nash Edgerton (Joel's brother), a long-time expert in stunt work in films which serves him quite well here.

LIFE OF THE PARTY

US, 2018, 105 minutes, Colour.

Melissa Mc Carthy, Maya Rudolph, Gillian Jacobs, Debby Ryan, Adria Arjona, Julie Bowen, Stephen Root, Luke Benward, Molly Gordon, Jacki Weaver, Falcone, Christina Aguilera.

Directed by Ben Falcone.

Probably, it all depends on how an audience takes to the comedy of Melissa Mc Carthy. She achieved some success on television but then moved to the movies with even greater success. She is a somewhat larger-than-life personality, even louder than life! She has combined with a number of actors, like Sandra Bullock in *Heat*, often providing a kind of Laurel and Hardy partnership with comic touches.

She sometimes acts with her husband, Ben Falcone, who has cowritten the screenplay with his wife, directs and has a nice cameo as a sympathetic Uber driver.

In a way, in *Life of the Party*, as Deanna, she is on her own. She does have Maya Rudolph as

Christine, a bluntly-spoken best friend, Molly Gordon has her daughter at college, and is supported by a range of her daughter's friends. Stephen Root turns up as her father in several sequences and, yes, that is Jacki Weaver as her mother.

This is a film of changing moods. It is also a women's film in the sense that yes, there are some men in the cast, one particularly obnoxious (Deanna's husband), one agreeable and charming (in love with or, infatuated, with Deanna) and a couple of husbands more or less in the background. The invitation is for women of all ages to identify with these characters, the comedy, and sadness and its consequences, the precipitation of a midlife crisis so unexpectedly.

While seeing her daughter off for the year at college, full of exuberant joy, she is bluntly told her husband that he wants to divorce her. Cataclysm in an instant. Her parents are sympathetic but her mother keeps insisting that she should make her a sandwich! She vents her feelings with hard played racquetball with her friend Christin. And then she decides to enrol in college to complete the degree in archaeology that she abandoned, on the advice of her husband, over 20 years earlier.

Then the film turns into one of those frat party comedies, raucous parties, obnoxious young girls who feel superior to everyone else, the strange group of her daughter's friends and her getting on so well with them. Her daughter comes to terms with her mother being at college, the same college, but changes her make up, her hairstyle, her clothes. And then Deanna goes extrovert off the page, drinking, dancing, a one night stand with the nice young man, then trying to break it to him that they should break off but, in the library, not succeeding.

But there are some bitter moments, comic for the audience but not for the participants when they go before an official to discuss questions of division of property – with the rule that they must address the arbitrator rather than their opposites at the table, and the poor woman officiating experiencing all the barbs and angers.

It doesn't seem to be in character at one stage when Deanna gets up to make her presentation for her course and becomes awkward, tongue-tied, sweaty, desperately in need of a glass of water, collapsing on the floor. She seemed to be too extrovertedly hardy for this to happen to her!

There is still one more let-go mayhem scene, smashing chaos let loose at her ex-husband's wedding reception, to go before the end. No, not quite, the girls decide to raise money for Deanna's course completion, which her parents are prepared to pay for, but the idea is to have a party to end all parties. Bad luck, that is the night when Christina Aguilera is performing with everybody going to the concert. Brainwave, advertise that Christina will turn up to the party. Will she? Won't she? We all know that she will – but there is an amusing reason why she does come.

Graduations, happy together, power to the women!

LOST IN PARIS/ PARIS PIEDS NUS

Belgium, 2016, 84 minutes, Colour.

Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon, Emmanuelle Riva, Pierre Richard.

Directed by Abel and Gordon.

Dominique Abel and Fiona Gordon are something of a cinema treasure and, like much treasure, has not been open to the public. A great pity. They made some short films but their features, *Rumba* and *The Fairy*, would go on many audiences lists after they see *Lost in Paris* – the French title more

evocative, Barefoot in Paris.

The two have been married since the 1980s, meeting through their love of the Circus. Belgium is their base. However, Fiona Gordon is actually Canadian but was born in Australia. She is obviously proudly Canadian because Canada and her character as a Canadian feature strongly in *Lost in Paris*.

The film is a droll comedy. However, audiences searching for raucous comedies should not look here. These films are much more subtle even when a lot of the action is slapstick. It is as if they were paying homage to the silent comedies and the type of comic performances from the time of Chaplin and Buster Keaton. The acting is quite stylised, quite a lot of mime, comic postures, exaggerated situations (early in the piece, a door is opened to an office during a blizzard and everybody performs in mime being blown at precarious angles on their chairs by the blizzard, covered in snow, resuming normal positions when the door is finally able to be shut).

There are words in the film and there is a reliance on music, from Shostakovich to Erik Satie and more contemporary songs. However, the delight is in the stylised performances, not only of the central characters, of so many of the others during the action. They include a Canadian Mountie in Paris whom Fiona keeps encountering, her aunt's exasperated neighbour at the laundromat looking for his socks, and a nurse caring for the elderly, a group of diners in fashionable restaurant (who keep bouncing in their seats as the sound system booms).

Fiona comes from Canada to seek her aunt in Paris, goes through an extraordinary number of adventures including falling into the River Seine, twice. Her aunt is played by veteran actress Emmanuelle Riva (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *Leon Morin Priest* and, Oscar-nominated in her 80s for *Amour*). She enters vigorously into the character of the ageing lady, not quite with it. At one stage she meets Norman, played by veteran French comic actor, Pierre Richard. There is a delightful interlude when they are sitting on a park bench, the music starts, and the focus is on the pair of feet tapping in time to the music and an entertaining choreography.

Speaking of choreography, there is also a delightful dance sequence in the fashionable restaurant showing that while Dominique and Fiona can do very awkward comedy, their dancing and movement has great finesse.

Dom lives on the street, in the tent, scrounging garbage bins, coming across some of Fiona's goods and backpack, surfacing on the Seine, and, by chance, encounters her at the restaurant. They are attracted but not willing to acknowledge it. They have a number of adventures, especially getting to the aunt's funeral – only to find that it is not the aunt. So, the destination of the film, though they are lost in Paris in some ways, is to find the aunt and a happy, if comic ending.

One of the best things about the screenplay is that small details at various times become very important in the later development of the plot.

Most of the action seems to take place on the Right Bank of the Seine – but, Fiona gives more meaning to the word *gauche* in her character.

MY FRIEND DAHMER

US, 2017, 107 minutes, Colour.

Ross Lynch, Anne Heche, Dallas Roberts, Alex Wolff, Vincent Kartheiser.

Directed by Michael Mayer.

Many of the audience will have some awareness of Jeffrey Dahmer, a notorious American serial killer who, in 1991, as the end of the film indicates, confessed to the murder of 17 men. There have been documentaries and some feature films about Dahmer himself and his serial killing. The danger always is the possibility of prurient curiosity from the audience being met by some sensationalism. While there is curiosity for the audience for this film, it is not sensationalist but, of course, given the foundation in fact, it is very disturbing.

The screenplay is based on a book by one of Jeffrey Dahmer school friends, Derf Backderf.

The setting is a town in Ohio, in Middle America, 1978. Dahmer is in high school, a loner. The opening sequence immediately sets a tone, Dahmer sitting by himself in the school bus, kids in the background playing 20 questions, suggesting issues of mysterious identity. Dahmer also looks out the window at a doctor who is jogging along the street, going to the back of the bus to watch him, the driver demanding that he sit down. Plenty of suggestions for audience reflection already.

So, this is a portrait of Dahmer over several months, culminating in his graduation from high school.

Once the audience sees the family, it is not difficult to realise that there could be quite some psychological problems which need attention. The mother (Anne Heche, not immediately recognisable) has mental problems, erratic behaviour, hectic and screaming one minute, loving the next. The father is much more quiet, reclusive in his laboratory, trying to cope and finding it more and more difficult, and an eventual divorce. There is a younger brother, David, presented ordinarily enough.

Dahmer has slightly stooped shoulders, walks in a kind of shuffle, mainly avoids people although he plays tennis and plays an instrument in the band. He avoids the school bullies. However, in some strange behaviour in the library, feigning and mercilessly mocking palsy and epileptic seizures, he is taken up by a group of the boys who think this is very funny and clever, continually urge him to repeat the performances, in the school corridors and, as a culmination to their fun, to behave in a berserk palsy fashion in the local Mall.

This does give some affirmation to Jeffrey, coming out of himself a little more, his father urging him to lift weights to improve his physique and helping to make friends. But Jeffrey is seen to have his own laboratory, a hut in the woods where he experiments with roadkill, saying that he is interested in bones and structure. His father, however, smashes his equipment and dismantles the hut.

The prom is coming up and Jeffrey invites, awkwardly and hesitantly, a young girl to go with him, though, at the dance, he is even more awkward and goes home.

He graduates, his mother and David going off to the grandparents because his father will be at the ceremony – and is present and gives him the gift of a car.

The film ends with sinister suggestions. Backderf, the author of the memoir, gives Jeffrey a lift in his car, noticing blood on his hands (the audience having seen Jeffrey with a knife and a dog). Jeffrey is menacing to his friend but resist the impulse. Finally, he offers lift to a shirtless hitchhiker on the road after deliberating as to what he should do – fade to black and information that the hitchhiker was never seen again and the further information about Dahmer's confession.

The screenplay offers suggestions, cues, possibilities for the explanation of Dahmer's psyche, impulses, killings.

OCEAN'S EIGHT

US, 2018, 110 minutes, Colour.

Sandra Bullock, Cate Blanchett, Anne Hathaway, Helena Bonham Carter, Rhianna, Mindy Kaling, Sarah Paulson, Richard Armitage, James Corden, Dakota Fanning, Elliot Gould, Griffin Dunne, Elizabeth Ashley, Mary Louise Wilson, Marlo Thomas, Dana Ivey, Matt Damon, Carl Reiner, Anna Wintour, John Mc Enroe, Katie Holmes, Kim Kardashian West.

Directed by Gary Ross.

Many people might have missed the news that Danny Ocean had died in 2018. (That Danny Ocean, played by Frank Sinatra in the 1960s, by George Clooney in later times.) We actually see his grave and his sister, Debbie, released from prison after five years or more actually sits there, at first taunting him, later toasting him! Apparently, heists were in the family blood.

So, that means no Oceans 14. We now go back to Oceans Eight, in this age of remakes with women taking previous men's roles. Strangely enough, the film was cowritten and directed by a man, Gary Ross. However, the cast has quite some exhibitions of women's power.

We meet Debbie, Sandra Bullock, tearfully reassuring the parole officer that she will be very good when she gets out of prison. Not a chance. Almost immediately we see her pulling a con in a fashionable New York store, pulling another one pretending to be a tourist stranded and having to take back the room she and her husband were staying in, which she comfortably occupies. It seems she has been planning a huge heist for all the time she was in prison, refining the details month by month till it all seemed the perfect heist. Spoiler alert – of course, it will be.

She meets up with her old friend Lou, chef and bkie, Cate Blanchett, and confides the plan to her. Lou is persuaded of the plausibility and they go about auditioning five other women with expertise ranging from knowledge of diamonds, IT interventions, catering management, pickpocketing and costume designing. It also offers a multi-ethnic cast, Mindy Kaling from India, Awkwafina with an Asian background, Rhianna with African- American contribution. Sarah Paulson is from the US tradition while Helena Bonham Carter, Irish accent included, is from Northern Ireland.

Part of the entertainment is watching all the women in action and their expertise, the planning of the detail of a robbery of a necklace from the neck of Anne Hathaway during the traditional First Monday in May party and exhibition at the Metropolitan, New York. (With the guest list of celebrities in the cast, from Anna Wintour to Kim Kardashian West, it may well have been filmed on location at the 2017 May Monday.)

As with the other Oceans films, there is an enormous amount of detail in the planning of the heist and the preparations as well as the split-second timing. That is one of the most interesting aspects of the film, seeing the plan go into complex action and go without a hitch. Or, rather, the hitches are part of the plan!

Just as we might have thought the film would come to an end, an insurance investigator from London, James Corden, turns up to interview everyone involved. So, after the heist, there are some other complications – and, finally, quite a complication that nobody might have anticipated and once again the split second timing for the exercise of this particular heist.

As with this kind of film, it is a glorification of crime – but always with tongue in cheek. And, the cast

of the women is quite impressive.

SOLO, A STAR WARS STORY

US, 2018, 135 minutes, Colour.

Alden Ehrenreich, Amelia Clark, Woody Harrelson, Paul Bettany, Joonas Suotamo, Donald Glover, Thandie Newton, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, voices of: Jon Favreau, Linda Hunt.

Directed by Ron Howard.

A solo Solo story. So low in early box office returns, a major financial disappointment. Moving away from the wordplay, expectations of any Star Wars film, in the series or spin-off, are very high. But audiences didn't flock to Solo as hoped for. Some suggested that it was released too soon after the previous episode in the series. Some suggested, and this has a point, that the lack of a strong adventurous female presence meant that it lacked an overall appeal.

But, the focus has to be on Han. And, for those who wondered about his name, Solo, and for those who didn't, there is a scene where he is leaving his dark planet to enlist in the Empire's air force and is questioned about his name. He has only the name, Han. And, he is alone – and so the official designates him Han Solo.

Alden Ehrenreich shows some courage in taking on the role. We all know that he has to grow into Harrison Ford, not an easy task for anyone. However, he gives it his best, young, rather cheeky, adventurous, eager for risks.

As regards the plot, long ago in the faraway galaxy, a lot of things are comparatively modern. While young Han is involved in some shady activities and is really attracted to Qi'ra (Emilia Clark), he is quickly involved in a car chase that looks like any other thriller chase only a bit more spectacular and crash-worthy. He is separated from Qi'ra, does his training in the air force, joins in battles – after all this is Star Wars.

However, he is caught up in some confusion and comes to the attention of Tobias Beckett, a space adventure and smuggler, along with his associate, Val (Woody Harrelson always welcome, Thandie Newton unfortunately killed off rather quickly). He joins them in an enterprise which provides the most spectacular part of the film, a raid on the super train, travelling through snowy and icy mountains, often on the edge of the cliffs, turning from horizontal to vertical towards its destination. The group is to steal some chemicals and, with great risks and special effects, they do so but not as intended.

They have been commissioned by Dryden Vos (a sinister Paul Bettany) and who should be in his entourage but Qi'ra. The adventurers offer to do another robbery and Qi'ra is sent to share the adventures with them. Plenty of expected Star Wars stuff here. But, there is something of a difference because Han, at one stage, is thrown down into a muddy pit and forced to fight a seeming monster – who, when washed, turns out to be none other than Chewbacca. A welcome return.

There are some twists in the plot, some goodies are really baddies and some expected baddies who turn out to be goodies – one of them are female warrior but coming in fairly late to the film.

There have to be some betrayals, there have to be some confrontations, the villain has to be thwarted – and, somehow or other those in control of the Empire have to have their say.

Partly a happy ending but, of course, an ending that the film is about Han will not be Solo but we might expect a Duo companion piece.

THE SONG KEEPERS

Australia, 2017, 87 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Naina Sen.

Most Australians would have heard of the Lutheran mission established in the 19th century at Hermannsburg, 1877, south-east of Alice Springs. One of the earliest Christian groups to work with aborigines and, while Christianising them, respecting their rights and fostering local languages, protecting their rights, especially at the time of the Stolen Generation. Albert Namatjira came from Hermannsburg. One of the features of Lutheran worship was the tradition of German hymns.

Over the years, especially in the middle of the 20th century, women's choirs were established at Hermannsburg and in various settlements, Arrarnta and Pitjantjatjara. And the hymns were translated into the local languages. The choirs had sometimes long lives, sometimes short.

The screenplay of this documentary fills out some of this historical background – enhanced by the use of a number of photos from the period as well as clips from home movies.

Then, enter a larger than life character, Morris Stuart. As the audience is wondering about where he came from, not easily identified at once as indigenous to Australia, he is revealed as coming from Latin America, from Guiana and slave families there. He is a big man with something of James Earl Jones voice and resonance. He is also a man of music. Throughout the film he speaks to camera explaining that he moved to England, met an Australian tourist, Barbara, married her and they came to Australia, moving to the Northern Territory.

He is extroverted, affable, made contact with the women at Hermannsburg and the other towns. He wanted to revive the choirs and, for 20 years or more, has not only achieved that, but has affirmed the women and their love of their stories and land, their songs, as well as their Christian devotion in the Lutheran tradition. But he was more ambitious for the women and their singing.

There is quite a lot of music throughout the film, a number of the hymns. There are there are practice sessions, rehearsals for concerts, performance. Most of the women had been in choirs earlier but responded to Morris and, despite their age and the difficulties of living in the far-flung settlements, they bond together to make the Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir. There are some men, the local activist as well as a young man whose grandfather was in choirs.

And there are a lot of interviews and storytelling spread throughout the film, many of the women having a chance to talk to camera about themselves, their lives, their music. These interviews offer pleasing opportunities for appreciating the women, their lives and their culture.

But at the core of the film is a tour to Germany by the choir. Maurice, assisted by Barbara, gathers the women together for rehearsals, planning a program of songs, contacting Lutheran churches in Germany and, an adventure for the women, the plane trip to Melbourne, Melbourne to Frankfurt and then travelling around Germany. We see the countryside, a touch of the travelogue, through the eyes of the women who have not lived in any towns or country like this.

The Lutheran communities throughout Germany come to the churches, appreciate the singing,

respond very well to Morris who conducts with some vigour. The congregations prove genial hosts to the women for this memorable tour.

This is another documentary, like *Gurramul*, like *Westwind*, which offer tributes to indigenous music makers but offers a wider audience both in Australia and overseas, find opportunities to get to know these traditions better.

TEA WITH THE DAMES

UK, 2018, 84 minutes, Colour.

Dame Judi Dench, Dame Maggie Smith, Dame Eileen Atkins, Dame Joan Plowright.

Directed by Roger Michel.

If you ever wanted to sit in on a conversation, chat between the four famous Dames, this is definitely the opportunity. Actually, there are very little tea seen, if any, but rather water and champagne! The original title, seen on the clapper boards is the quote from *South Pacific*, *Nothing Like a Dame*.

The four senior actresses, in their 80s, agreed to go to Joan Plowright's home in the countryside and to sit down and talk. There are some conversation with the filming crew, some of the new technicians at their work, and some questions from director, Roger Michel (best known for such films as *Notting Hill*, *Changing Lanes*, *My Cousin Rachel*).

The conversation begins outside in the garden, a sunny afternoon – but rain soon started to fall and everybody having to adjourn inside. And the conversation is very entertaining, the four ladies laughing with great gusto at some of the stories – and the audience somehow rather empathising so strongly that they also laugh at times with great gusto.

The film is based on anecdotes. And it is supported by quite a number of photos, some home movies, some sequences from televised plays, some film clips. In the short amount of time, there are quite a number of clips but are many in the audience would be hoping for even more.

Each of the actresses has quite a distinctive personality. Joan Plowright is the matriarch. She is legally blind, with hearing aids, still bears herself with great dignity, being assisted by a walking stick as well as her daughter guiding her. Questions are asked about her marriage to Laurence Olivier, her status as Lady Olivier, her meeting with the actor, her appearance in *The Entertainer*, subsequent appearances as well as the story of their children, the travels, his work in the National Theatre. And there are glimpses of Joan Plowright's appearances on stage and on television. In some ways she is rather proper but she also has a sense of fun and is enjoying the conversation and the memories.

Eileen Atkins is less well-known than the other three women but has had a distinguished career on stage, on television, in cinema. She speaks about her childhood, dancing, moving to acting, appearing in some kind of burlesque. She comments on her stage experience and the actors she has performed with, including her first husband, actor Julian Glover. She has something of a sardonic tone, especially about her appearance, not pretty, but having a talent for acting and enjoying her career. Interestingly, when asked what she would change from her past, she says she would be less angry and less confrontational – something which doesn't quite appear so strongly during the conversation.

Maggie Smith probably has the widest reputation, beginning in films in the 1950s, having good roles internationally, in the UK and in the US. She won an Oscar in 1969 for *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*,

winning another in the 1970s as Best Supporting Actress in *California Suite*. And, all the time, she was appearing on stage. She has quite a lot of comment, partly teasing Joan Plowright, of how severe Laurence Olivier was with her, with some clips from various performances including the stage and film version of *Othello* (where, in close-up, he seems rather a ham). With a stage career of more than 50 years, Maggie Smith is particularly well-known. But this film does not include many striking performances including those for playwright, Alan Bennett. She is asked about her relationship with her first husband, Robert Stephens, and there are some scenes of them acting together in a novel card would play. While he had many difficulties, including alcoholism, she says she prefers to remember the happy times. (She knows that she has not had time to look at all of *Downton Abbey* even though they gave her a box set!)

For the last 20 years, Judi Dench has been quite a significant stage and screen presence. She had performed on stage for many decades, part of the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1960s. There are also photos and sequences of her performance in *Miracle Plays* in the early 1950s. With the flashbacks and the clips from plays, she has had quite a range of performances from *Cabaret* to *Cleopatra* in *Anthony and Cleopatra*. There are scenes from *Mrs Brown* which brought her to the attention of the world of cinema, winning an Oscar the following year for her portrait of Queen Elizabeth in *Shakespeare in Love*. There are clips from *Tea with Mussolini* (Joan, Maggie and Judi), from *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (Judi and Maggie). She has quite a sense of humour, laughing vigorously at so many of the stories – and a surprising angry swearing at an insensitive carer! There are also pictures of her with her husband, Michael Williams, in their television series *A Fine Romance* and on stage.

The conversation ranges widely. It is not a portrait or study in depth. Rather, the audience sees the actresses in themselves, in their performances, in the changes over the decades. They do have quite a lot of commentary about performing, being apprehensive and fearful, techniques, the effect of experiences. There is also a sequence for each of them when they were made Dames, presented by the Queen or by Prince Charles.

This is a pleasure of a film – but, something of a pleasurable treasure for those who admire the actresses.

TULLY

US, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.

Charlize Theron, Mackenzie Davis, Mark Duplass, Ron Livingston, Elaine Tan.

Directed by Jason Reitman.

A film with which female audiences will identify, especially mothers, and, even more especially, mothers coping with young children. *Tully* is also a film with which a male audience might not immediately identify (a bit like some of the husbands in this film) – but *Tully* is definitely a film they ought to watch.

Diablo Cody, and to play with her name, has a devilish kind of ability to combine the serious and the comic (*Juno*, *Young Adult*), she has written a screenplay that is close to the bone in its seriousness but also provokes the audience to smile, even laugh, despite themselves. The film is directed by Jason Reitman who also directed Charlize Theron in *Young Adult*.

And, despite the title, which refers to the engaging of a night nanny who is hired for the family night shift, and her name is Tully, played quite exuberantly and charmingly by Mackenzie Davis. The centre

of the film is Marlo. And Charlize Theron, who can definitely be glamorous in films and has been over the last 20 years, also excels at roles which are not glamorous at all. She won an Oscar in 2003 for her portrayal of the serial killer, definitely not glamorous, Aileen Wournos, Monster.

At the opening of the film, she is very pregnant, hassled by all the care of the house, by her two young children, a daughter aged nine and a younger boy who is described throughout the film as “quirky”, overstimulated by external sources, sometimes an exasperating and burdensome child whom, each night, Marlo gently brushes. This is being recommended by a therapist to calm her son down. Her husband, Drew, Ron Livingston amiable but a man who could be far more attentive than he realises, is supportive, but...

Rather exasperating for Marlo in her condition is her affluent brother, Craig (Mark Duplass) and his wife who is prone to making blandly wearing comments that do nothing for Marlo's patience. However, Craig does give the gift of money to hire a night nanny.

There is an exhausting collage (for the audience, let alone Marlo) of the three weeks after the birth of the daughter, Mia. There is the demanding routine of crying in the night, waking up, going to the baby, breastfeeding, putting the baby down, going back to bed, and the possibility of the routine happening all over again. Eventually, Marlo gives the night nanny a ring.

Tully, the nanny, is all that a nanny might be. Despite Marlo's hesitations, Tully is wonderful with the baby, watches happily as Marlo breastfeeds, tidies up the house, becomes more of a friend and a confidante with some wise advice.

Sometimes there is a mixture of reality and fantasy, Marlo's dreams with her son banging the back of the driver's seat in the car, scenes of a mermaid and an underwater rescue from a waterlogged car, the fact that Marlo's maiden name was Tully, sexual encouragement for Drew.

Perhaps Tully is too good to be true. But her message, the hopeful message of the film, is that a strong inner self should emerge to confront the difficulties of day by day, and that husbands become much more aware of the reality of their wives' experiences and support and for them. No quarrel with that.

REVIEWS JULY 2018

ADRIFT

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JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM

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TAG
TWO IS A FAMILY/ DEMAIN TOUT COMMENCE
UPGRADE

ADRIFT

US, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.
Shailene Woodley, Sam Claflin.
Directed by Baltazar Kormakur.

The title is very plain. This is a film about a battered yacht adrift in the northern Pacific Ocean. There have been a number of films in the adrift brain, about a decade ago several with people drifting in danger of shark attacks. In more recent times, Robert Redford was All at Sea, and Colin Firth was attempting a round the world record in Mercy.

This time the person adrift is Shailene Woodley, Tami Oldham, who does appear as herself at the end of the film, the film based on a true story.

Tammy had a hard upbringing in San Diego but left home and became a very happy-go-lucky young woman, happily drifting around the world from temporary job to temporary job, finding herself in 80 Tahiti. However, the film opens with the disaster for the yacht, her coming to consciousness, and searching for her partner, Richard Sharp, played by Sam Claflin.

The film goes into flashback, establishing Tami's character, her chance meeting with Richard, their enjoying each other's company, a growing bond, falling in love – shown with quite some tenderness.

The structure of the film is that it keeps moving backwards and forwards, keeping the tension about the yacht being adrift in balance with the background story and the romance.

Richard is asked by a wealthy couple to sail their yacht to the United States and he agrees, especially with Tami as his partner.

It is only at the end of the film that we actually see the vast storm that wrecks the yacht. In the meantime, we have very strong leading character, a strong female character at sea, with the physical strain, the psychological strain, the emotional strain that keeps her going for more than 40 days adrift. But, she is sustained by her relationship with Richard, her working with him, her caring for him.

Stories about people adrift at sea may not have a great appeal to non-sailors. However, Icelandic Dir Baltazar Kormakur retains the tension between the past and the present, has great admiration for Tami and her story.

BACK TO BURGUNDY/ CE QUI NOUS LIE

France, 2016, 130 minutes, Colour.

Pio Marmai, Ana Girardot, François Civil, Jean- Marc Roulot, Maria Valverde, Jean- Marie Winling, Florence Pernel, Eric Caravaca.

Directed by Cedric Clappisch.

This is a film to put on the list of French films that are worth seeing. While the English title emphasises the winegrowing area of Burgundy, the French title is more evocative of the themes of the film, Ties which Bind.

Visually, the film is most attractive, opening with a collage of the same view of the Vineyard throughout the seasons of the year. The location photography evokes the world of the Vineyards as well as life in a French town.

It is the characters who hold the interest. Jean offers a voice-over commentary on the events and the characters. He returns after 10 years away, driven away by his dominant father, but returning because of his terminal illness. (Dramatically, it is rather effective to have the reconciliations scene in the hospital placed later in the film, the earlier part concentrating on flashbacks and Jean's difficulties with his father.) The family have been wine producers. On his return, Jean finds his sister, Juliette, managing the business, the harvest almost ready. There is also the younger brother, Jeremie, who has married a local girl, from a wealthy family and an insistently dominating father, and they have a child.

Initially, there is great resentment that Jean had left, not made contact for 10 years, refused to come to his mother's funeral. After an outburst, Jean is able to explain what has happened, his marriage in Australia, the birth of his son, their Vineyard out there.

So, while the timeline of the film shows the decisions about harvesting, the picking of the grapes and the workers who come in temporarily, the pressing of the grapes, the vats, the processes – offering all that any audience might have wanted to know about wine production, and even more...

The drama is interesting in the depiction of the three siblings, the effect of their father's death, decisions about production, the reading of the will, the joint ownership of the house and the Vineyard, the pressures on Jean to sell his share and go back to Australia, Jeremie and his father-in-law wanting to buy parcels of the land, Juliette and her desire to be an effective wine producer.

There is a strong humanity in the film, audiences being caught up in the lives of the three central characters as well as in the work and the wine production. Pio Marmai plays Jean, and Ana Girardot is Juliette, François Civil is Jeremie. The film was directed by Cedric Klappisch – who knows how to make films about characters living together, bonds, conflicts, with his series of films which began with L' Auberge Espagnol and was followed by Russian Dolls and Chinese Puzzle.

BELLE AND SEBASTIEN 3, LE DERNIERE CHAPITRE/ BELLE AND SEBASTIEN, FRIENDS FOR LIFE

France, 2017, 97 minutes, Colour.

Felix Bossuet, Tcheky Karyo, Clovis Cornillac, Thierry Neuvic, Margo Chatelier, Andre Penvern, Anne Benoit.

Directed by Clovis Cornillac.

The Belle and Sebastien books have been very popular in France for many decades, an earlier film version made in 1981. They are based on a series by French actress, Cecile Aubry. She also wrote the lyrics for the songs throughout the film.

Followers of French films will have seen the first two films in this trilogy. In 2013, the first was released, focusing on the experience of the young boy, Sebastien, at the age of six, living in the snowclad Alps, experience in World War II and German occupation and the rescue of French flyers. The role of Sebastian was played by a very young Felix Bossuet who continued in the role in the two subsequent films. His quite an engaging screen presence. Actually, so is Belle, the beautiful, white powerful dog that he befriends.

The second film, Belle and Sebastien, The Adventure Continues was released in 2015. The action moves forward to the end of World War II and Sebastien, again with Belle, anticipating the return of his friend, Angelina, from her flying action during the war.

While this third film does open with Sebastien's birth, difficult situation in the stormy mountains, his mother dying, the wayfaring shepherd, Cesar (Tcheky Karyo in all three films) rescues the boy and brings him up, a grandfather-figure.

This time, Sebastien is 12. Belle has had a litter of pups. Sebastian goes to school but would prefer to be out in the mountains and his ambition is to become a shepherd like his grandfather. However, Angelina is about to marry Sebastien's father and the boy overhears their plans that they will move to Canada, taking the boy with him. He decides to run away – especially since a very sinister figure, Joseph, arrives, claiming that Belle is his dog and that he will take her and the pups.

The director of the film, actor Clovis Cornillac, portrays this sinister figure, black coat, black shirt, black trousers, black beard, black hat and hair, glowering eyes, towering presence, a frightening figure for children. (It is obvious that the Cornillac is enjoying his role as actor.).

This means that there is quite some tension at the end, the dangers of the confrontation, the risks in testing the villain.

While the film can stand on its own, sufficient explanation is given in the screenplay, it will be more pleasing for those audiences who have seen the previous two films.

BORDER POLITICS

Australia, 2018, 94 minutes, Colour.

Julian Burnside.

Directed by Judy Rymer.

With the worldwide movements of peoples travelling the world, migrants, refugees, those fleeing from persecution, there has been both a greater consciousness about the plight of those searching

for another home as well as a hardening of consciousness against these migrants and refugees, a self-protective attitude and politics from countries in Europe, the United States, and, though with far fewer numbers, Australia.

Prominent Australian lawyer, Julian Burnside, worked in commercial law until he was asked around the year 2000 to become involved in social justice cases. The experience of politicians claiming that migrants were throwing babies overboard from the ship Tampa, and this later proven to be false, led him to a new career in legal cases about border protection and border policies. In this documentary, he is at the centre, speaking to camera, his observations and challenges, visiting several countries around the world to examine their attitudes towards migrants and refugees, sympathetic welcome as well as harsh closing of borders, the construction of fences and walls.

In many ways, this film is preaching to the converted. It will reinforce the views and feelings of those who believe in advocacy for people in need, for empathy and compassion for those who suffer. Many will not find anything new in what Burnside is offering but rather an expansion of consciousness, widening of horizons, literally in his visits to other countries. Those who are not converted will probably have their stances reinforced, more sympathetic to those countries who put up the barriers, the president of Hungary, demonstrations in Poland, and the internment of refugees on Nauru and Manus Island.

Many audiences will be familiar with some of the countries and their reactions – although, it is very sobering to look at the extensive wall cutting off Mexico from the United States and some draconian legislation which separates parents who lived for a long time in the US and their deportation to Mexico, having minimal contact with their children, for short times with only the possibility of finger touching through the barriers. This certainly extends the consciousness about human hardheartedness.

By comparison, Burnside visits the Greek island of Levros, just across from Turkey, receiving thousands of Syrian refugees, and, on the whole, welcoming them, the contrast between three camps on the island, two in the midst of the people who go out of their way for the newcomers and one a wired compound, established by the Greek government, which confines the refugees.

Perhaps most challenging is Burnside's visit to Jordan, the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have come across from Syria, the reaction of the King, the population, enabling the refugees to find homes, however temporary, amongst the Jordanian people, the possibility of work, of earning one's keep, of some temporary peace before returning, it is hoped, to homes and properties in Syria.

What most of the attention is on the present, one of the features of the film is to highlight the millions of children around the world who are not getting the education that they need and deserve – and pondering what are the consequences for the coming years for them as adults without this basic education and how they will cope.

At the beginning of the film Burnside highlights the Golden Rule, asking people to think of how they would wish to be treated in the same situations as the refugees. And one of the words that recurs throughout the film is 'decency', the kind of human decency that should be exercised to people in need.

This kind of documentary is always sobering. It is an opportunity to reinforce more compassionate

attitudes towards those in need and, even if it is unlikely, to challenge those who think they must take hard and harsh stances.

EDIE

UK, 2017, 103 minutes, Colour.

Sheila Hancock, Kevin Guthrie.

Directed by Simon Hunter.

Whew – and applause! The expression and feeling of this reviewer at the final close-up and triumphant image of Edie.

Edie? She is Edith Moore, an elderly widow, her daughter helping her to pack up house and moved to an aged care facility. She is getting ready to go – but, obviously, not at all ready when she visits the place. As she goes through her things, her daughter finding a diary in which Edie expressed her private responses to the hardships of her life, of control her controlling husband. She also finds a picture of a Scottish mountain which she climbed with her devoted father.

She gets a brainwave – one which her family and friends would not endorse, and the audience wonders whether this is a good idea or not. What about going back to that mountain in Scotland? What about climbing it? She packs her bags, take some money, please a message on her daughters and answering machine and takes the train to Inverness.

What seems a momentary annoyance at Inverness Station, a young man and his girlfriend rushing for the train, bumping Edie and knocking her over, turns out to be a happily fortuitous encounter. When the bus doesn't come for several hours, he gives her a lift, helps her with accommodation because the town is booked out, lets her stay at his house. And the interesting thing is that he is working in a camping shop.

This all happens fairly early in the film so we know where we're going, we know that we are going with Edie. At one stage, John, exasperated with her says she is like a cranky cow – and then agrees that she is a cranky cow. And, though we are more sympathetic at first because we know her, she actually is something of a cranky cow.

The point is what does one do with one's life. What choices do we make, especially after living life with its regrets, wanting to change some of life if we could? Should there be a final quest? And, of course, should there be a final quest which is so demanding as an elderly lady camping out, rowing across a lake, climbing a mountain?

Needless to say, the Scottish Highlands scenery is beautiful even if the touch barren. But, as Edie goes on her journey, we are made to feel every step with her, the exhilaration, the physical and mental demands, the beauty, the bad weather – and the relief of finding a hunters hut with shelter and warmth for a night. Will she climbed to the top of the mountain and place a stone on the canyon there as she did in the past? What will John do, initially shamed by helping her for the money she gave him, helping her with the equipment, and the dilemma whether to go to her rescue or not?

Sheila Hancock has been in films and on television for many decades. She is quite a stream screen presence as Edie. Strong-minded and strong-willed, a touch imperious, a touch cantankerous, but a woman who wants to make something of her life.

FOXTROT

Israel, 2017, 117 minutes, Colour.

Lior Ashkenazi, Sarah Adler, Jonaton Shiray, Shira Haas, Yehuda, Almagor.

Directed by Samuel Maoz.

This is a very moving film. It is also very sombre.

The writer-director, Samuel Maoz, made the award-winning film, *Lebanon* (2009). It won an award from SIGNIS (World Catholic Association for Communication). *Foxtrot* screened at the Venice film Festival, 2017, winning the Grand Jury Prize. It also won a prize from SIGNIS.

Foxtrot seems an unusual title for such a serious film. However, there is a telling scene where the central character enters a building and finds elderly couples dancing the foxtrot. He explains and demonstrates the steps. Later, the son will dance a foxtrot on the road at his desert outpost – and the codename for the outpost in fact is *Foxtrot*. And, again, later, there will be peacemaking and reconciliation in the dancing of the foxtrot.

This is an Israeli film. The screenplay is in three parts, three acts, the approximately 40 minutes long.

The first takes place over some hours on one day, the military arriving at the door of an apartment with the audience sharing the apprehension of the parents who open the door. The news is that their son, very young, has been killed in the line of duty. The director uses many close-ups, especially of the father, Michael (Lior Ashkenazi in a most impressive performance). The mother collapses. Michael is quiet, quietly panic-stricken, then breaking out in anger and demands. He visits his mother with the news. His brother comes to help. An official comes to explain the protocols for the funeral and the tribute. Then there is other news which will take the audience by surprise.

There is a transition for the second part. The audience is taken out into the desert, the checkpoint on the lonely road, four young men doing their military service there. Nothing much happens. A camel walks by and they lift the barrier, the camel moves through, the barrier is lowered. The young men talk, play computer games, Jonathan, the son from the first part, has a sketchbook. One of the activities is to roll a can from one end of the hut to the other, their speculating that the hut is sinking. There is rain, heavy rain, scenes of watery mud seeping from the road.

As regards activity, a couple is held up, caught humiliatingly in the pouring rain. One of the young men uses techniques of photo identity so that the people can be cleared and move through. Later there is a group of raucous young men and women, though one looks intently at Jonathan. Again the checking, and then something overwhelming happens.

With the third part, the audience goes back to Michael and his wife. There are many close-ups, intense gazing at the face of the characters, feeling their tensions, sense of alienation, exasperation, grief. This part is introduced by an animated segment, bringing Jonathan's sketches to life, the story

of his father, courting his mother, sexuality – and a glimpse of Michael's mother in hospital, the concentration camp number on her wrist.

As with the other two parts, there is a surprise that the audience could not have anticipated. An explanation that makes sense of the whole story. Tragic sense.

This is a film for an Israeli audience but makes quite an impact beyond Israel. It is a story about a husband and wife, about children and family – and, especially, different ways of coping with death, different ways of living through grief.

HEREDITARY

US, 2018, 127 minutes, Colour.

Toni Collette, Gabriel Byrne, Alex Wolfe, Millie Shapiro, Ann Dowd.

Directed by Ari Aster.

This film has received some very complementary reviews. Many have found it something of a relief, in terms of films which have horror elements, because it does not indulge in blood and gore. Rather, it is a film of atmosphere – at least until the last minutes.

This is the story of a family. The opening shot is that of an obituary, the grandmother of the family, a listing of the members of the family as well as the ancestors. At her mother's funeral, Annie (Toni Collette) indicates that at times her mother was a difficult, secretive person. She has played a dominating role in her family's life.

The other members of the family are Stephen, husband and father (Gabriel Byrne), the son Peter (Alex Wolfe) and the younger daughter, Charlie (Millie Shapiro). Stephen seems very normal, loving his family, going to work, sharing meals, bonding with his children. Peter also seems normal enough, a not untypical teenager, distracted at school, trying out drugs with his friends, with an eye on the girls. It is Charlie who seems a little strange, look, her manner, her drawings, hiccup, predilection for chocolate. And, suddenly, the lives of the family are changed because of a road accident.

Annie, who is an artist making miniature scenes of homes and rooms, worries that she cannot grieve as much as she ought to, becomes distraught at Charlie's death, begins to clash with her husband, rants against Peter, reverts to an earlier habit of sleepwalking. In fact, she does go to group meetings to try to deal with her grief. There she meets a very friendly woman, Joan, who lost her husband and son (Anne Dowd) and Annie begins to depend on her.

And then, the family deteriorates further, Annie becoming interested in mediums and seances, Joan demonstrating the way, Annie trying to involve Stephen and Peter with bizarre results.

There is an atmosphere of horror in these interactions amongst the family, aggravated by mysterious and menacing dreams on the part of Annie and Peter. There are sinister sounds in the house, mysteries in the attic, strange books and photos in the box of the grandmother's goods. Suggestions of a cult begin to appear.

And things then deteriorate, madness, family mayhem, an atmosphere of fear rather than explicit

depictions. It might be said that the film is “atmospheric”. Just as the audience might be thinking there are no explanations, some explanations come thick and fast. They may be satisfactory for some audiences but for other audiences they may seem suddenly absurd (too much detail).

So, some praise for the atmosphere, the performances, some questions about the rationale underlying the plot – and the film might be described as “herediteerie”.

IDEAL HOME

US, 2018, 91 minutes, Colour.

Steve Coogan, Paul Rudd, Jack Gore, Jake McDormand, Alison Pill.

Directed by Andrew Fleming.

The title sounds like a slogan promoting an estate agent. Is there an ideal home? One of the questions that the title and the film imply. And, more importantly, is there an ideal family?

This is a film, touches of comedy, touches of drama, touches of sentiment, which comes in the wake of discussions and legislation about same-sex marriage and issues of same-sex couples adopting children and bringing them up. Those in favour will respond well to the film. For those not in favour, it is an opportunity to look at a story, listen to real characters, rather than reflect on an abstract concept or a moral question.

The setting is Santa Fe. Audiences will enjoy the scenery in the background. In the foreground, at first, is Erasmus, sitting on a horse, talking to camera – and, eventually we realise that he is being filmed and is advertising. In fact, he is something of a chef, something of a promoter of high life. He is British, did a chef’s course in Oxford, was rather wild in the 1980s, drugs and sexual experimentation. He is played by Steve Coogan.

Then we meet his producer, Paul, a bearded Paul Rudd, making him somewhat unrecognisable. He squabbles with Erasmus on set and somebody asks whether they are like that at home. Only worse! The two have been a couple for ten years, depending on each other, arguing with each other.

In the meantime, we have been introduced to a young boy, Angel (later he wants to be called Bill), his father being disturbed by the police in their apartment, getting his son out the window and sending him to Santa Fe to Erasmus. The father goes to jail. We discover Erasmus is his grandfather.

And this is where the ideal home and the not so ideal family come in to play. How do the two men cope with this boy, whose role model has been his criminal father and his addict-mother who fell to her death from a fourth storey window. And what role modelling will Erasmus and Paul offer?

The two men are rather camp in their way and manner. Erasmus could be described as fastidiously, hyper- sensitively self-centred. While Paul is a touch more down-to-earth, he proves himself more capable of being a father than Erasmus does. One of the things about the boy is that he is not one of those cute Americans. He can be very irritating. He also has a passion for Taco Bell – and the film seems at times like an extended commercial for Taco Bell.

Obviously, the two men are going to be challenged in how they relate to the boy and the effect that

that has on their own relationship, especially on the cantankerous arguments they have and Paul's proneness to have panic attacks. And the boy himself is challenged, going to school, eventually making friends. And what about the father? Especially when he is released from jail?

The final credits have a great number of stills of same-sex parents and their adopted children, so *Ideal Home* is something of a special plea film. When seriously considering same-sex relationships, marriages, same-sex adoption of children, it is important that stances are taken based on experience as well as principles and characters and stories that contribute to the experience.

INCREDIBLES 2

US, 2018, 125 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: Craig T. Nelson, Holly Hunter, Sarah Vowell, Huck Milner, Catherine Keener, Eli Fucile, Bob, Samuel L. Jackson, Sophia Bush, Brad Bird, Isabella Rossellini, Jonathan Banks, Barry Bostwick, John Ratzenburger.

Directed by Brad Bird.

X-Men? (and X-Women) can relax. Apparently, super heroes have been banned for some years but but there are moves to have legislation to make them legal and acceptable again. Something of this helps to explain what is 14 years since the first *Incredibles* film came out and won an Oscar for Best Animation. It was highly popular and, at last some might say, here is the *Incredibles* family again.

These days, one has to be careful about inclusive language, not using super heroes to cover men and women, some finding superheroines to exclusive. The solution here is to call all these characters, Supers.

And, not only issues of inclusive language. There are issues of equality, sometimes the male Super standing aside while the female Super goes on mission. That certainly happens here.

At the beginning, the whole family is involved, mother and father, daughter and son. However, now there is a baby – who turns out to have more superpowers than you can shake a stick at! After the initial adventure, excitingly-paced, with help from an uncle and an agent who cannot only debrief memories but eliminate them, especially after the daughter has been recognised by the boy at school that she has a crush on. When they meet again, he has no idea who she is!

There is also a campaign going on, some villains, wearing special goggles which fixates them, are working for the Screen Saver, trying to get audiences back into real life and not dependent on screens. The manager of the television company, Winston, is the enthusiastic promoter of the cause which is to gather authorities from around the world to sign the document legalising Supers. He has a very talented IT and beyond sister,

The mother, known as the Super, Elastogirl, is sent on a mission to save a runaway train – quite an exciting sequence early on in the film. Since she is out on mission, father has to stay at home doing the domestic duties, nodding off as he reads a bedtime story to the baby, discovering all the powers that the baby has, trying to support his moody daughter, teach his son math complexities for his homework, do all the chores. And by the look of him, he doesn't have time to shave!

With Elastogirl supporting the family, it is only right that the villain should be female and that there should be a lot of confrontation. There is. Also in the act are a whole range of characters who look as if they had graduated from Monster University, all with their special powers – but taken over by the villain, wearing their fixation goggles, combating the Incredibles.

For the final confrontation, the whole family joins in, and baby joins too.

So, something for family audiences, children with powers, parents with powers, lots of action, themes about media and influence, and equal opportunities for mother and father both professionally and domestically. (Who could ask for anything more!)

JILL BILCOCK: DANCING THE INVISIBLE

Australia, 2017, 78 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Alex Grigor.

A film buff's delight. And a delight for all those interested in Australian filmmaking.

Jill Bilcock has an international reputation as being one of the world's top editors. This film fills in the background of her life and career (she is almost 70 at the time of the film's release). While it does not show all the films that she has edited (and the IMDb has quite a significant listing), it does focus with some detail on 15 of these films.

And the film gives some family background. It shows Jill studying the arts at Swinburne University in the 1960s, deciding on a career in editing, moving to the Melbourne company The Film House, under the leadership of Fred Schepisi. While practically no movies were being made in Australia at this time, there was lively activity in the industry, the making of commercials, with the government stipulation that all commercials for Australian television should be made in Australia. This gave many filmmakers the opportunity to develop their craft and be ready for the coming film renaissance.

Jill Bilcock also had quite some experience in spending time travelling, especially in India, even taking some small supporting roles in Bollywood melodramas.

It was in 1985 that Jill Bilcock launched her high-profile career, with the backing of director, Richard Lowenstein, collaborating with him and editing his docudrama, *Strikebound* in 1984. She further worked with him in his offbeat look at contemporary Melbourne society, *Dogs in Space*.

One of the values of this film is that it is very instructive for the average audience in just how significant editing is, quoting Francis Ford Coppola and others highlighting that cinema is editing and how important it is to connect with the audience. Jill Bilcock herself has done master classes and, throughout the film, there are explanations of the techniques of editing, the philosophy of editing, as Baz Luhrmann remarks, the technology, the personal inspirations, the judgements made, the sense of pacing, timing, the reworking of various sequences (15 attempts for the opening of *Moulin Rouge*), with comments from collaborating editors, especially her partner, Roger Savage.

In the early part of the film we see Jill Bilcock at work on Jocelyn Moorhouse's *The Dressmaker*, looking especially at some of Judy Davis's performance. There is also a great deal of attention given

to Evil Angels as well as to Strictly Ballroom (even a mini masterclass on editing of the dancing, Jill Bilcock herself photographing legs, feet, movement that could be incorporated to give background to the continuing narrative). She worked again then with Baz Luhrmann for William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet, the team working intensely together, finding creative ways of bringing Shakespeare into the 20th century.

It is interesting to note that Jill Bilcock has worked on more than one film for several directors, Baz Luhrmann, Jocelyn Moorhouse, Kriv Stenders (including some scenes from Red Dog and editing in the dog's passive presence to create an active character). Phillip Noyce also has some comments on the editing of his South African story, Catch a Fire. As well, Jill Bilcock had an international experience on Sam Mendes' Road to Perdition, including sequences with Paul Newman and Tom Hanks.

Jill Bilcock is lively character as well as an expert. It is a pleasure being introduced to her. It is instructive to listen to her and the detail of her work and the reasons for her choices. And it is very enjoyable to watch the clips from various films which illustrate her career.

JURASSIC WORLD: THE FINAL KINGDOM

US, 2018, 128 minutes, Colour.

Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard, Rafe Spall, Justice Smith, Daniela Pineda, James Cromwell, Toby Jones, Ted Levine, Jeff Goldblum, BD Wong, Geraldine Chaplin, Isabella Sermon, Robert M's.
Directed by J.A.Bayona.

This Jurassic film, the fifth in the series, was released at the time of the 25th anniversary of the original film, Stephen Spielberg's exciting version of Michael Crichton's story, Jurassic Park. The next two sequels continued the adventures but were not quite as astonishing as the original.

This new series of Jurassic films uses the word 'World' instead of 'Park'. Audiences who saw the 2016 reintroduction of the Jurassic World, will remember that the title is rather literal, that a theme Park had been set up on an island, that the restored dinosaurs had a home where they could roam freely, that visitors could come and share this experience, prehistory in the present. However, human nature being what it is, each of the film has villainous humans who want to exploit the dinosaurs. No empathy, no holds barred. This led to quite some mayhem and destruction at the end of Jurassic World.

What to do with a sequel? The answer is basically, to provide audiences with excitement and with some wondrous special effects to recreate the dinosaurs, their size and menace, the possibility of friendship, the threat, this time, to their very existence.

At one stage, the screenplay has character remarking that the dinosaurs have been with us for over two decades – and, in our imaginations through the films, at times, in our heart of hearts, we probably were under the impression that they actually exist! But, no, they are movie fantasies.

So, with Jurassic World destroyed, where are we to go? There are two ideas behind this scenario. One is that a volcano is erupting on the island with the ruins of Jurassic World. A rescue mission to save as many dinosaurs, as many different species as possible. And, who better to consult than

Claire, Bryce Dallas Howard, and Owen, Chris Pratt, from the previous film. And, in their adventures, they are joined by a young girl.

She is the granddaughter of Benjamin Lockwood (James Cromwell), an old collaborator with John Hammond (with a portrait of John Hammond, Richard Attenborough, on the wall for nostalgia's sake). Lockwood is being advised by Eli (Rafe Spall). But all is not as it seems, there are mercenaries rounding up the dinosaurs to escape the volcano, led by the ambitious and sinister Wheatley (Ted Levine).

The dinosaurs are shipped to Lockwood's mansion (Claire and Owen and two assistants, one intelligent, the other nerdish) where there are laboratories, a scientist (BD Wong) experimenting with the species, an entrepreneur (Toby Jones) wanting to sell of the dinosaurs as weapons to international buyers. (As so often, British actors are cast as the villains – but this time there are American characters with American accents!)

The climax is inevitable, Clash of the dinosaurs, goodies helping to save them, baddies coming to disastrous ends (some chomping ends). But, there are always some little dinosaurs at the Lockwood laboratories, possibly eager for a sequel.

JUST BETWEEN US

Australia, 2018, 106 minutes, Colour.

Deanna Ortuso, Joanne Nguyen, Calista Fooks, Kaarin Fairfax, Clayton Jacobson, Isobel Henry, Samantha E. Hill, Andy Rhodes.

Directed by Christopher Kay.

Although directed by a man, Christopher Kay, this film is a women's film, written by Deanna Ortuso who plays the central role, also starring the producer, Joanne Nguyen as Trixie.

The film opens in Adelaide, travels through the countryside on its way to Sydney, with tourist pictures of Sydney and then a resolution along the coast.

Deanna Ortuso plays Hannah, shy and retiring, awkward at work, mistiming her responses, especially to the men at work and invitations to a party. Trixie, with Vietnamese background, has been adopted into the family. However, another sister, Bee, has died.

The film is also a ghost story, with Bee materialising, confronting Hannah and her being upset, challenging Hannah about her life and its lack of meaning. She urges Hannah to go on a quest, to a lighthouse and to come out of herself and make something of herself.

So, the film is a road film, Hannah and Trixie on their way, Trixie the more extroverted, urging Hannah on, and Bee continually reappearing and becoming part of the drama. There are various adventures along the way, the women's football match, Hannah (continually being hit on the head by accident) breaking her teeth, getting them fixed by an attractive dentist, out on the town with him, spending the night with him while Trixie spends the night with one of the football players.

And so, on with the journey, the screenplay fills in the background of the two women and their

family.

There is a change of tone when they arrive in Sydney, being ushered into a lavish hotel and into the best rooms only to find that there has been a mistake in their identities and, while they are abducted, and pressure put on them, it is erroneous – and the two women are able to effect their escape.

After a falling out with Trixie, a family argument, and with the urging of Bee, Deanna does find the lighthouse, finds something more in herself, reunites with Trixie – and, probably, is able to start something of a new life.

THE LEISURE SEEKER

Italy, 2018, 114 minutes, Colour.

Helen Mirren, Donald Sutherland, Christian Mc Kay, Dana Ivey.

Directed by Paolo Virzi.

While the film focuses on an elderly married couple, the Leisure Seeker of the title is actually their rather old caravan. There is a sense of tension at the opening when William, the son of the couple, and his frantically searching for his parents only to find that their house is empty.

No need to worry – or, perhaps, many reasons to worry. Under the guidance of Ella, Helen Mirren with a South Carolina accent, she and her husband John, Donald Sutherland, driving out of their Massachusetts town, going on vacation. Their son William (Christian Mc Kay) is more than worried. Their daughter, Jane (Janel Moloney) is concerned. Ella phones from time to time, not revealing their location, trying to reassure her children. In fact, during the journey, the film returns to the children and their discussions and worries. Their mother has terminal cancer but refuses treatment. Their father is suffering from increasing senility.

On the one hand, this road story is presented as “realistic” but, there are many episodes that somewhat defy realism, especially John’s capacity for driving and Ella’s capacity for keeping going. On the other hand, if the story is seen as something of hopeful imagination, it works much better for the comedy and the drama.

Starting in New England, the couple drive down the east coast, stopping in Pennsylvania, stopping in Williamsburg Virginia, making their way south so that they can visit Hemingway’s house in the Florida Keys. John has been a literature Professor. A major part of his memory consists of the works of Hemingway which he is able to quote, discuss with those waiting on him at diners or anyone who offers friendly attention, appreciating the insights of American literature. Ella, on the other hand, tries hard to keep focused, sometimes getting impatient, at other times very tender with him, drawing him back to reality, continually showing slides at their caravan stops, reminding him of their past and of their children.

Ella continues to chat – which, despite Helen Mirren doing the chatting, is sometimes wearying. John continues to wander, an amiable man although, at one stage, he unwittingly reveals a past betrayal.

There are quite a few entertaining incidental characters, at the diners, at the caravan camps, at an

old people's home (with a brief cameo by an irascible Dick Gregory).

The purpose of the journey is, of course, to recapture the past for one last time. And so, to how Ella will handle the end of the journey. In many ways, they are both terminal and she makes decisions about this. Not everyone will agree with what she does but, in terms of a humanist society, she acts in accordance with her feelings and her conscience. For those who disagree with her, it is a challenge to appreciate and understand her perspective.

This is a film for mixed reactions. Some older audiences will identify with the characters, their long lives and their long love for each other, this last journey. And the talent of the two stars and happiness as well as the pathos of their interactions enhance this. Other audiences may find the film difficult, maybe making comparisons with their own lives and being somewhat exasperated by this journey of Ella and John.

KODACHROME

US, 2017, 105 minutes, Colour.

Ed Harris, Jason Sudeikis, Elizabeth Olsen, Bruce Greenwood, Wendy Crewson, Denis Haysbert, Gethin Anthony.

Directed by Mark Raso.

There are many good reasons for seeing Kodachrome.

"Regrets, I've had a few...", Frank Sinatra singing My Way. The central characters in this film have more than a few regrets and one of them has been causing regrets to the others by his selfish doing it his way.

For audiences who have admired Ed Harris over many decades, fine performances, this is a must. It is certainly one of his best performances. He plays Ben Ryder, crack photographer, now old and not long to live because of terminal cancer. In his photography, he used Kodachrome and finds that Parsons, Kansas, is the last centre to develop slides from Kodachrome and he wants to make a kind of pilgrimage there, taking some rolls from the past that he never developed. The question is, how is he to get to Kansas, by car, plane being out of the question.

But, first, we are introduced to his middle-aged son, an executive with a small recording company, caught up in the hullabaloo of concerts and records, not having been successful over several years and about to be fired – one last chance to sign on a leading group. He is Ben Ryder's son, Matt. His played by Jason Sudeikis, very well known for a lot of comedy films, but this role offers a reassurance that he can tackle dramatic roles quite persuasively.

He gets a visit, unwelcome, from a young woman, Zoe – played by Elizabeth Olsen, quite a forceful dynamic presence on screen. She is Ben's nurse and urges Matt to drive his father to Kansas, not a likely proposition because Matt resents his father's ignoring of him in the past, his infidelities to his mother, and has not spoken to him for 10 years. We know that he eventually will drive his father but we are presented with a range of motivations for his doing so, including his father's assistant enabling him to stop on the way to interview the prospective group that he would like to sign.

The characters are particularly well drawn, Ed Harris is the embodiment of the narcissistic and neglectful father. For most of the film he seems to show no redeeming features but, towards the end, there is a frank conversation with his son and quite a moving scene where he meets veteran photographers at Parsons and they acclaim him, Matt looking on with some satisfaction.

There is a lot of incidental action along the way, showing some relenting on Matt's part, Zoe and her putting up with a great deal from Ben, then Ben advising his son on how to deal with the group but, in another striking sequence, Matt uses his father's advice to get the group but they then mock Ben's incontinence in a stupid adolescent way and Ben defends his father.

This is one of the most persuasive father-son dramas, not an easy getting to know each other, especially after a significant visit to Ben's brother, Dean and his wife (good cameos from Bruce Greenwood and Wendy Crewson), Matt grateful to Dean for being more of a father to him than his own father.

While there is a lot of bitterness, this is certainly a powerful film about regrets and, it will not be a surprise to find out what is on those previously undeveloped slides. In some ways, the ending is clear, but communicated to the audience with a blend of emotion and objectivity.

THE MAN WITH THE IRON HEART

France/Belgium, 2017, 120 minutes, Colour.

Jason Clarke, Rosamund Pike, Jack O'Connell, Jack Reynor, Mia Wasikowska, Stephen Graham, Thomas M. Wright, Geoff Bell, Enzo Cilenti, Ian Redford.

Directed by Cedric Jimenez.

At one point in this drama, SS chief, Heinrich Himmler, tells his underling, Reinhard Heydrich, that this is Hitler's description of him, man with the iron heart. And this is certainly the portrayal of him here.

Heydrich is not the first name that comes up when we consider Hitler's main supporters. Perhaps this is because he was assassinated, the only high Nazi official assassinated during the war. He was killed in Prague, 1942, but was a significant contributor to formulating the Final Solution.

This is really two films in one. The first half of the film focuses on Heydrich himself, indications that there would be an assassination attempt, in presenting him as a rather ruthless person, seen arrogant in the Navy, brutal fencing with an opponent, aggressive in casual sexual relationships, court-martialed and dismissed. The film then introduces us to Lina, who was to become Heydrich's wife, her Nazi ideology and his joining the party, his marriage, several children, his policing and gaining information about suspects.

He is interviewed by Himmler and indicates quickly and sufficiently that he could be ruthless in the work of the SS. And this is seen graphically, firing squads, massacres in Poland, soldiers shooting civilians, the eradication of the Jews, the setting up of the concentration camps – and scenes where these atrocities are photographed and Heydrich watches them on film. In fact, he is so successful, that Hitler appoints him Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. Again, there are graphic scenes of his

ruthlessness. He has some (perhaps) redeeming moments with music, violin playing with his son, but he becomes consumed with his work, the plans for the Final Solution, that he begins to treat his wife like other suspects.

Then, halfway through the film, it changes pace. We are introduced to the Czech young men training in Scotland for going back to their fatherland. The focus is on to their parachuting into Czechoslovakia, joining the local resistance, the intention (Operation Anthropoid) to assassinate Heydrich. The film gives a great deal of attention to the characters, their interactions, the planning and the execution – as well as its consequences, audiences may remember the reprisals and the elimination of the village of Lidice, the searches for the perpetrators and the siege in the church which destroyed them.

For those interested in World War II stories, a great deal of interest. For those less familiar with the events, the two-part film may be sometimes confusing. However, Heydrich was remembered in Hollywood soon after his death in the films, *Hitler's children*, *Hangmen also Die*. During the 1970s the story is told again in *Operation Daybreak*. Strangely, at the time of the making of this film, another version, *Anthropoid*, was filmed and released. The latter part of this film coincides with the whole story of *Anthropoid*, the resistance, planning, assassination, consequences.

Jason Clarke gives a sometimes chilling performance as Heydrich, filmed just before his portrayal of Edward Kennedy in *Chappaquiddick*. Rosamund Pike can also be chilling as his Aryan-Supremacy? wife. Stephen Graham is quite frightening as Himmler. And young actors, Jack O'Connell? and Jack Raynor portray the two designated to lead the assassination attempt.

The film offers no sympathetic perspective on Heydrich while being in admiration of the resistance.

SHOW DOGS

US, 2018, 92 minutes, Colour.

Will Arnett, Natasha Lyonne, Omar Chaparro. Voices of: Chris Ludicrus Bridges, Stanley Tucci, Shaquille O' Neal, Ru Paul, Gabriel Iglesias, Ronni Ancona.

Directed by Raja Gosnell.

Back in the old days, there was Francis, the talking mule. Then there was that talking horse, Mr Ed. And, since then, lots of films with talking animals, and developing techniques to make their mouths move to make it all the more convincing.

This time it is a talking dog, a strong Rottweiler named Max. In fact, he is on the expert staff of the NYPD. And, he talks to animals and they respond – initially a group of daffy pigeons who admire Max, want to help and, ultimately, succeed. Max is watching a group of criminals, trading in valuable animals and sees little panda in a cage and response to the panda's appeal.

In the meantime, there is Frank, an FBI agent (Will Arnett), with the potential for being a romantic hero and detective but also prone to accidents. And this is very evident at first with the pursuit of the criminals by car, and Max using his ingenuity and vigour by chasing one of the criminals around the streets.

The head of the New York police is very supportive of Max as are some of the other dogs in the headquarters. Most reluctantly, the FBI accepts that Max will share a mission with Frank at a dog show in Las Vegas, apparently the most prestigious in the world, where Max will compete to be Best in Show.

Lots of dogs in this film – which means that, even though it is aimed at a young audience, parental dog lovers may well be satisfied in contemplating the range of dogs, their style, fussiness, dialogue, performance, preparation for the big show. One of the dogs is French, resentful of his past owner, but deciding to help Max. And, so, the voices are important with comedian Chris Ludicrous Bridges voicing Max, and audiences wondering who this French poodle is voiced by, discovering it is Stanley Tucci.

Of course, there is a touch of romance with Natasha Lyonne as another dog trainer, helping in the ultimate confrontation with the Hispanic villain and his contacts with Ukrainian gangs, Omar Chaparro.

There is a final action confrontation, a tiger on the loose, pigeons in pursuit of a car, the humans and the dogs all combining and combatting for success.

Enjoyable, forgettable, something for the holidays (although, some parents might be wary of the use of guns in the action).

SICARIO, DAY OF THE SOLDADO

US, 2018, 122 minutes, Colour.

Benicio Del Toro, Josh Brolin, Isabella Moner, Jeffrey Donovan, Catherine Keener, Manuel Garcia-Rulfo, Matthew Modine, Shea Whigham, Elijah Rodriguez.

Directed by Stephen Sollima.

The original film, *Sicario*, made quite an impact on both critics and audiences. Inevitable, perhaps, that there would be a sequel. And, since the action took place in Mexico, in the world of the violence of that country and the cartels, American interventions, and there has been very little letup in the cartel violence and so, a sequel, the title emphasis on the warriors and the soldiers in these conflicts.

The first filming was released before the election of Donald Trump as was president. This sequel was released in the middle of his second year of presidency. Because he has targeted Mexico, Mexicans coming illegally across the border, at one stage separating parents from children and then going back on this policy, the film, with its visuals of the wall, the people-smugglers and their vehicles through the desert, is more than topical.

In fact, from the very beginning, even more contemporary themes are introduced. We see the American helicopters scouring the border area with their searchlights, the refugees fleeing, one of them going aside, putting out his prayer mat and his suiciding with an explosive. Immediately, we are taken to Kansas City, to a suburban supermarket, everything familiarly ordinary with three terrorists arriving and exploding bombs. And then, suddenly, we are with American secret forces in Somalia, abducting a terrorist, destroying his home and family, trying to get information about terrorists in the Middle East getting boats to Mexico to infiltrate the US. The interrogation sequence

takes place in Djibouti.

And this is all within the first 10 to 15 minutes. We know that this is going to be an intense film, but violent film, a challenge to prevailing world attitudes towards migration, towards terrorists, towards secret agencies working outside the letter of the law.

Matthew Modine appears as Secretary of State with Catherine Keener as a rather ruthless advisor. The plan is to foment war against the cartel leaders, especially by the abduction of the daughter of one of them. Josh Brolin takes up his previous role as the head of these official/unofficial mercenaries and he brings back Benicio del Toro from the previous film, still full of anger and revenge for the death of his family.

With this all set out in the film, it is over to the audience to sit, sometimes in amazement, sometimes in horror, sometimes emotionally stirred, sometimes disgusted. But, whether an audience likes this film or not, given the headlines and the stories out of Mexico, given the revelations about past CIA interrogations and torture, this sequel is certainly topical. And, the final sequence means that there is going to be another Sicario film.

TAG

All US, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.

Ed Helms, Jon Hamm, Annabelle Wallis, Jake Johnson, Isla Fisher, Hannibal Buress, Nora Dunn, Steve Berg, Jeremy Renner, Leslie Bibb, Rashida Jones.

Directed by Jeff Tomsic.

Writing a review? Perhaps not, because this film is too silly for words.

However, it alleges that it is based on a true story. And, lo and behold, in the final credits, there are all kinds of sequences where these middle aged men carry on with taking one another. And then there is the photo of the group who have been playing tag for 23 years – and one of the members in a clerical shirt in the front row.

Boys will be boys. Men will be boys. But for how long? And what does this say about them – possibly playfulness at first. But then obsession and rivalry? Competitiveness, taking off the whole month of May from their work to play tag across the whole of the United States, money and costs no obstacle.

Then, there is a distraction about American politics, especially since the film was released in the second year of Donald Trump's presidency. The distraction leads to thinking about the Whitecap house, Donald Trump himself and his equivalent of tag, especially with the great turnover of his staff and officials. Perhaps in American politics there is a lot of boys will be boys.

The cast actually give it all that they can. Ed Helms, in various disguises, completely obsessed, urged on by his rather rapid wife, Isla Fisher, promotes the tag game every year. Jake Johnson is something of a Stoner but nevertheless joins in. Hannibal furious is Kevin Sable, one of the more stable members of the group. Jon Hamm looks as if he is just stepped out of Madcap men and is a business executive who can let it all go for the sake of tag. And the target is played by Jeremy Renner, who has never been tagged, was about to get married, his fiancée, Leslie Bibb, in on the game and,

surprisingly abetting Jerry in a false miscarriage defence.

Also along for the ride is Annabelle Wallis as a journalist interviewing Hamm but is abandoned for the tag game but she thinks that there is a better story in following through (and, of course, involved in the game at the end). Rashida Jones is also there the object of affection and attention by Jake Johnson and Jon Hamm.

TWO IS A FAMILY/ DEMAIN TOUT COMMENCE

France, 2016, 118 minutes, Colour.

Omar Sy, Clemence Poesy, Antoine Bertrand, Ashley Walters, Gloria Colston, Clementine Celarie.

Directed by Hugo Gelin.

The climax is at Jerry's wedding – which leads to a hospital sequence and good-natured (we hope) tagging all round.

This is a remake of a Mexican film which has the evocative title, Instructions Not Needed. The original French title of this film has a different tone, Demain tout commence/Tomorrow Everything Begins. However, Two is a Family does give a focus to what this film is about.

Advertising tells us that it was one of the most popular films of the French box office in 2017-2018. It certainly has a lot of popular ingredients, a vivacious little girl aged eight, an oddball father-figure, a mother, Kristin (Clemence Poesy) who abandons her baby, some heart-wrenching child custody issues.

While the film is French and the opening sequences set on the coast of southern France, most of the action actually takes place in London. Fortunately, there are a lot of French-speakers in London as well as a French school for the little girl! The little girl is Gloria, played by actress Gloria Colston, able to speak charmingly in both French and English.

And the father-figure? Samuel. He is played by the very popular Omar Sy who made such an impression as the carer in The Intouchables. The filmmakers are able to capitalise on his agreeable screen presence – although, at the beginning, he is shown to be pretty reckless and irresponsible. Of course, this is the setting for him having to discover responsibility, a young woman arriving to tell him that he is the father of her baby and getting him to hold her while she takes €20 and gets a taxi and disappears from their lives.

What is Sam to do? He goes post-haste to London, gets lost, has some problems in the Underground, encounters a French-speaking man, Bernie (Antoine Bertrand) who ultimately helps him out. Bernie is a film producer and sees the potential in Sam as a stuntman. Bernie also has a roving eye and has a very camp manner.

And so the years pass. Gloria is eight, lively, goes to school, joins Sam on the film sets, and in-jokes with him pretending to be unconscious after a stunt and she telling him he is immortal and his waking up! Who could ask for anything more!

Actually, Sam has become very responsible man, a loving father, sending an email every night to Gloria in the name of her mother whom he describes as a world-roving secret agent. Of course, there is the perennial question about telling the truth right from the beginning because lying can lead to disasters.

Suddenly, Kristin makes contact, comes from New York with her partner, wants to meet her daughter, is overjoyed, Sam slightly mellowing in his attitude towards Kristin. But, we know that there will be a mother's desire to have custody of her daughter.

The film becomes very serious towards the end, with both parties making strong speeches in court, pleading their cause, and the point being made, and made out loud by the judge, that custody is for the benefit of the child, not of the parent.

There are some further complications, a bit more heart-rending, before an ending which give sense to the original French title: it will be tomorrow when everything begins for Sam.

UPGRADE

Australia, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.

Logan Marshall- Green, Melanie Velejo, Harrison Gilbertson, Benedict Hardie, Linda Cropper, Clayton Jacobson, Simon Maiden, Betty Gabriel.

Directed by Leigh Whannell.

There are so many horror films about these days, some classy like A Quiet Place, many of them routine gore stories, some of them B-grade (or Z-grade). A number of successful films in recent years, like Get Out, like have been produced by Jason Blum, sometimes including Blumhouse in the titles.

Upgrade is actually a Blumhouse filmed in Melbourne standing in for the US. The director is Leigh Whannell, writer and actor, who moves into directing with Upgrade, which he also wrote. Whannell has appeared in a number of films including The Conjuring series. But, at the beginning of his career, with his friend from Melbourne University, James Wan, he invented the Saw franchise. In real life, listening to him in interviews, he seems like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. But, he knows the ins and outs of horror conventions.

This is quite an above average a story. It is futuristic. It is science-fiction. And, it seems to be a variation on the Frankenstein monster theme. It is also a revenge action story.

Logan Marshall- Green plays Grey who likes tinkering with and repairing cars. He is married to Asher, who works in a highly professional firm. The two go together to deliver a repaired car to a whiz kid, Warren (Harrison Gilbertson) who explains that he has a technological device that can be inserted into a human to improve skills.

Very quickly, there is a disaster, with thugs crashing into Grey and Asher, killing Asher, Grey becoming quadriplegic. Obviously, he is a candidate for the device and it is inserted.

At first, this enables Grey to move, to stand, to fight. And, there is a voice inside him, named Stem, who dialogues with him as well is enabling him to move, but soon becomes in, anticipating situations

controlling situations. Grey tracks down the thugs and confronts them.

But, obviously there has to be more than just the revenge theme. The complexities start with Stem taking over Grey, the young scientist becoming involved as well is the chief thug who is himself mechanised as well. It is all something of a conspiracy theory – but, the mystery for most of the time is, who is the main controller?

The film is well paced, often exciting, often mysterious, with touches of gory deaths as expected, and an explanation which goes beyond initial expectations – but which also could lead to a sequel.

REVIEWS AUGUST 2018

ANT MAN AND THE WASP

BEST OF F(R)IENDS

BEIRUT

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MARY SHELLEY

MR STEIN GOES ONLINE/ UN PROFIL POUR DEUX

ON CHESIL BEACH

RBG

SECOND, The

SKYSCRAPER

SUBMERGENCE

SUMMER 1993

WIFE, The

WHITNEY

ANT-MAN AND THE WASP

US, 2018, 118 minutes, Colour.

Paul Rudd, Evangeline Lilly, Michael Douglas, Michelle Pfeiffer, Michael Peña, Walton Goggins, Judy Greer, Bobby Canavale, T.I.Harris, David Dastmalchian, Hannah Joyn

-Kamen, Abby Ryder Fortson, Randall Park, Laurence Fishburne.

Directed by Peyton Reed.

Paul Rudd's Scott Lang must be the lowest-key superhero in the Marvel Universe. And, he spends a lot of his life and action as the diminutive Anti-Man? (though he does have some moments where he gets over-heightened, threatening boats and crowds at Fisherman's wharf in San Francisco).

However, he was welcomed by audiences in the original film, [Ant-Man](#), enjoying the scientific experiments whereby he could be reduced, the work of the scientist, Hank Van Dyne, played by Michael Douglas. His daughter, Hope, also played a role (Evangeline Lilly).

They are all back again, the film introduced with a prologue explaining how Hank's wife, Janet (Michelle Pfeiffer) was reduced and went into a miniature world but disappeared and has been missing for 30 years. Hank wants to mount an expedition to go to rescue her.

In the meantime, Scott has been in during two years of house arrest, an ankle bracelet for security, at home, playing with his young daughter, Cassie, and working with his associate in building up a security firm, Luis, played with comic enthusiasm by Michael Peña.

The bulk of the plot has some straightforward action. Some thugs want to get hold of Hank's laboratory – which, like humans, can be transformed into anti-size and resurrected to life-size. Walton Goggins leads the motley crew of thugs. So, a lot of time escaping with the laboratory, warding off the criminals, continuing with the plans for rescue, the police getting involved – but, most of all with Scott being able to escape house arrest by transforming into Anti-Man[?] and eluding detection and pursuit.

However, this is an adventure, and it all catches up with Scott and his associates. This involves an elaborate car chase, the laboratory building suddenly coming to large life at San Francisco Bay, its going up and down – and a further complication that the daughter of a scientist-rival of Hanks has grown up able to move in and out of space because of the reconstruction of her molecules! She is Ava/The Ghost, dangerous but potentially convertible.

Of course, there is excitement in the rescue with Hank himself going to find his wife.

The thugs are rounded up, the rather ingenuous policeman who is intrigued by Scott's ability to do magic tricks and misdirected attention, reconciling with Scott – and, of course, a very happy Van Dyne family and Scott and his daughter.

BEST F(R)IENDS

US, 2018, 99 minutes, Colour.

Tommy Wiseau, Greg Sestero, Kristin Stephenson Pino, Vince Jolivette, Rick Edwards.

Directed by Justin Mc Gregor.

Tommy Wiseau is back! The perhaps-good news is that he is still a terrible actor and that seems to be what his audiences want of him. Given his performance here, it would seem that he thinks he is a very good actor. Otherwise, this film is bad news for most audiences. It is one of those seeing is disbelieving movies!

An initial appropriate piece of advice. This is a film only for those who liked the cult film, with the attribution that it is one of the worst films ever made, *The Room*. The star and director of that film was Tommy Wiseau who is the star of this one. His co-star, Greg Sestero, who also wrote the book about the making of *The Room*, is here again.

The film is directed by Justin Mc Gregor who, on the evidence of this film, might be considered a terrible director, but actually might be a very good director following the instructions of Sestero, who wrote and produced the film, to make it as deadpan and as amateurish in performance, situations, visual style, editing and pace as possible.

Audiences who haven't seen *The Room* may well know it from the James Franco film, *The Disaster Artist*, a film about the making of *The Room*, with Franco himself as Wiseau and his brother, Dave Franco, as Sestero. Franco won a Golden Globe for Best Actor for this role and was present at the ceremony at table with Wiseau himself.

One of the troubles is that Wiseau is in no way a sympathetic screen presence. His stilted delivery with a touch of accent (allegedly from Poland many decades ago), his awkward stances, and an unpleasant character, are rather alienating – although, this is the point for those who will enjoy this film. And, Greg Sestero has a very limited range as his friend, Jon. Actually, there are a couple of actors in brief supporting roles who do a decent job and show up the stars!

If you heard that the film was about the manager of a morgue who extracts gold teeth from corpses, especially Chinese in Los Angeles whose mouths seem to be filled with gold fillings, then you'd have a fairly accurate explanation of the basis of the story. He befriends, Jon, a homeless man with corny placards begging for money (Sestero himself). They actually have a scheme going whereby a crooked entrepreneur sells the boxes full of gold teeth to make a fortune.

With a title like *Best F(r)iends*, we guess (rightly) that there will be a falling out. This is engineered by John's girlfriend who gives a better performance than the two men.

And then it stops. It is now revealed that this film is Volume 1 and there is a promise/threat that there will be *Best F(r)iends* Volume 2 – and, taking a leaf out of the Marvel Universe movies, the final credits have extended highlights of a trailer in which Wiseau, with a wig aping Sestero's hair, has to be seen to be believed. On the other hand, the film does not necessarily have to be seen!

Undoubtedly, this will also be a cult film, a definite curiosity item.

BEIRUT

US, 2018, 109 minutes, Colour.

Jon Hamm, Rosamund Pike, Mark Pellegrino, Shea Wigham, Leila Behkti.

Directed by Brad Anderson.

Beirut is a serious and sombre film. It is political, a dramatic look at American foreign policy, the role of Israel, the PLO. It was written by Tony Gilroy who has written some very interesting serious films like *Michael Clayton*, *Duplicity*, *Nightcrawler*. And the star is Jon Hamm, who made such an impression on television with *Mad Men* and has now established a film career.

While it is a film about espionage, it is not an action-packed film. It is an appeal to a more intelligent audience and it has disappointed those who are addicted to non-stop action and have found such dialogue tedious.

The film opens in Beirut (although the filming was done in Morocco, much to the upset of some Lebanese commentators. It is 1972, commentary made about coexistence in the country between Muslims and a variety of Christians, Jon Hamm appearing as an American host, Mason, a solid politician and negotiator. He is hosting a party with his wife, a young PLO 13-year-old boy who has been adopted, more or less, by the couple helping with the serving. Suddenly the party is interrupted, officials arriving, threats, the demand to surrender the boy because his brother has been one of the terrorists at the massacre of the Jewish athletes at the Munich Olympic Games. The tensions in the situation leads to some tragic consequences.

The film then moves to 10 years later, 1982, with Mason self-employed back in the US, still in grief about his wife's death, alcoholic, and negotiator between companies and unions. Unexpectedly, a message comes from the State Department inviting him to return to Lebanon to deal with a hostage situation. The hostage is his close friend who was involved as an authority on the night of the party 10 years earlier.

Mason is somewhat reluctant but, drawing on his skills as a negotiator, he evaluates the situation with the local American authorities, the ambassador, the complexities of the demands by the PLO for Israel to return the terrorist from the Olympic Games who has been taken by the Israelis.

It is also sobering to watch this kind of story realising that this is the kind of thing that is going on in many countries, thinking of the Middle East, abductions, hostage demands, threats of retaliation, the need for the negotiators to have steady nerves and ability to think through situations and potential consequences.

The screenplay takes the audience through the various steps, contact with the Israelis, then discussion with the Israelis who deny having the prisoner, though not calling off further negotiations. There are the contacts with the PLO and their status at the time, and the presence in Lebanon.

Jon Hamm is quite credible in this role, a good man, a man who suffered, a man who has lost some confidence in himself but who draws on his resources to negotiate while respecting the demands and conditions of the respective parties. His co-star in the film is Rosamund Pike as one of the members of the team in Beirut. She is a presence. She is very serious (there is nothing to suggest any levity in the situation) and supports Hamm in the process.

There is a postscript at the end with a speech in a press conference by Ronald Reagan, the President talking about peace in that area of the world while there has been Civil War during the 1970s and impending 1980s invasions of Lebanon by Israel.

A story from past decades but still of immediate relevance.

BLACKKLANSMAN

US, 2018, 135 minutes, Colour.

John David Washington, Adam Driver, Topher Grace, Alec Baldwin, Ryan Eggold, Laura Harrier, Jasper Paakkonen, Robert John Burke, Paul Walter Hauser, Corey Hawkins, Michael Buscemi, Harry Belafonte.

Directed by Spike Lee.

It has an understatement to say that Spike Lee is passionate about race issues in the United States. It is almost 30 years since his tough stand in *Do The Right Thing*. And, here he is, 30 years later, taking stands. In the meantime, he has made a great range of films, many documentaries, many dramas, even thrillers like *Inside Man* and *Old Boy*. But he continues to return to race issues. The tone is set by a black-and-white filmed interview from the past, the dignified-looking white speaker being prompted as he is filmed, bigotry and bias pervading the speech. In fact, it is Alec Baldwin playing this speaker.

BLACKKLANSMAN won the Grand Jury Prize, 2018, in Cannes. It also won an Ecumenical Jury Commendation at Cannes.

A first hearing of the core plot element might indicate that this is an impossible story, an African-American man in the early 1970s infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan and even becoming the head of the local chapter in Colorado Springs. However, this is based on a book by the actual Ron Stallworth, the man behind the plan. What actually happened is that Ron talked to the Klan officials on the phone and his police partner, Jewish and white, taking the same name, did all the visits, attending the meetings. And, it worked, as an undercover police operation.

The two actors are convincing in their roles, even when they act acting. John David Washington is Ron Stallworth. In fact, in real life, he is the son of Denzel Washington and, as we listen to the dialogue in the film, they seem to have identical voices. Adam Driver is Flip Zimmerman, the partner, carrying off his impersonations and his Klan rantings with fabricated enthusiasm, but with growing intensity reflecting on his Jewish background which had had no impact during his growing up.

The film opens with a sequence from *Gone with the Wind*. There are also some excerpts from D.W.Griffiths classic *Birth of a Nation*, 1916, based on a novel called *The Clansmen*, sympathetic to the clan, presenting the slaves and free in stereotypical fashion. There is a sequence where the local members of the Klan watch the movie with catcalls and guffaws.

Ron is a man of his times, but the first black policeman on the Colorado Springs force, seen as something of a pioneer and supported by the authorities, ridiculed by a bigoted policeman in the force. He is sent to infiltrate a black gathering to hear Stokely Carmichael (with his changed name, Kwame Ture), with a microphone and getting information for the police. He meets the president of the Association, Patrice (Laura Harrier). They argue. He is more restrained as regards the issues though getting to enthuse about the cause, especially during the powerful and steering address.

The local to members, of course, are quite a redneck collection, bigoted and uneducated about race relationships, spouting the superiority of the white race with their God-given destiny (and completely oblivious of Native Americans). Their meetings are haphazard, but they are eager to go into some kind of action which would now be branded as terrorist, that includes the willingness of the wife of the most bigoted to plant a bomb at Patrice's house.

And, at the centre of the Klan, is the Grand Wizard of the period, David Duke (Tougher Grace), with suit and tie, political ambitions, external charm, but able to rouse the rabble - despite the Klan wanting to be known as *The Organisation*.

Spike Lee has a very effective sequence where the Klan having a lively meeting and it is intercut with

a veteran recalling his life, the death of a friend, the contempt and humiliation experienced throughout his life – all the more persuasive because the speech is given by Harry Belafonte.

There are a lot of comic touches in this disguise caper, some narrow escapes, Ron being appointed by the police chief to be the security guard for David Duke in his visit to the town... Flip Zimmerman becoming head of the local chapter. And there is a sequence of burning crosses, caps and capes, a ritual of loyalty. But, there are serious moments, images of burning crosses, photos of atrocities, the tension when the woman goes to plant the bomb.

John David Washington is completely believable in the role, engaging as he plays some scenes for laughs. He is nicely counterbalanced by Adam Driver. For those wondering about the character of Jimmy, another police officer, it is not Steve Buscemi but his younger brother Michael.

At the end, the audience sits in rather stunned silence as Spike Lee powerfully incorporates sequences from riots and deaths in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. He shows actual sequences of David Duke speaking there – and, the sequence of Donald Trump as he talks about the good and bad people on both sides of the riots.

Passionate and partisan but tantalising and often very moving.

C'EST LA VIE

France, 2017, 117 minutes, Colour.

Jean- Pierre Bacri, Jean- Paul Rouve, Gilles Lelloouche, Vincent Macaigne, Eye Haidara, Suzanne Clement, Alban Ivanov, Helene Vincent, Benjamin Lavernhe, Judith Chemla.

Directed by Olivier Nakache, Eric Toledano.

So, that's life! C'est la vie!

This is one of the agreeably funny films of 2018. It was co-written and co-directed by Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano, who are extraordinary successful with the film about the invalid and his carer, *Les Intouchables*.

This film is not quite what might be expected from the title and expectations that this could be yet another French romantic comedy. Rather, it is the story of a day in catering for a wedding where everything could go wrong (and a lot of it does), the hassles for the manager and the staff (sometimes extreme), but where the celebration does go on and many of the guests are none the wiser.

The film also has a large cast and the casting directors have done a very good job in their selection, especially of the staff, men and women, young and old, eccentric and fairly normal, different race representations. So, this wedding celebration is a mini microcosm (though one is cautious to say this because one of the main characters, a former English teacher who has had a breakdown, comments pedantically through the whole film about precise expression, especially pointing out to unwitting users, "pleonisms", redundancies like "starting from now" or "mini-microcosms"!).

The film opens amusingly with Max, the manager for catering (an excellent Jean- Paul Bacri) to

special events, is discussing plans with a pleasant young couple who have thrift, even beyond-thrift, in their suggestions for their own wedding reception. His exasperated response to the invitation to his being inventive, sets the tone of humour, expectations that people have about receptions, and the professional and personal pressures on the managers.

Most of the film takes place between 2 o'clock in the afternoon and almost 6 AM the following morning. Step by step we meet all the people involved, the chefs, the substitute musician and his tantrums, the assistant manager and her seeming inability to stop bursting out angrily to any opposition, the photographer whom nobody will employ except the manager, his friend, a photographer now being redundant as all the guests line up with their phone cameras. There are quite some different types in the staff, the aforementioned former teacher who had dated the bride, a substitute brought in who is accident-prone, turning off the freezing switches when he uses his shaver, ruining the meat. And there are some Sri Lankans who provide some humour, language jokes, and finally some saving-the-night music.

The main target of spoof is the bridegroom, impossibly conceited, giving long speeches, participating in an acrobatic finale that has to be seen to be believed! At many moments, the audience might be thinking that a sequel to this film would be a reception for everyone after the divorce! How could anyone remain married to this oafish narcissist?

Very funny at times. Angers being vigorously expressed at times. But, ultimately, quite a sense of humanity underlying the quirks and foibles as well as the resilience of human nature.

THE EQUALIZER 2

US, 2018, 121 minutes, Colour.

Denzel Washington, Pedro Pascal, Ashton Sanders, Orson Bean, Bill Pullman, Melissa Leo.

Directed by Antoine Fuqua.

Clearly The Equaliser was popular with audiences and at the box office. Hence, The Equaliser 2.

In the old days, it was Charles Bronson who was the avenging vigilante, loner righter of wrongs. In more recent times it is Liam Neeson or Denzel Washington. Not that Denzel Washington as Robert Mc Coll was a loner in the past. He worked with a team of agents, government-backed, official assassins. But, with the death of his wife, his being consumed with grief, he has gone out on his own when he sees a wrong to be righted.

This is made very clear in the opening sequence, Mc Coll travelling by train through Turkey (actually very attractive) and confronting the abductor of a child – and, anonymously restoring the child to its mother back in New York. She works in a bookshop which Mc Coll visits, buying the next volume of Proust which is working through. (Charles Bronson probably did not read Proust.)

Mc Coll now seems to be something of an Uber-driver, deeply contemplating the range of passengers with their problems, their issues, their needs – giving the audience time to watch these passengers with Mc Coll and be empathetic like him. He lives alone, has an old Jewish friend (Orson Bean) who has been searching for his long-lost sister from the Holocaust, is friendly with a Muslim gardener at his apartment block, tries to help his young African-American neighbour (Ashton

Sanders), to move him from drug-criminal friends, improve his self-esteem, foster his talent as an artist.

So, what is the violent plot element in this film? Suddenly we are in Brussels, a man arriving home to find intruders in his house, his wife at the dinner table, their both being executed. Mc Coll has a friend, Suzanne (Melissa Leo) who is sent to investigate. The criminals confront her – and, Mc Coll naturally becomes involved.

Actually, the plot is a bit complicated. Mc Coll goes back to the agency, especially his former partner, Dave (Pedro Pascal), a family man, who has thought Mc Coll dead for seven years. There are also other connections from the agency.

Then, the young artist, successful, is visiting Mc Coll's room and he is trapped by the killers and taken as hostage. Fortunately, Mc Coll has surveillance cameras in all his rooms in his apartment and can see what is going on. The killers then realise that Mc Coll will go to the coast, to his wife's house. They make for it – but, a hurricane is blowing in from the Atlantic, and the violent climax takes place in wind, rain and storms.

No spoiler to know that all will be well in the end – but all is well in the end for some of the minor characters as well, giving a niceness in our feelings after the brutality that we have witnessed. It is an ugly world – but everything need not be ugly.

FUNNY COW

UK, 2017, 102 minutes, Colour.

Maxine Peake, Paddy Considine, Alun Armstrong, Christine Bottomley, Stephen Graham, Tony Pitts, Lindsay Coulson.

Directed by Adrian Shergold.

Not the most engaging of titles – but it is the title for a film which has quite a lot going for it. This is a very British story, set in northern England in past decades, in the streets of a city, the touch of poverty row. But, it is the story of a character who emerges from this background to make something of herself, not without many difficulties and challenges.

This is a film about a stand-up comedian. Not an easy profession. It requires a great deal of self-confidence, even self-esteem, a sense of humour (often offbeat) which does not appeal to every audience and, we realise, audiences are hard to please and often become hostile and mocking.

In fact, the film opens with a middle-aged woman in close-up, her microphone, performing for an audience, touches of humour, but many wry touches as she talks about her family background. This performance provides a framework for the whole film, the anchor for the many flashbacks.

And the title? The central character is always referred to as Funny Cow (and, as a little girl, she is listed in the cast as Funny Calf). She is played by Maxine Peake, quite an extraordinary performance in its way, often very brash, often unrelenting, ups and downs in relationships, wanting to be a clown professionally, tongue-tied at an audition when young, stepping into the role unexpectedly and

wowing her audience and not looking back. For those with more delicate sensitivities, it needs to be noted that her comedy initiatives at first, routines later, are very earthy, sex-oriented, few holds barred.

But, Maxine Peake's presence and performance is compelling. Her background as a little girl is harsh, bullied at school but exuberant at home, her mother drinking, her father particularly brutal and whipping her but, when he unexpectedly dies, with eyes initially downcast, she exits the house and yells "Yippee!". She has a brother and later visit him and his family but to little effect. (Stephen Graham is quite powerful in the role of the father, the embodiment of domestic violence – and also appears, much more subdued, in the role of her brother.)

She has sex in the back of a car with Bob (Tony Pitts who in fact wrote the screenplay). He too is ultimately violent – though there is a moving scene towards the end of the film when Funny Cow visit him in hospital. Her other relationship is fascinating both for herself and for the audience. She is browsing in a book shop owned by Angus, a sympathetic Paddy Considine, and they become friends, Bob threatening, but her going to live with Angus when she leaves Bob.

She uses the words about Angus and his friends, "educated" and "articulate". She is bored by the performance of a Shakespearean play and realises that, though she is articulate, she shuns Angus's type of education.

Alun Armstrong appears as a stand-up comedian, getting older, getting weary, trying to dissuade Funny Cow from the profession but her stepping in when finally he refuses to go on stage – which leads to a movingly fatal sequence.

And, there is her mother, sitting at home, perpetually drinking, with her daughter helping her to move away from the brutal past, get off the drink – and there are moving sequences they walk along the beach.

We don't know where this will all lead for Funny Cow – we leave her, in her monologue, reminiscing, humorous, wondering whether lives are fatal or whether we mould our own lives.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ANDRE

US, 2017, 93 minutes, Colour.

Andre Leon Talley.

Directed by Kate Novack.

The advertising for this documentary states that you don't have to be a fashionista to enjoy it. But, being a fashionista is almost a prerequisite. However, as the film goes on, there are quite a number of more substantial American themes.

And, for those not in the know, who is Andre Leon Talley? First thing to say is that he is a big and imposing presence, tall when he was younger, but filling out more than amply as he grew older so that by 2016 something of a giant presence. Many would notice him at once anyway, but his choice of wardrobe is rather spectacular, large and particularly colourful. In fact, that is true of Andre, large and particularly colourful.

There are many talking heads in this film, many from the fashion industry who express their appreciation of Andre, designers like Tom Ford and Karl Lagerfeld. There are also a number of women who have encountered him in his journalist career and a number of models, like Naomi Campbell, seen in clips of catwalk shows. In fact, there are quite a lot of talking heads. And these include editors of Vogue that Andre worked for, especially the very well-known Anna Wintour, more benign than in a number of her other documentary appearances.

Andre was born in North Carolina in 1949. He has great praise for his grandmother who brought him up, instilled in him a sense of style and class despite being African Americans in the South. She was also religious, instilling some religious values into the young Andre which he has preserved, even as he has grown much older.

He is an interesting African- American who has experienced all kinds of prejudices. He is also a gay American, less talking about his sexual preferences, letting his flamboyant and camp manner make an impression.

He became a fashion journalist, working in Paris, doing lots of interviews, contributing articles to fashion magazines, which lead him back to the United States and a substantial career at Vogue and contributing to other magazines. He has met many, many people, many, many celebrities, and has become quite a celebrity himself, a knack for appreciating colour and style, a knack for improving fashion design, and more than a definite knack for communicating his ideas and opinions - seen in his handling of television interviews.

As the film goes on, it broadens its scope from the world of fashion to the United States and its values, issues of race, issues of class, issues of prejudice. And, the film takes us up to the campaign for the presidency and the election of Donald Trump as president. It comes as a surprise to Andre and his friends, giving some insight into those who opposed Trump, expected Hillary Clinton to win, and had to deal with the outcome. (Andre is very satisfied with the way that Melania Trump wore her clothes.) Andre is a great admirer of the Obamas, and pays tribute to the style and presence of Michelle Obama.

Essential viewing only for fashion fans but, ultimately, an entertaining portrait of a self-made American celebrity in the context of the late 20th century and the early 21st century.

HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 3: MONSTER VACATION

US, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: Adam Sandler, Selena Gomez, Andy Sandberg, Kathryn Hahn, Mel Brooks, Fran Drescher, Steve Buscemi, Tara Strong, David Spade, Kevin James, Keegan- Michael Key, Chris Parnell, Jim Gaffigan.

Directed by Genndy Tatartarkovsky.

For audiences who enjoyed the goings on at the comically sinister Hotel Transylvania, this third in the series will be warmly welcomed. In fact, it will be doubly welcomed because the other two films were generally confined to the Hotel and this one moves away, well away.

A new element is introduced with an initial train ride, some of the monsters concealed with the ordinary passages passengers on their way to Budapest. But, who should arrive on the train with his anti-monster gun but the vampire Hunter, van Helsing himself. This means that there is initial confrontation – with, of course, the vampires and the monsters winning and going back to the hotel while van Helsing seems to disappear over a cliff and into the sea forever. (Not exactly, as we discover...)

While life goes on at the hotel, the passing of the decades, Drac becoming rather weary of his work at the hotel, his daughter Mavis, who is now teamed up with DJ Johnny, comes up with a practical suggestion. A holiday – an American style vacation. Just a reminder that Adam Sandler is once again enjoying himself as the voice of Drac with Selena Gomez as Mavis and Andy Samberg voicing Johnny.

They make a decision to go on a voyage – and it is something like a parallel of *The Love Boat*. The monsters, in all their array and disarray, the jelly blobs, Frankie Frankenstein, the invisible man and the spectacles, her enjoying the voyage and all the deck games.

However, the captain of the boat is Ericha (voiced by Kathryn Hahn). She seems to be doing a line for Drac and he is certainly ready to succumb, feeling a lot of romantic vibes. But, she reveals to the audience that she is intending to destroy Drac and that her name is actually Erica van Helsing.

There are a couple of ports on the way, an undersea volcano, a deserted island where they all have very elaborate picnic, and then the undersea city of Atlantis. This Atlantis is not unlike contemporary Las Vegas!

Everybody is enjoying the occasion, and Drac in some torment about Ericha, Mavis definitely taking a dislike to her. She has to climb a mountain through various obstacles to get a text which will help her achieve her mission., Charming as ever, Drac helps her through the obstacles and barriers, making her very emotionally confused but she delivers the text to Van Helsing who is still alive, connected to all kinds of machinery.

The conflict between the monsters and Professor is amusingly portrayed by a clash of music, Johnny the DJ helping out, Van Helsing playing on old harpsichord trying to drown out the opposition who rely on Good Vibrations and on everyone swinging to the Macarena.

Everyone, being refreshed by a sea voyage, happy to go home, romance and love in the air – and audiences wondering what they will do for *Hotel Transylvania 4*.

KNOCK/DR KNOCK

France, 2017, 114 minutes, Colour.

Omar Sy, Alex Lutz, Ana Girardot, Sabine Azema, Andrea Ferreol, Pascal Elbe, Helene Vincent, Rufus. Directed by Lorraine Levy.

While this is a very watchable film, there is a certain uneasiness underlying the response. It concerns the conman, the nature of frauds, the effect on victims of the cons. One of the descriptions to use the central character in the original novel on which this film is based is that of “charlatan”, which is a bit more derogatory than “conman”.

The film is very, as the French might say “geniale”, and so is Knock, the conman. But there is the underlying question, when is a conman a rogue and when is he a helpful row.

The original novel was written in the 1920s, adapted for theatre, filmed as something of a classic in 1951. The setting in this version is the 1950s, with reference to memories of World War II.

Knock is played by Omar Sy, who made such an impression in *The Intouchables* as well as *Samba* and *Two is a Family* (also appearing in *Jurassic World* and an *X-Men* film). Sy can't help but be charming – although at first he is seen being pursued by criminals to whom he owes money and being bashed. He gets away from them, taking a job on a boat to India, standing in, with the Captain's consent, as a doctor. He has some success with patients and learns a lot, returning to Marseille in order to study medicine.

The bulk of the film takes place five years later in a very attractive Alpine village (beautifully filmed in widescreen format). He is still the conman, even though qualified, and his goal is to make money even as he helps people. And, help people he does, contrasting with the previous doctor who gave them herb teas. He gets in pleasant cahoots with the pharmacist who is not against making money either, nor his wife who becomes infatuated with Knock. At first he offers free consultations – with long lines coming. He is able to talk easily with people, the alcoholic postman, the rather harridan manager of a farm, a rich old lady, all the locals, in fact, so that business thrives.

However, he has a flair for understanding human nature and being able to persuade the patients to help themselves. So far, so good.

The young parish priest, Alex Lutz, takes in immediate dislike to Knock. He undermines him, contradicts him, accuses him of being a liar, is on the alert to catch him out at any cost, utilising gossip and some information from the confessional to denounce him, the exact opposite of the classic “*Diary of a Country Priest*” by Georges Bernanos, which was screening in France in those years. This makes the film anti-clerical, (anti-clericalism having a strong French tradition), the character giving just grounds for anti-clerical responses.

There is a dramatic crisis as Knock helps a serving girl with tuberculosis, the priest capitalising on a ceremony in the church for a final confrontation with Knock, but the congregation, the townspeople turning against the priest and supporting Knock.

Entertaining, a number of the characters in the town being rather stereotyped, a more sentimental interpretation of the conman – that is the nature of the conman's charm.

MAMMA MIA! HERE WE GO AGAIN

US, 2018, 114 minutes, Colour.

Lily James, Amanda Seyfried, Meryl Streep, Dominic Cooper, Pierce Brosnan, Stellan Skarsgaard, Colin Firth, Cher, Christine Baranski, Julie Walters, Jeremy Irvine, Andy Garcia, Josh Dylan, Hugh Skinner, Celia Imrie, Jessica Keenan Wynn, Alexa Davies, Omid Djalili.

Directed by Ol Parker.

Actually, the title might have been better with *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Before*. While the core of the plot takes place in the present, 10 years after the original film, most of this story is in flashback.

We get an initial shock to hear that Donna (Meryl Streep) has died the year before. There are a number of pictures of her in the house on the Greek island, but she doesn't appear herself until the end of the film, singing a plaintive ballad, but joining in the exuberance of the final credits choreography. Her daughter, Sophie (Amanda Seyfried), is planning the opening of the home as a hotel, *Bella Donna*, in her mother's memory.

So, this is Donna's story, but Donna back at the end of the 1970s. She is played with exceeding vim, vigour and vitality, as well as charm, by Britain's Lily James (*Downton Abbey*, *Cinderella*, *The Guernsey... Literary Society*). And we see her first at her university graduation in the UK, the valedictory speaker, but suddenly bursting into song and taking over the whole ceremony, upstaging the vice chancellor at first (Celia Imre) but then she joining in with enthusiasm.

There are some references to Donna's mother, a travelling singer, Ruby. Ruby, not invited to the opening of the renovated hotel, turns up and takes control of the whole show. She is played by Cher, a strikingly commanding and glamorous presence.

But, back in the past, Donna has a yearning to go to Greece. And, on the way, she encounters three young men (whom devotees are familiar with from the first film), the three potential fathers of her baby. Harry is a student in Paris. Bill is a sailor from Sweden in Greece. Sam is on a kind of Gap Experience in Greece.

While there are lots of ABBA songs, quite a number of the favourites which have become part of our psyche over the last 40 years, there are a few less familiar songs, some ballads, sung by the young Donna with the young men, some by Sophie to her absent husband Sky, doing a business course in New York (Dominic Cooper).

And, so, the screenplay involves us in the present and the preparation for the opening of the hotel, challenged by devastating storm, Sophie upset that Harry and Bill cannot come, is Sky will be absent... However, thank goodness, Christine Baranski, especially, and Julie Walters turn up as Donna's old friends, Tanya and Rosie) and contribute to the humour of the interactions, with some Christine Baranski wisecracks.

And while the casting of the three suitors in their young days are credible enough for the older Sam, Harry and Bill, the actresses who portray the younger friends, Jessica Keenan Wynn and Alexa Davies, are spot on. (And Pierce Brosnan singing has not improved – that he does get to do some dancing. Colin Firth is still averse to dancing. And there is a funny joke with Stellan Skarsgård in a fat suit as his twin brother.)

Not to forget the presence of Andy Garcia. Whether the writers wanted to have Fernando being sung in the new film or whether they wanted to give a back story to Cher and her younger days, they have been planted a plot detail to enable Cher to do a show-stopping rendition of Fernando.

As with the first one, the film is rather slight and, at times, silly. But, this will not matter too much to the potential fans, eager to hear the ABBA songs (yet again), to enjoy the story of Donna and her suitors and, nice climax, Sophie being pregnant and everybody assembling for the baptism.

(And, as a reward for those who sit through the credits, there is a joke, continued from the film, with comedian Omid Djalili at passport control.)

One local enthusiast in a Catholic paper thought that the film was ABBA-solutely wonderful, while an ABC radio reviewer said it was a terrible film – but later added “but you’re going to go out and see it anyway”. And that will probably be it all around the world.

MARY SHELLEY

UK/Luxembourg, 2017, 110 minutes, Colour.

Elle Fanning, Maisie Williams, Douglas Booth, Steve Dillane, Tom Sturridge, Joanne Froggatt, Bel Powley, Ben Hardy, Hugh O'Conor

Directed by Haifa Al-Mansour?

Mary Shelley is synonymous with Frankenstein. This seems to be her basic reputation. However, as this film highlights, there is much more to her as a person, her life, relationships, her ideas as well as the greater range and depth of themes in Frankenstein.

This is a period drama, set in the second decade of the 19 century. It is the period of transition from the Enlightenment to the Romantic era. The Enlightenment was personified by Mary's parents, the writer and thinker, Mary Wollstonecraft, and her father, William Godwin, thinker and novelist. They were concerned with political, Meconomic, intellectual issues, writing, discussing, instilling this search for meaning into their daughter, Mary Godwin.

During the action of this film, Mary moves from the age of 16 to the age of 18, a period of life as a teenager but a period of moving from adolescence to adulthood for Mary herself. Given the household that she grew up in and the influence of her parents, it is not surprising that we see Mary as a writer, writing in her journal, confiding in her half-sister, Claire. However, there is tension between Mary and her stepmother. This means being sent off to Scotland for some time, calming her down as well as broadening her horizons.

But, the important person in her life was the poet Percy Shelley, already published, in his 20s, a public figure. He is an apprentice to Mary's father and she falls in love with him, with a passion that drives her beyond intellectual thought. In the household, it does not matter that they are not married (although it is a shock when Shelley's wife, Henrietta, the accosts Mary in the street and she discovers the truth). Mary becomes pregnant but loses her child, part of the financial and accommodation difficulties that they encounter.

But the romantic figure of the time was Lord Byron and paths cross, especially when Claire is infatuated with Byron and begins an affair with him, and becoming pregnant.

The occasion of the drama for this encounter is the performance of the play, Phantasmagoria, a lecturer explaining Galvanism, the role of electricity, current enabling limbs to move – and the question of the scientist electrifying a body to make it live. Mary was interested in the science, in the philosophy, in the nature of life and possibilities of creation. And, as is well known – and was dramatised in the 1980s by Ken Russell in Gothic – the famous night on the Lake Geneva where

Byron and Claire, Percy and Mary, were present with Byron's physician, John Polidori and, to while away the time, they were to write horror stories. Mary, with her love for ghost stories as well as science, created Frankenstein, the new Prometheus, who was to steal, like his predecessor, life from the gods through the new fire, electricity.

The original novel for this film, the adapter, the director and Elle Fanning as Mary bring a strong positive female, feminist perspective to the story and the storytelling. Mary fails to get a publisher until someone agrees that it can be printed with the author as anonymous and an introduction by Shelley himself. Ultimately, the book is published under her name. Shelley dies. Mary lives another 30 years or more into the 19th century.

Elle Fanning is a strong presence as Mary, indicating the intellectual power as well as the emotions. There is an interesting British supporting cast with Douglas Booth the Shelley, Tom Sturridge almost over-romanticised as the narcissistic Byron, Steve Dillane as William Godwin, Joanne Froggatt is his second wife, Bill Powley as Claire and Ben Parker giving an interesting performance as Polidori, subservient to Byron, wanting to write a vampire story, its being published under Byron's name, his subsequent penury and death.

An immersion into this Romantic period with all its ambiguities of ideas and emotions.

MR STEIN GOES ONLINE/ UN PROFIL POUR DEUX

France, 2017, 99 minutes, Colour.

Pierre Richard, Yaniss Lespert, Fanny Valette, Stephane all Bissot, Stephanie Crayencourt, Gustave Kerven, Macha Merill.

Directed by Stephane Robelin.

The English title for this French film, a romantic comedy with a touch of farce, is certainly more direct. Mr Stein does go online. However, there is a Gallic subtlety in the French title – one online dating identity profile but with reference to 2 men.

In recent years, there have been quite a number of comedies incorporating online dating, the comedy of odd couples meeting, the clashes of incompatibles, deceptions. While this is a case of deception, it is done with a light touch even though, theoretically, there is something bit creepy about the premise.

Mr Stein, Pierre, is played by the celebrated veteran comic actor, Pierre Richard, whose heyday was in the 1970s and 1980s, The Tall Blond Man with the One Red Shoe... There was no such thing as online dating in his time, but he enters into the spirit of the film, making it at age 82.

However, this is the story also of Alex (Yaniss Lespert), a writer who has published a short story, rather forlorn in his outlook on life, downcast look, who rescues a young woman, Juliette, who is sick in the street and drives her home on her motorbike. He would like a kiss but she is in a relationship with a businessman who is about to go to China (which she is not enthusiastic about).

Three months later, they are a couple, but he has no income although he has interviewed a producer who wants him to write some pitches for blood and gore stories. But the couple is living with Juliette's mother who often visits her father, Pierre, giving him her computer to give him something to do because he has been stuck, allegedly agoraphobic, in his apartment since his wife of many decades died two years earlier, re-watching her on his home movies. She has the brainwave that Alex, but not revealing that he is Juliette's boyfriend, should give him computer lessons.

Alex does. Pierre pays him. Begins to call on him for further help. Pierre is fascinated by the computer, going online, discovering dating, the audience sharing a collage of various women who respond to him, but then discovering the ideal woman, a physiotherapist called Flora who happens to live in Brussels.

How to handle the relationship? Fortunately, French literature provides a model from olden days, Cyrano de Bergerac. Pierre writes the messages. Alex goes to meet Flora. As we all expected, Alex is attracted to Flora, she to him (although initially to Pierre's stories). Alex has to do a fair amount of inventing, but begins a relationship with Flora, the two men travelling to Brussels to meet her.

The resolution could be very serious – and, in an underlying manner, it is. This is where the touches of farce enter in, Juliette and her mother encountering Flora and misinterpreting her relationship with Pierre. Alex appears and Juliette is upset with him (although she is still attached to her boyfriend who, in fact, does return from China to look her up).

Another visit to Brussels, some truth-telling, the relationship working out as expected (and as we would like) and a pleasant little online trick played on Pierre for a happy ending all round.

ON CHESIL BEACH

UK, 2017, 110 minutes, Colour.

Saoirse Ronan, Billy Howell, Anne-Marie Duff, Adrian Scarborough, Emily Watson, Samuel West.
Directed by Dominic Cooke.

Chesil Beach is on the Dorset coast.

The core action of this film, set in 1962, takes place on the beach and in the hotel on the beachfront, Florence (Saoirse Ronan) and Edward (Billy Howell) walking along the pebbles on the beach, formally dressed, in fact, the aftermath of their wedding that day. They are young. They are in their early 20s. They have studied at university and had top results, Firsts. But, despite the contemporary music and the bands, and the beginning of permissiveness of the 1960s, each of them is still, in manner and reserve, back in the rather restrictive 1950s.

While this day at the beach extends over most of the film, there is almost as much time, perhaps even more, given to frequent flashbacks to build up the characters of both Florence and Edward as well as glimpses into their families.

Florence comes from a very conservative family, the father, Samuel West, an industrialist with snobbish attitudes (and mean determination to dominate everyone, especially Edward, at tennis), critical of his daughter despite giving her a financial gift and offering a job at his factory to Edward.

Florence's mother, Emily Watson, embodies and mouths the Conservative views of the day.

Edward, on the other hand, comes from working class stock in working class conditions – to the disdain and comment of Florence's parents. Edward's family is far more interesting to watch, a considerate father, Adrian Scarborough, twin younger daughters, and a mother who at first view, naked in the backyard rousing on her children, Anne-Marie Duff, seems quite strange. However, the sad explanation is given for her mental condition, a sudden accident on a railway station. She loves art and that sustains her with the help of her ever-caring husband and her daughters. When Florence comes into the family, she shows tenderness and sensitivity towards the mother which endears her to everyone and greatly relieves Edward.

The screenplay is based on a novel by Ian McEwan, celebrated for film versions of *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Enduring Love*, *The Child in Time* and, especially, *Atonement* (which featured Saoirse Ronan). These are all films about relationships but relationships which are tested, tried, relationships which are misunderstood, which can fail.

This means that this is the bittersweet story of the relationship between Florence and Edward, at moments very bitter. And, at some moments, the audience is tested as to where they might lay some blame, strongly on Florence and her immediate response on the wedding day, and strongly on Edward and his response to Florence.

A film of love, courting, hope for marriage, regrets.

RBG

US, 2017, 98 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Julie Cowan, Betsy West.

Many Americans would know what the initials RBG stand for. This documentary film was an opportunity for non-Americans to be introduced to Ruth Bader Ginsberg, member of the Supreme Court of the US since 1993.

She is quite the personality. On the one hand, she is somewhat shy and retiring, not blessed with a great sense of humour – but marrying Martin Ginsberg, a tax lawyer with quite a sense of humour, having two children, relishing grandchildren – but a lawyer of superior standing and talent. She is very small in stature, especially seen in photos with the other Justices, predominantly male, powerful beyond her stature.

Her presence on the Supreme Court, a woman, more liberal than conservative, frequently dissenting from majority opinions, has been significant for a quarter of a century. At the time of the making of this documentary, 2017, she was aged 84. And her reputation has led to a nickname, The Notorious RBG.

Most audiences for this film will be interested in her contribution to American legislation, the interpretation of legislation, changes in legislation. However, they will also learn some biographical information about the Justice. From Brooklyn, her father migrated from Ukraine, she began college studies in law in the early 1950s, the time of Senator McCarthy and other targeting of communists.

In the 1960s and 70s, she established herself as a champion of equal rights (a significant case was her promoting a widower who was bringing up his children and was not granted financial support by the government because he was not a woman). In her championing of equal rights, there was a great deal to contribute to the rights of women. She had strong human rights and legislative views on abortion choice.

A lot of the film consists of talking heads, as might be expected, supporters from both left and right, especially her personal friendship, and opera-going, with strongly conservative judge, Scalia.

But, there are many sequences of Ruth Ginsberg speeches. Central to the film is her speech before the Senate enquiry into her nomination (Edward Kennedy being seen on the panel), and later comment by Bill Clinton about his meeting her and his decision to nominate her. There is also an address to students at Fordham and/or high school in more recent years. Younger students seem particularly keen to meet her and listen to her. (There are some sequences of spoofs about her manner and behaviour from Saturday Night Live and the Justice laughing and enjoying them.)

Ruth Bader Ginsberg emerges as a very hard-working lawyer and judge, devoted to her husband of over 50 years, grief at his death from cancer, her own battles with cancer, her integrity as a judge – who publicly complained in 2016 about Donald Trump (not as if he didn't attack personalities in his speeches and tweets). She apologised acknowledging that this was inappropriate comment from a judge.

The documentary is particularly American, aimed at an American audience, but also of interest for audiences outside the United States.

THE SECOND

Australia, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.

Rachael Blake, Susie Porter, Vince Colosimo, Martin Sacks, Susan Prior, Megan Dale, Bridget Webb, Will Beasley.

Directed Mairi Cameron.

The Second is not necessarily an enticing title for an audience. However, it does have meaning for the plot which concerns an author who was published her first book, an erotic memoir, and is now working on the second, comment being made about the syndrome for the writing of a second novel, and its being so difficult to write in comparison with the first.

But, we are soon alerted that there is more than one element of complexity in this plot. The author is seen being interviewed, stylishly dressed, impeccable manner, agreeable but aloof, the presumption being that this is a television interview. She is being asked about her book, whether it is completely autobiographical, whether it is accurate – and even whether it is true.

The writer (all the characters owner designated by a title rather than a personal name) is played with a mixture of playfulness and disdain by Rachael Blake. She is in the company of the publisher, Vince Colosimo (wearing glasses and quite different from many gangsters he has played on screen and television). They are travelling to and elaborate mansion in the middle of the bush owned by the writer's father, an author, now dead. (And the film was shot in the west Darling Downs in and

around Dalby and other towns.).

The couple are having an affair, he rather laid-back and urging her on because of financial difficulties, she seen at a computer, writing but having blocks. The complication is that her friend from the past, played by Susie Porter, turns up, partly takes over, relies on the past friendship with the writer when they were girls (shown in quite a number of flashbacks which gradually build up the story of the girls at 14, a young boy attracted to them, his death and the consequences). Also in the vicinity is a sullen tractor driver (Martin Sacks), the brother of the dead boy who seems to threaten the publisher.

The audience has to be on the alert, not only for the flashbacks, but, it would seem, after the publication of *The Second*, a lot of flash forwards. And then the question arises, and the writer vocalises, what is she actually writing while the audience sees particular incidents that she describes. So, what is actually happening in reality and what is dramatisation of the novel that is being written.

In fact, it becomes quite melodramatic, inconsistencies in the characters of the two women, the bewilderment of the publisher, his becoming a target, the ambiguous role of the neighbour...

So, this is an adult drama about relationships, an adult drama about writing and career as well as publishing, and tantalising questions about memoirs, biographies, descriptions of crimes, what is reality and what is invention, the nature of fiction.

SKYSCRAPER

US, 2018, 102 minutes, Colour.

Dwayne Johnson, Neve Campbell, Pablo Schreiber, Chin Han, Noah Taylor, Mackenna Roberts, Kevin Rankin, Roland Moller, Byron Mann, Matt O' Leary.

Directed by Rawson Marshall Thurber.

Ultra-towering, ultra-Inferno. Back to the spirit of the 1970s and all those disaster movies.

A warning to those who like their films to be absolutely realistic, documentary-like in the detail, all the verisimilitude of truth! They may find *Skyscraper* rather far-fetched. On the other hand, those who enjoy thrillers, cliff-hanging and the equivalents, won't be worrying too much about how accurate or truthful it is but will relish the entertainment.

The film doesn't waste any time getting into the action with a prologue where a special squad has to break a siege with a man holding children hostage. One of the consequences of the action is that our central hero, Will Sawyer, played by the almost-always welcome Dwayne Johnson (with touches of grey in his beard now), losing a leg, tended in hospital by a military nurse who also served in Afghanistan, (Neve Campbell) – then, 10 years on, happily married and two children.

And then to his new job, recommended by his partner during the siege, Ben (Pablo Schreiber), the security in the world's tallest skyscraper, in Hong Kong. Actually, architectural design seems to have come on since towering infernos 70s. The skyscraper doesn't look like any building we have seen – yet; and that is only the outside! It is all luxury and IT control inside the building with the IT headquarters some kilometres away (all it very important for the complications of the plot, getting

rid of some of the workers, sabotaging the control).

Needless to say, wife and children will be caught in the building when the thugs arrive and set fire. While there is a lot of the expected wife and children in peril, the wife has plenty of experience on her side, is tough in her own way and uses her brains. Of course, Dwayne Johnson has to use both brawn and brains – lucky he has so much brawn because the stunts are not only far-fetched, they seem to be almost impossible! And, not only that, he has to save everyone he can single-handed, sometimes having to take off his leg, and doing things single-legged as well. And he relies on his wits as well as a lot of duct tape.

Sinister villains, a complicated plot has to their motives, a businessman who is seeing his pride and joy skyscraper going up in smoke, some betrayals, and the Hong Kong police standing aghast, misinterpreting the situation, eventually on side. And, crowds and crowds, watching TV broadcasts as well as lots of phone cameras.

The whole thing keeps good pace and, if you are in the mood for this kind of disaster film, it certainly fills the bill.

And, inventively, the credits have the title vertically beside the building,

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SUMMER 1993

Spain/Catalonia, 2017, 97 minutes, Colour.

Laia Artigas, Paula Robles, Bruna Cusi, David Verdaguer, Monse Sanz.

Directed by Carla Simon.

There has been quite some acclaim for Summer 1993. It was actually Spain's official entry for the Foreign Language Academy Award for 2017. And this is rather significant, given the political upheavals of the time, clashes between Spain and Catalonia, that this is a Catalan film, spoken in that language.

As noted with the title, this is a reminiscence to Catalonia, almost a quarter of a century earlier. While there are references to homes in Barcelona, the action of the film takes place in the sunlit countryside.

On the one hand, it is a very simple film. The little girl, age 6, Frida (a strong presence and performance by the young Laia Artigas) has been staying with her grandparents while her mother

died of a virus. The intention was to protect the child. Then she goes to the countryside to stay with her uncle and his wife and their little three-year-old daughter, Anna.

The issue is, of course, how does a little girl, age 6, deal with the death of her mother, the absence of motherly love, relating to her cousin and her uncle and aunt, support from the grandparents, love from a handicapped aunt. Audiences will strongly identify with little girl if they have shared something of these experiences.

On the whole, everything is sunny, Frida gets on well with her little cousin, her uncle is lovingly fatherly, her aunt has moments of tension but is still loving. And, there are the doting grandparents.

While some audiences will be caught up in the beauty and feeling of this story, others will find it rather hard to concentrate on all the small detail, the children playing together, sequences in the bath, at meals, squabbling over a gift of nightgowns from the grandparents, going for swims... Some may well find their attention wandering, appreciating what is happening, but actually finding the details somewhat tedious, even wearing.

Which means that this is a film of quality but one which can command a lot of attention could also be the subject of quite a lot of destruction in attention.

WHITNEY

UK/US, 2018, 120 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Kevin Macdonald.

Most audiences will realise that Whitney is singer, Whitney Houston.

Interesting to note and for audiences to see, there have been two feature-length documentaries on Whitney Houston within the last two years, both directed by British documentary filmmakers, Nick Broomfield, *Whitney: Can I Be Me*, and now from Kevin Macdonald, *Whitney*.

Both films are powerful in their way, offering a portrait of the singer, considerable amount of background of her growing up in New Jersey, her singer mother, her father who left but acted as her manager, stealing from her and then suing her for millions. And there are interviews with her two brothers, their wives and other relations. There are visual images of her close friend, Robin, but no interview. As might be expected, there are some interviews with Bobby Brown, her husband, but he is very restrained and limited in what he will say (more from him in the Broomfield film). Significant in Whitney Houston's life was her mother, her career as a singer, her mother investing energy into her daughter's career and her daughter then moving against her.

Audiences may well be delighted with the amount of performance of songs by Whitney Houston throughout this film, quickly establishing the power of her voice, in church choirs, singing publicly, on television, her rapid rise with her topping the charts so often, her tours in the US and beyond (and a reminder that she was the first American singer to tour post-apartheid South Africa and meeting Nelson Mandela).

There is commentary on her breakthrough performance in the film, *The Bodyguard*, her comments,

scenes photographed on sets, comment from Kevin Costner, her co-star. While the film and its song, I Will Always Love You, moved her to the realm of star power, almost immediately, there were tensions in her marriage, Bobby Brown not having the success of his wife, a succession of infidelities, press interviews and probings.

This film does not necessarily explain Whitney Huston's use of and reliance on drugs and her moving to addiction. It offers the information, the facts becoming public, harsh reactions, her attempts at rehabilitation, even filming another movie, Sparkle, in 2011-12. However, she was just a shadow of herself in these years, disappearing, then going on tours and people walking out of concerts demanding their money back.

The film gives some background to her relationships, with agents, managers, PR personnel who speak favourably of her but with great regrets about what happened to her. Particularly tragic is the story of her daughter, whom she took on stage with her when she was little, but then neglected, the daughter becoming addicted and dying at the age of 22.

As with so many stories of talented people, this is a story of sadness despite achievement, a powerful life with decline and regrets.

THE WIFE

US, 2017, 100 minutes, Colour.

Glenn Close, Jonathan Pryce, Christian Slater, Max Irons, Elizabeth Mc Govern, Annie Starke, Harry Lloyd.

Directed by Bjorn Runge.

A film to be recommended for those who enjoy a solid drama with intelligent performances and themes.

The title is rather blunt. And, immediately it evokes different perspectives on the role of a wife. Are we looking at tradition, the wife as the mate to her husband, subservient to him, managing the house and household, a woman who is not to have a career beyond the home? Or, is the title ironic, critical of the tradition and urging women to move beyond the tradition? These questions have been relevant her many years but, in the context of recent years about sexual abuse and exploitation of women, the story seems more than relevant. It is challenging.

The action of the film takes place mainly in 1992. The married couple, the centre of the film, Joe and Joan Castleman, have been married for 35 years. They have two children. Joan has been supportive of her husband all these decades, especially with his reputation as one of the greatest living authors and now being informed that he is to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. There is great excitement, exhilaration at the news.

While Jonathan Pryce is excellent in the role of Joe, the exuberant narcissistic novelist, this is Glenn Close's film. It is certainly one of her best performances, a strong screen presence, her mature appearance, a strength of character, and, of course, the probing of the reality of her life in the light of her husband's work and the possibilities that she had, but...

There are some flashbacks to the meeting of the couple (played by Harry Lord and Glenn Close's actual daughter, Annie Starke) when she was her husband's student and had written an excellent short story, her baby sitting for him and his wife, and her love for him. This is in 1958. There are also some flashbacks to 1962 and 1968 and glimpses of their lives together and, especially, of her success in growing reputation. There is a telling scene where a successful author (Elizabeth McGovern) advises Joan to give up any thought of a career in writing, little hope in a man's world.

The main action takes place in 1992, some drama on the plane to Stockholm, but principally the two days in the Swedish capital. Joe has no difficulty in being in the limelight. Joan prefers the shadows, not wanting him even to thank her during speeches, very embarrassed when he does. But, we might have guessed, Joe has a roving eye, even to the young woman appointed as guide. (And, in some irony, the Nobel committee are happy to have someone assigned to help Joan: for shopping and for beauty parlours!).

There is a subplot about the couple's children. The daughter is happily married, pregnant and gives birth to the joy of the grandparents. The son is an aspiring writer (Max Irons), supported by his mother, hurt by his father and his seeming neglect, and something of a dampener on the celebration. But the complication is a journalist who wants to write Joe's biography and is shunned by Joe. He is Nathaniel, played by Christian Slater. Of course, his questions and interest raise curiosity in the audience, and the last part of the film answers the curiosity.

In the aftermath of the acceptance speech and dinner, complications arise for both Joe and Joan – which, of course, it is over to the audience to see and appreciate.

REVIEWS SEPTEMBER 2018

BOOK CLUB

CRAZY RICH ASIANS

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BOOK CLUB

US, 2018, 104 minutes, Colour.

Diane Keaton, Jane Fonda, Candice Bergen, Mary Steenburgen, Andy Garcia, Craig T.Nelson, Don Johnson, Ed Begley Jr, Richard Dreyfuss, Wallace Shawn, Alicia Silverstone, Katie Aselton, Mircea Monroe.

Directed by Bill Holderman.

Is a book club a mainly female phenomenon? You don't hear about many men's book clubs. Whatever the case, the book club here is very much a women's club – with a rather prestigious Hollywood membership, Jane Fonda at 79, Diane Keaton and Candice Bergen in their early 70s, Mary Steenburgen merely 65. It is clear that this comedy is for an older female demographic.

There isn't exactly equal time for men but here are Andy Garcia, Craig T.Nelson, Don Johnson and Richard Dreyfuss.

And, what are the members reading this month? With a bit of a giggle, with more than a touch of embarrassment, with some eyebrow-raising and jawdropping, they have ventured into The E. L. James 50 Shades of Grey. So, we know what the film is going to be about. We are not wrong.

We are introduced to the four members of the club, Diane Keaton, a widow, with two insistent daughters who feel a compulsive need to look after their mother – and Diane Keating performing (and sometimes dressing) like Annie Hall after 40 years. With Jane Fonda, we are remembering her long career, 50 years since Barbarella, almost 50 years since an Oscar for Klute, almost 40 years since an Oscar for Coming Home. And, she is a living example of the effectiveness of aerobics! She plays an accomplished businesswoman skilled in risk management. Candice Bergen has always been an enjoyable screen presence, especially in her television incarnation of Murphy Brown. There are some humorous references that she is not as thin as she used to be. Here she plays a Supreme Court judge who has been divorced for 18 years. Mary Steenburgen, winner of an Oscar for Melvin and Howard, has been married for 35 years, several children, a husband who has retired and is trying to do with a retirement crisis.

They read the book. They giggle, imagine, speculate. And they do some venturing. Most seriously is Diane Keaton's story, not coping with her daughters, encountering a more than charming airline pilot who has retired to a vast ranch in Sedona, Arizona, Andy Garcia. Will she? Should she? The other serious story is that with Mary Steenburgen and her all-out efforts, including dance lessons, spiking beer with Viagra, to interest her husband who has retreated to his workshop, Craig T.Nelson.

Ultimately, Jane Fonda's story is a bit serious, meeting again an old flame after 40 years, Don Johnson (being rather benign with that Trivial Pursuit answer that he is the father of Dakota Johnson who portrays Anastasia in the 50 Shades films). Her friends in the book club persuade Candice

Bergen to go online, online dating. Actually, she is very lucky that one of the earliest men she meets is Richard Dreyfuss, genial and charming.

So, the four stories are intercutting, a lot of humour, a reminder that every subject is possible for humour, even sex. As with so many American films, it starts out with tongue-in-cheek, the touch of the permissive but, eventually, arriving with four final speeches all in the name of true love.

CRAZY RICH ASIANS

US, 2018, 120 minutes, Colour.

Constance Wu, Henry Golding, Michelle Yeoh, Gemma Chan, Lisa Lu, Awkwafina, Harry Shun Jr, Ken Jeong, Chris Pang, Jimmy O.Yang, Ronnie Chieng, Nico Santos, Pierre Png.

Directed by John M. Chu.

Certainly a title that does not deceive its audiences!

The film was based on novels by Ken Kwan, very popular novels. And the film has proven to be not only popular, but box-office successfully popular, especially in the United States. And it won't do the Singapore economy any harm, especially attracting any crazy rich Asians who haven't visited Singapore – and, probably, quite a lot of crazy rich Americans, as well is the rest of this.

There is a reference at one stage to Cinderella. So, this is a variation on the Cinderella story except that the heroine, Rachel (an attractive Constance Wu) is not indentured in hard labour and does not have a harsh stepmother or ugly stepsisters. Rather, she is a Chinese immigrant to the US living with her single mother, with a degree in economics and a professorship in Economics at New York University. No slouch!

She is in love with a charming and handsome Singapore man, Nick Ewing (Malaysia and TV host Henry Golding with an impeccable British accent, who lived in the UK in teen years – and, interestingly, most of the Singaporean characters speak with the British heritage). They had been together for a year and she knows little about his background but is pleased when he invites her to accompany him to Singapore for a friend's wedding. However, gossip social media has photographed the two and before you can say Crazy Rich Asians, everybody in Asia has pictures, asking questions, gossiping.

When they get into the plane to Singapore, Rachel is astonished that she is taken to a first-class suite and realises that when Nick says his family is comfortable she is to understand that they are very rich. In a way, we can guess the rest (or have seen it in the trailer where most is revealed), Rachel being uncomfortable, overcoming hesitations and taking strong stances, Nick continually being charming and loving, introductions to the rest of the family with their problems but, especially the matriarchal (very matriarchal) grandmother who makes decisions about people people's lives (veteran actress Lisa Lu) and Nick's rather icy mother, a pleasure to see Michelle Yeoh again.

There is plenty to show in terms of the crazy rich – extravagant parties, huge payments, something which brings to mind an analogy with violence porn, wealth porn. It is showy, in-your-face, exaggerated (we hope), the self-indulgent life of the rich and – fatuous.

Actually, there is a bit of dialogue to indicate this, especially at the end at a party where the women rather hysterically indulge in shopping sprees (with a sardonic remark that the most enthusiastic about freebies are the rich) and massages, along with some catty denunciations of Rachel as a golddigger.

The crazy rich are amusingly satirised by a family with US comedy actor, Ken Jeong, as the father and Awkwafina (who was one of the Oceans 8) enjoying her comic turns as Rachel's good friend and chaperone.

Of course, everything has to come to a head, the wedding ceremony to which Nick and Rachel had been invited, Rachel denounced, the story of her mother coming from the US to rescue her daughter – and, while it is not midnight with Nick proposing with a glass slipper, there is an ending which hopes for happy ever after. The screenplay clearly hopes for a sequel and, with the financial success of the film, it is already underway.

THE DARKEST MINDS

US, 2018, 104 minutes, Colour.

Amandla Stenberg, Mandy Moore, Bradley Whitford, Harrison Dickinson, Gwendoline Christie, Skylan Books, Patrick Gibson.

Directed by Jennifer Yuh Nelson.

For those not in the know about the novel on which this film is based, the title, at first glance, might indicate one of those many current horror films, sinister characters, blood and gore. However, this is not the case.

The novel by Alexandra Bracken is described as a Young Adult novel. There has been something of a proliferation in recent years of Young Adult novels and films set in a post-apocalyptic world, challenge to young people, some kind of internment and categorising of them in terms of dangers and capacities, the urge to break free, the expose of the authority figures. In film terms, it was probably The Hunger Games which set the tone, followed by such series as the Divergent films, The Maze Runner, The Giver. However, these films were made in a way to attract an adult audience as well as the Young Adult audience.

The Darkest Minds seems to be aimed at what might be called a Younger Young Adult audience, and audience still in their teens. Another film like this in past years was The 5th Wave. The characters are younger, also still in their teens. Another feature of this film is that it is multi-racial in its characters, the central character is African-American as is another in the group, a rather nerdy young man. There is also an Asian American. However, the hero and the villain are both white males.

The central character, Ruby (Amandla Stenberg) offers a voice-over, indicating mysterious illness and deaths of children, the repercussions at school, in families, even including the son of the American president. Ruby is 10, has a strange and threatening experience with her mother, but is then rounded up with other children and taken to a camp, tested and catalogued, those in the green space being less dangerous, yet interned in a camp, those classified orange as the most threatening. No surprise to find that Ruby is orange but is able to manipulate tests to pass as green.

The main action takes place six years later, the audience being introduced to the League, with adults like Mandy Moore trying to rescue the children to escape from their servitude. The guards, needless to say, are brutes.

Ruby encounters a small group, Liam (Harrison Dickinson), the leader, Chubs (Skylan Brooks) the nerd, plus a young Asian American girl. The group bonds, roaming the countryside escaping pursuit, trying to find the camp which is the refuge for the threatened children.

When they do, all is not plain sailing as might be expected and this builds up to danger, confrontations, escape, the role of the League...

There is no fixed conclusion to this episode – and, one presumes, the producers are hoping that this film is successful at the box office to get the finance for the expected sequels.

THE FLIP SIDE

Australia, 2018, 91 minutes, Colour.

Eddie Izzard, Emily Taheny, Luke McKenzie?, Vanessa Guide, Tina Bursill, Tiriell Mora, Hugh Sheridan. Directed by Marion Pilowsky.

This is billed as a romantic comedy, a feel-good movie. Perhaps. Perhaps not.

This is a South Australian film, proudly made. There are many sequences in Adelaide itself but the screenplay takes the leading characters out into the Barossa Valley, to Handorf, to the Vineyards, out into the desert and the range of South Australian scenery. One presumes the South Australian tourist bureau will not be unhappy with the promotion (even if they might have some difficulties with the film and its screenplay, especially a lot of derogatory remarks made by a French character, especially about wines, names and French propriety of names.)

Emily Taheny is a strong screen presence, well-known to ABC television viewers from her skits and spoofs in Shaun Micallef's *Mad as Hell*. In many ways, she holds this film together. But, while her character might have seemed consistent on paper, it doesn't seem quite so consistent on screen. And this is true of each of the central characters.

Emily is Veronica James, Ronnie to all her friends (but not to the French character, Sophie, played waspishly by Vanessa Guide and referred to by Ronnie as a "French Bitch", rather an understatement given the dominantly catty behaviour. Ronnie was in love with a visiting British actor, conceited and fickle, played with a certain self-absorbed charm and lack of charm by Eddie Izzard, the audience wondering why he came to Australia to make this film. He had promised to take Ronnie to England but went back home without her. There is a telling sequence where he is back in Adelaide promoting a new film, doing a Q and A, playing to the audience but self-focused.

Five years later she is in a partnership with a high school science teacher and would-be novelist, Jeff. Again, he is played with some contradictions by Luke McKenzie?, most of the time a real gawk, unintentionally flirting with the French woman and she leading him on, but finally something of a man of principle. The actor pretends to take an interest in the novel he has written, talking of making a film but, of course, is not read the manuscript to Jeff's ultimate dismay.

A comment often made about actors not particularly connecting in their performances is that there is little chemistry between them. Not much chemistry here despite some effort by Emily Taheny and Luke McKenzie?

And, some audiences will have problems with the humour – often strained at best. The trip to the Barossa Valley and beyond, a car crash when it hits a kangaroo, a local garage manager with an over-coarse mouth delaying in fixing the car, a scene where a boomerang is thrown – and actually comes back with injuries.

There is a subplot concerning Ronnie's mother who was in a home for the aged, Ronnie running up bills at the restaurant she has established, unable to pay for her mother's care, her mother a mixture of common sense and incipient senility.

Perhaps the film is too flip.

THE HAPPYTIME MURDERS

US, 2018, 91 minutes, Colour.

Melissa Mc Carthy, Maya Rudolph, Elizabeth Banks, Joel Mc Hale, Leslie David Baker. Voices of: Bill Barreto, Dorian Davies.

Directed by Brian Henson.

Brian Henson is the son of the celebrated Jim Henson, creator of the Muppets and developer of the Jim Henson's studios. He died prematurely and his son, Brian, took over the studios.

It is not recorded whether there was a severe rumble of Jim Henson's grave when The Happytime Murders was announced. Did he turn in his grave? The material and treatment of this story, cowritten and directed by Brian, is not exactly in the spirit of the Muppets. Though...

Of course, it is an amusing idea. This is a private eye story from LA, echoing the conventions of the famous private eyes and their investigations. The difference is that Phil, voiced by Bill Barreto, is a puppet, close cousin of the Muppets. And, as with so many other PIs, he has a significant secretary in the office – and very amusing performance by Maya Rudolph, spoofing the role with her manner, talking, frequent change of fashion. But, almost immediately, Phil finds that he has a client, Jessica who, despite her wearing spectacles, is shown as a variation of Sharon Stone in Basic Instinct.

Phil has had his difficulties in the past, a dramatic flashback showing the cause of his being dropped from the LA police force, his falling out with his former partner, Edwards (Melissa Mc Carthy doing her usual raucous thing), and the accidental shooting of a father in the presence of his daughter.

Mention of the word 'raucous' is probably very relevant to the film and its dialogue, lots of coarse language, some explicit sexual behaviour and language, plenty of innuendo beyond the explicit.

Allowing for this, which many will probably not allow, the plot takes its usual course, a number of murders of the group associated with Phil, his investigating despite the interventions and disapproval of the local police, teaming up with Edwards again, a buildup to a dangerous shootout

and heroism all round.

Actually, the idea is not bad, but had it been done with a little more subtlety, a little more finesse in the raucousness, it could have been a more entertaining spoof that a wider audience could have enjoyed.

THE INSULT/ L'INSULTE

Lebanon, 2017, 112 minutes, Colour.

Adel Karam, Kamel El Bashah, Camille Salameh, Diamand Bou Abboud, Rita Hayek, Talal Jurdi, Christine Choueri, Julia Kassar.

Directed by Ziad Doueiri

A film to be recommended. It was the Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language film from Lebanon for 2017.

The title is very straightforward. And, in some ways, so is the incident which leads to the insult but does not anticipate many of the dire consequences.

It can be said at the beginning of this review that the director has explained that his screenplay is based on a real incident, and that it involved himself, an outburst of criticism and insult to a plumber. The consequences were not as he expected and they made demands on him for some kind of reconciliation – but it provided personal experience on which to base a screenplay which takes the insult much further.

It is not necessary to know a great deal of the history of Lebanon in recent decades to appreciate this film. It is something of an allegory of resentments, hatreds, angers and conflicts in the Middle East. However, it introduces immediately a militant Christian group in Lebanon and its fierce loyalties, as well as a background of hate talk on the radio. The central character, Tony, is a garage mechanic in Beirut, a Christian area which contrasts with the Palestinian camps. The other character is Yasser, a Palestinian refugee, living in a camp, a calm man generally who is supervising building sites with great success and finesse.

The insult incident is trivial in many ways, Tony hosing his balcony, an open pipe spilling the water onto passes by. Yasser confronts Tony, tries to fix the pipe, Tony smashing it, leading to a verbal confrontation, provocative because of the hate messages on the radio, and a punch which leads to broken ribs in hospital. Tony demands an apology of Yasser. Yasser is not prepared to give it.

This part of the drama is interesting in itself, the director creating quite a sense of tension, Tony absolutely fixed and rigid in his stances and prejudices, Yasser remaining calm but then provoked.

The main part of the action of the film actually takes place in the court. Tony decides to sue Yasser. A top Beirut lawyer, Christian, interviews Tony and prepares a spirited and somewhat bigoted prosecution of Yasser. The irony is that Yasser's defence lawyer is the daughter of the prosecutor, her first case, quite a rivalry. There are three judges who preside – and the trial proceeds with interrogation of witnesses but spontaneous interventions from both lawyers.

The trial gives the opportunity to the audience to appreciate what is behind the hostility, the experience of the Palestinians, the behaviour of Israel, the role of the PLO, the refugees in camps in Lebanon. But it also gives the opportunity to appreciate the experience of the civil war in Lebanon in the 1970s, the role of PLO and Palestinians, massacres in Christian villages and still-unresolved animosities.

While the film is involving and itself, audiences off-put by the angry Tony, appreciating the calmness of Yasser (and the introduction of complications of Yasser's behaviour when he was a young man in the camps and involved in violence), the film asks its audience to think about the conflicts in the Middle East, what is behind them, and possible solutions for peace if not reconciliation.

JIMMY BARNES, WORKING CLASS BOY

Australia, 2018, 99 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Mark Joffe.

This documentary about singer, Jimmy Barnes, has a lot going for it. And it offers quite a lot as well.

The film is based on interviews with Barnes himself as well as with relations and friends but also on a performance at this State Theatre in Sydney, where he recounted his story as well as offering a selection of his songs. And, there is a great deal of historical footage included in the film which brings alive Jimmy Barnes' past both in Scotland and in Australia.

Jimmy Barnes (born James Dixon Swan) is well-known to most Australians, one of the most successful singers as well as for his presence in the band, Cold Chisel. This film is about him more than about the band.

While the film does have quite a number of Barnes' songs, they tend to be longish excerpts rather than whole songs and are all related to particular themes as he recounts his story. He sings with his current musicians, with some members of his family, but especially with his daughter, Mahalia (her name given because of her father's admiration for Mahalia Jackson), a powerful singer in her own right. For some songs he teams up with Ian Moss and David Walker, who initially auditioned him for their band in 1973 and went on to success together has Called captures all. He also introduces his son, daughter of his girlfriend in the early 70s, who was brought up by his maternal grandmother and only as a young boy discovered that Barnes was his father, singer David Campbell, who also joins his father on stage and sings a duet with him.

The film is very interesting as an autobiography, quite a deal of attention given to Barnes' origins in Scotland, in very harsh streets and homes in Glasgow, many clips of the city and the environment, comments from some of his relatives. His parents were married very young, had six children, fought continually, his mother a hard woman, his father a champion boxer who never achieved expected fame in Australia, hard drinker who often abandoned his family.

The film is also interesting in its presentation of the migrant scheme from Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, the family coming to Australia, going to Adelaide, being settled in the newly developed town of Elizabeth. Barnes has quite a deal to say about the hard life in the town, his absent father, his mother leaving for several years before she returned with a genial man, Reg Barnes, who married

her for the children and served as a father figure. Barnes took his name. He also notes that his own father was his father but Reg Barnes was his dad. There is also testimony from Barnes' sister, Lisa.

Growing up in Elizabeth was particularly harsh and, eventually, Jimmy started to repeat the patterns of his father, the drinking, chasing the girls, drug experimentation.

It was a music which saved him, although he did have hard years of drinking and drugs during his musical career. After a successful audition, he was accepted into the band which became Cold Chisel – and a hugely successful career.

Barnes' wife, Jane, also appears, a good wife and mother, a stabilising influence in her husband's life.

And, at this stage of his life, where he says he is happy, he has come a long way through many difficulties, many of them enough to crush a less strong personality. He is a good raconteur, has an ironic sense of humour, engages with his audience, not only in song, but in conversation.

Directed by Mark Joffe, who directed many feature films as well as episodes of Jack Irish), this is a very well-made documentary, always interesting, always engaging.

JIRGA

Australia, 2018, 78 minutes, Colour.

Sam Smith, Sher Alam Miskeen Ustad.

Directed by Benjamin Gilmour.

The film comes from a religious perspective, the father of the film's director and cinematographer, Benjamin Gilmour, was a minister. This humane and religious perspective was also a feature of the first film by this director, *Son of a Lion*, a story of post-9/11 Pakistan.

It is also an Australian film, the main character a soldier returning to Afghanistan on a personal journey.

We are told immediately that Jirga means a meeting of council elders.

The opening invites its audience into military action, a raid on a village, dangers and shooting, all filmed in green night-light. At the end of the episode, one of the men is filmed staring at what has happened, the death.

The director knows the landscapes of Afghanistan as well as the city of Kabul and audiences may well feel as they look at the cityscapes from above, move through the streets and markets into the small hotel, into the shops, that they have been there.

However, this is the story of a personal journey of the soldier from the night raid, Mike Wheeler (played by Sam Smith). It is not clear at first why he has returned from Australia to Afghanistan. He has a large amount of money. He asks a taxi driver to take him to the combat area, the driver refusing many times, resisting the money, but eventually taking Mike part of the way, sharing the journey, some music, a meal, his Muslim prayer and rituals.

As Mike Wheeler continues his journey on foot through the desert, we realise that he is on a pilgrimage, to go back to the village, to confess, appear before the Jirga, the Council of Elders, for them to decide his fate.

For a Catholic watching the film, the parallel with the Sacrament of Penance becomes ever more clear. In this sense, the film does serve as a paradigm for the Sacrament. There is the offence, the perpetrator of the killing deciding that he has “sinned”. He has examined his conscience quite profoundly which leads him back to the Jirga meeting which is his confessional. He is sorry for what he has done. He has repented. But this is not enough. He needs to confess aloud, to acknowledge his sin. He certainly has a firm purpose of amendment. He wants to atone – although some of the locals note that the money he has brought is something of a curse and we see some of it blowing in the wind. He wants to make reparation and to perform a penance.

He experiences both condemnation and forgiveness – and, in the ritual styles of the Middle East, an animal is sacrificed, shedding its blood, symbol of the suffering and reconciliation.

The film is worth seeing as a film, brief, some beauty, some dread. A non-religious audience watching it would appreciate the humane themes while the Christian audience, especially those with a sacramental tradition, would appreciate how the pattern of penance and reconciliation is played out before their eyes.

The film can be recommended for discussion, for religious education.

KEEP THE CHANGE

US, 2017, 94 minutes, Colour.

Brandon Polansky, Samantha Elisofon, Jessica Walter, Jonathan Tchaikovsky.

Directed by Rachel Israel.

A New York story, combining the familiar, the wealthy self-confident family, along with the unfamiliar, a course for young adults with a variety of disabilities.

The focus is on David, a young man, from the wealthy background, an only child, spoilt by his doting mother who is also controlling and his more genial laid-back father. He has been required to go to this course and is seen being driven by the family chauffeur. At the course, one of the participants he encounters is a very talkative Sarah, enthusiastic about many aspects of the course, partnered with David for a project (the supervisor hoping to get David involved instead of playing with his phone).

This seems an unlikely partnership, audiences probably feeling rather critical towards David and his seemingly arrogant attitudes, but feeling rather sympathetic towards Sarah although probably thinking that they would find it very hard to go out with her and experience her continual enthusiastic chatter.

It emerges that the course is for those with a variety of disabilities. David's is not immediately evident although he does have peculiar mannerisms, a facial tic which is disguised as a sneeze. Sarah is more obvious and very quickly explains to David that she is autistic and has learning disabilities.

David has felt the need for relationships with women and is a constant devotee of online dating – and we see him on one of the dates which concludes almost instantly, the woman walking away.

But, probably to our great surprise, David forms something of an affection for Sarah, especially when they have to go to the Brooklyn Bridge and write a report of their visit, she always broming with enthusiasm.

On the whole, this is a very gentle story about two needy people, autistic men and women dealing with their disabilities, forming bonds, David taking Sarah home to his disbelieving mother, Sarah, always full of life, becoming very hurt when David seems to neglect her. He has an actor cousin who shows an immediate awareness of Sarah and her needs, something of a relief to the audience that there are people who are sensitive.

How can this develop? What are the challenges in terms of personality, abilities and disabilities, affirmation of personalities, love and sexuality, hurt and possibilities for reconciliation? The only answer to these questions is that audiences should go and see – and find this brief film with its unexpected focus rather rewarding.

KIN

US, 2018, 104 minutes, Colour.

Myles Truitt, Jack Raynor, Zoe Kravitz, James Franco, Dennis Quaid.

Directed by Jonathan and Jesse Baker.

With a title like Kin, the main expectations might be a story of family and bonding. And, in some ways, it is.

There are quite some intriguing elements in the screenplay. However, there are three main strands of the narrative, eventually coming together though a bit disparate at times along the way. Since there are touches of science-fiction introduced early, the film is a blend of gritty realism and fantasy speculation. Credibility and plausibility are not a major feature.

At the centre of the film is a young African-American boy, Elijah, Eli, played quite effectively by Myles Truitt. He is bullied at school because of his mother. Suddenly Dennis Quaid appears as his stepfather, a stern man of principle, who warns Eli to be wary of his step-brother, Jimmy (Jack Raynor) who is being released from six years in prison.

Some difficulties at the dinner table, Jimmy going off to see a group of thugs, led by James Franco being sleazily brutal, about paying off debt. Then, we are off on a cross-country car trip, Jimmy and Eli. There is a series of adventures, especially when Jimmy takes his young brother to a disreputable bar, drinks, gets into a fight with the owner, and making friends with one of the dancers at the bar, Milly, Zoe Kravitz.

It is here that the science-fiction opens up, an ultra-powerful weapon that Eli has found in a warehouse where he used to collect scrap metal and has taken this strange box with him, discovering its lethal power.

There is an episode at a gambling den at the back of a farm. There is an episode at the casinos in Las Vegas. Jimmy wants to confess his guilt about what has happened to Eli but is interrupted leading to a drama between the two brothers, an arrest in Nevada, being interned in the police precinct – with the thugs attacking the station, a rather brutal shootout, the FBI also arriving on the scene and, some mysterious bike riders (including Michael B. Jordan who produced the film) and an explanation of the science-fiction elements.

This is one of those you might like it, you might not, depending how intrigued you are with the various strands, especially the science-fiction, and how it all comes together.

THE LAST SUIT/EL ULTIMO TRAJE

Argentina, 2017, 98 minutes, Colour.

Miguel Angel Sola, Angela Molina, Martin Piroyanski, Natalia Verbeke, Julia Beerhold, Olga Boadiz, Jan Mayzel.

Directed by Pablo Solarz.

This is a very fine film, a film that makes life worthwhile for a film reviewer. It can be well recommended.

The basic setting for the film is Argentina, opening with a joyous celebration of the Jewish community, music, dance, a reminder of the old traditions. However, the keeper of the traditions in this film is an 88-year-old patriarch of the family, significantly called Abraham, who is terminally ill, has a leg which strictly needs amputation, who is being sent by his daughters and their families to a retirement home. On the surface, he seems to accept this, but... He is played persuasively by Miguel Angel Sola.

In the middle of the film, when he reluctantly seeks out his youngest daughter in Madrid after he has been robbed, having previously refused to apologise for his disinheriting her in favour of her two sisters, there is a strong reference to the plot of King Lear. The daughters in Argentina who are sending their father to the retirement home have professed their love for him while the youngest daughter, Claudia, accuse them of hypocrisy. (There is an explicit reference to Shakespeare and King Lear in the final credits.)

The film is also a Holocaust memorial film. Abraham lost his family in the camps in Poland, was able to escape with the help of a friend. He had been able to migrate to Argentina but had let contact with his friend lapse. As he faces his death, he decides to return to Poland and the bulk of the film shows his journey.

He is a resourceful old man, relying on a literally underground agency to get his ticket to Europe. He imposes himself on a quiet young man on the plane – who later does ask Abraham's help and offers to drive him in Madrid. Before he gets his train to Poland, Abraham goes to an old hotel, encounters Maria who runs the place, who takes him to a club where she sings after he misses his train and they reminisce about the past.

There are various episodes, all interesting and entertaining, as Abraham pursues his travels, getting tangled with language in Paris, being helped by a young woman archaeologist who is able to speak

Yiddish – who then has to bear the brunt of Abraham's hostility towards Germans, not wanting to set foot on German soil as he makes his way from France to Poland. As with his daughter, so with this young woman, Abraham has to learn to let go of some of his angers and hostility and appreciate the kindness of others.

There is also great kindness in Poland, especially from the nurse in the hospital where he is taken after collapsing on the train (aggravated by his memories of the past, seen in flashbacks, his injuries after the war, his seeking help from his friend, but a cruel sequence of memories where he is mocked by decadent German soldiers and their women).

There is great emotion at the end of the film, great hope in a film which acknowledges human weakness but also invests in human resilience, forgiveness and reconciliation.

LEAVE NO TRACE

US, 2018, 108 minutes, Colour.

Thomasin Mc Kenzie, Ben Foster, Dale Dickey, Jeff Kober.

Directed by Debra Granik.

Directed Debra Granik has not made many feature films. Some years ago, she attracted a great deal of critical attention with her film *Winter's Bone*, featuring Jennifer Lawrence in an early role which earned her an Oscar nomination. The film was set out in the back blocks.

This film is also set out in the black blocks. This time it is in Oregon, with beautiful photography in close-up detail in the forests beyond the city of Portland. The screenplay shows a father and daughter surviving in the forest, continually on the move, found at one stage and moved into the city (we have actually seen them walk to shop in a supermarket). Because we have been plunged into their forest life, their independence and interdependence, the visit to the city is momentarily unnerving, and when they are taken in and interrogated by the authorities, psychological questionnaires, we share their unease.

Gradually, the background is filled in. The father, Will, played by Ben Foster (who is frequently cast in rather abrasive roles but is much more sympathetic here), is a war veteran, a victim of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, returned from the war zone but unable to live in society. His wife has died. He is protective of his teenage daughter, Tom (played with conviction by New Zealand actress, Thomasin Mc Kenzie).

The film slowly builds up its portrayal of Will and his psychological condition, a principled man, trying to do the right thing, unable to settle in society, schooling his daughter, training her to survive in very harsh conditions. The attempt to settle him on a farm with a genial owner, with visits to the local church, does not work.

After an accident when Will needs treatment, Tom is able to rescue him and draws on the help of an isolated community, older men and women, withdrawn from society, living in huts and caravans, but building up a sense of interdependence.

Will this be enough for Will? Will it be the kind of life that Tom wants? That is the dilemma at the

end.

A sympathetic woman, Dale, takes care of Tom and, in a striking sequence, shows her the beehive, trusting bees walking on her hand – something which Tom herself is able to develop and show to her father. Tom also helps Dale and the groceries, discovering that there has been a man living in the forest for years, leaving a bag hanging on a tree that is to be filled by provisions. That is the only trace he has left.

For some who have experienced Post Traumatic Stress, there seems to be a great desire to leave no trace. Is it possible? And is it possible for those who are loved?

THE MEG

US, 2018, 113 minutes, Colour.

Jason Statham, Bingbing Li, Rainn Wilson, Cliff Curtis, Winston Chao, Shuya Sophia Cai, Ruby Rose, Page Kennedy, Robert Taylor, Olafur Darri Olafsson, Jessica Mc Namee, Masi Oka.

Directed by John Turteltaub.

The Meg has to big. And it is! The focus on the film is a mega shark, the prehistoric shark which has survived in the depths of the ocean until today (and not only just one).

During the last 40 years or more any audience seeing a shark on a film poster will immediately think of Jaws. And rightly. It is the archetypal shark film. This film pays some homage to Jaws especially in the final sequences at a crowded Chinese beach resort, lots of people in the water, the celebration of a wedding and a poodle falling into the water (will it be chomped – so we are led to believe and, for those of tender emotions towards dogs, spoiler alert, it is saved!).

However, with the shark being prehistoric and surviving into the present, there are memories of Jurassic Park, so this is a kind of Jurassic Deep Ocean Floor.

Chinese producers have invested heavily in this film as have the Americans – which leads to the setting being the oceans off China, with a climax at the above-mentioned beach resort, some key Chinese characters in the drama and lots of extras on that beach resort. It is not surprising to find that the film was a box office success in China – and, more surprisingly, in the United States.

Jason Statham, who has survived 20 years of action shows and shows no sign of easing off, is a popular hero of this kind of film. He is something of a kind of antihero, involved in a disaster in the initial action here, retired to Thailand, unwilling to come back to deep sea diving when there is an emergency but, of course, persuaded to do so.

The centre of most of the action is a huge facility (perhaps something of an understatement given the size, affluence, high-technology) in the ocean, scientists doing research on the ocean floor and sponsored by one of those bluff American billionaires (Rainn Wilson). The assorted experts include the veteran Chinese scientist (Winston Chao), his daughter who is skilled in science and deep sea diving (Bingbing Li) whose young daughter is present and proves a significant presence not only in the drama but in fostering a relationship between her mother and our hero. There is an eccentric young inventor (Ruby Rose), a Scandinavian expert in diving, an African- American whizzkid on

theory but who gets very anxious in the water – and the hero's former wife (Jessica Mc Namee). More than enough for interpersonal clashes in crises.

But, of course, the big focus is on the shark, savaging an initial diving expedition, biting at the reinforced windows of the facility, and doing all the menacing things that sharks do in the movies if not in real life.

Which means, there is plenty of tension, plenty of action, plenty of heroics, plenty of dangers, the American owner being arrogant and getting his comeuppance, a touch of romance, and a super-abundance of mayhem.

This is what The Meg promises – and what it delivers.

MILE 22

US, 2018, 94 minutes, Colour.

Mark Wahlberg, Lauren Cohan, Iko Uwais, John Malkovich, Rhonda Rousey.

Directed by Peter Berg.

This action film is rather exhausting to watch even as we sit in the comfortable multiplex seat. There is a lot of action.

Just to get ourselves into the picture, it is useful to know where Mile 22 actually is. The action of the film, apart from a shootout set in the United States, is in a fictionalised Southeast Asian city (although actually filmed in Colombia). There is some drama in the American Embassy in the city and the need to get a subject to the airport, with the group being continually threatened, which is at Mile 22 from the Embassy.

Director Peter Berg has become something of an expert in making fast action films in recent years. Famous for Friday Night Lights, he has been to Saudi Arabia for The Kingdom, Afghanistan for Lone Survivor, the Gulf of Mexico for Deepwater Horizon, the Boston Marathon for Patriots' Day. He has worked with Mark Wahlberg in several of these films – so we really know what to expect.

Because of the unnamed country, the variety of racial types, the presence of the Americans and their covert activities, the main part of the film with a desperate mission to get those 22 miles, the plot is not always easy to follow.

In the opening, there is a siege as a house in the American suburbs, agents outside, well-armed, a huge surveillance centre presided over by John Malkovich. It seems there are Russian agents inside. All this serves as an introduction to the covert agents and their supervision. There is actually a twist which is revealed at the end.

In the Southeast Asian city, Alice (Lauren Cohan), who is also observed in a number of domestic problems at home, his partner with Jimmy Silva, a hyper- intelligent whizzkid, seemingly emotionless agent, played by Mark Wahlberg, has contact with a local policeman who has the key to some kind of code which the agency is trying to open. This man, Li, is played by Iko Uwais whom fans of tough action films will remember from the two Indonesian action shows, The Raid. (In those films he

showed an extraordinary agility with his martial arts and get several opportunities to show this agility here.)

The local authorities do not want Li to leave the country and take every opportunity to make the trip to Mile 22 a dangerous obstacle course. This provides a whole lot of car chases, car explosions, detours into dangerous buildings, agents sacrificing themselves with explosives to stop pursuers.

And, as mentioned, there is something of a twist at the very end.

This film might be successful with action fans – but Peter Berg and Mark Wahlberg should move onto the next one (which they apparently have).

THE MISEDUCATION OF CAMERON POST

US, 2018, 91 minutes, Colour.

Chloe Grace Moretz, Jennifer Ehle, Sasha Lane, Forrest Goodluck, Kerry Butler, Dalton Harrod, John Gallagher Jr, Christopher Dylan White.

Directed by Desiree Akhavan.

The title clearly indicates that something is wrong.

Cameron Post is a teenage girl, still at school, living at home with her guardian. She has a girlfriend and they are being prepared for prom night, dresses, make up, photos... The boys come calling. However, Cameron is not an enthusiast about the prom. She is in love with her girlfriend.

This is a film about sexual orientation, same-sex orientation, teenagers facing their orientation, hiding it, experiencing shame. When the girls are caught by the boys, Cameron is sent off to a re-education institution, for re-orientation, for, as is said, being de-gay, confronting gender confusion. However, this is a Christian-based institution, with quotations from Matthew's Gospel and, powerfully at the end, St Paul's comments about his own experience with torment and the thorn that he asked God to be rid of (interpreted here in sexuality terms).

The facility, as it is called, is run by a brother and sister. The brother, Rick, has been re-oriented from being gay. His sister has a doctor's qualification and runs everything by herself. At one stage, and the audience is possibly thinking this, there is a question as to what qualifications they actually do have and whether they are making things up as they go along. Jennifer Ehle brings the charm from her other roles but turns it into a sweet-smiling but iron-controlling personality. And the question is asked about what accountability the brother and sister have for their initiatives, for the course, for their control.

Chloe Grace Moretz, in her late teens, has had a very successful film career. She is convincing as a girl who is confused, made even more confused by the re-orientation, puzzled by the appeal to God, remedies based on overcoming sin, and stating eventually that she was tired of being disgusted with herself, something that the course re-emphasises.

The treatment of the facility is particularly American, echoing something of a cult, with a kind of

Pentecostal enthusiasm, with TV programs which are ultra-zestful in the name of God, and some approaches to aversion therapy.

Cameron is allotted a roommate who is very earnest, says all the right things, tries to do all the right things, but is unaware (as the audience actually is) that she really is not changing in her orientation. There are group meetings and we are introduced to a range of those participating in the course including a chubby young woman who wants to sing but has a low self-image, a rather arrogant young man, a young man whom his father labels as effeminate who is driven to drastic physical action against himself. Cameron bonds with two of the members, Jane (Sasha Lane), a rather tough-minded young woman and Adam, Forest Goodluck, earnest and a good friend.

By these years in the early 21st century, such programs have generally been discredited although they are supported earnestly by those who believe that such re-orientation is possible and, especially by homophobic people who consider that it is essential.

The film has a comparatively brief running time, focuses on female same-sex relationships principally, invites the audience to understand as well as empathise with the young women, also invites the audience to be critical of those running the program, raising the questions and leaving the audience to reflect on possible answers. (A forthcoming film, *Boy Erased*, raises the issues in terms of male-male orientation.)

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: FALLOUT

US, 2018, 147 minutes, Colour.

Tom Cruise, Henry Cavill, Ving Rhames, Simon Pegg, Rebecca Ferguson, Sean Harris, Alec Baldwin, Angela Bassett, Vanessa Kirby, Michelle Monaghan, Wes Bentley, Wolf Blitzer.

Directed by Christopher Mc Quarrie.

What more is there to say about the Mission Impossible series? It began on television decades ago, enjoyed a gimmick where messages detonated within five seconds of their being read, at a theme melody by Lalo Schiffrin which stayed in the imagination and was transformed, even inflated, into a huge-budget, star-filled drama by Brian DePalma [?](#) in 1996. It consolidated the action career of Tom Cruise – if it actually needed consolidating! And that was over two decades ago. And then, sequel upon sequel, the box office and audiences reinforcing the popularity.

So, here is Cruise's Ethan Hunt now in his mid-50s, not slowing down at all, and the actor continuing to do his own daring stunts. Christopher McQuarrie [?](#) has been writing screenplays and directs for the second time.

There is some continuity with the previous film, the villain played by Sean Harris, the presence of Rebecca Ferguson as an MI6 agent, the continued support of Ving Rhames as Luther and, comic touches, with Simon Pegg as Benji. In a sense, we know where we stand.

This film opens with action adventure, plutonium deals in Berlin which go awry, talk about an arch-villain who wants to control world power with nuclear weapons, and associates who proclaim a bizarre philosophy of peace coming through violent upheaval.

Authority figures appear, Alec Baldwin in charge of mission, Angela Bassett asserting authority from Washington DC, and a kind of minder imposed on Ethan Hunt in the form of agent Walker, played with some customary stolidity by Henry Cavill.

One of the attractions of watching these espionage stories, tough fights, traditional car chases through cities, slam banging into traffic, motorbikes and mayhem, is the interspersing of the action with vistas of cities, this time the landmarks of both Paris and London, attractive helicopter flights over the cities. The use of St Paul's in London, the cupola and the roofs creates excitement. But, the best is kept to last, the action taking place in Indian Kashmir, a village with medics from the West working with the locals, vast mountainscapes and deep valleys, cliff ledges, and some final climax moments with both Walker and Hunt literally cliffhanging.

The basic plot is not particularly new, mad villains, nuclear threats, dominating authorities, betrayals... However, for some minutes at the end, Michelle Monaghan appears as Hunt's former love interest (having appeared in two previous films).

Audiences will know what they are getting – and, because this is what they want, they will be satisfied.

THE NUN

US, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.

Demian Bechir, Taissa Farmiga, Jonas Bloquet, Bonnie Aarons, Vera Farmiga, Patrick Wilson.
Directed by Corin Hardy.

There is an exorcism sequence in this film, but it is not an exorcism film in the vein of *The Exorcist*. Rather, it is a general kind of horror film which uses some of the conventions of exorcisms and other religious themes.

For audiences who enjoyed the two *Conjuring* films, they will remember that in the second film there was the image of a sinister nun, an embodiment of evil. There was some discussion about the background, possibly Romania. The screenwriters then decided that they would fill out this prequel story. (And the two *Conjuring* films were directed by James Wan, who helped establish the *Saw* horror series – cowriting this time because he was working, more upmarket, in the DC film of *Aquaman*.)

So, the setting is an enormous castle in the Romanian forests, imposing exteriors, very sinister interiors, crypts, basements, corridors, a door which states “God ends here”, the chapel. It is 1952 and there are memories of bombs dropping on the Castle (suggesting some diabolic activity but not pursuing this theme much further).

The film opens with a young nun and the Superior venturing beyond that sinister door and, the nun wanting to avoid possession by evil, hanging herself. This raises issues in the Vatican, a group of cardinals and priests meeting and authorising their representative, Father Anthony Burke (Demian Bechir) to investigate. He has a lead with a young novice in London and decides that she should accompany him to Romania. She is played by Taissa Farmiga, the younger sister of Vera Farmiga who is glimpsed, along with Patrick Wilson, reprising their roles as the famous Warrens, the experts

in exorcisms in Amityville and London's Enfield.

There is also a young French-Canadian [? Frenchy](#) (Jonas Bloquet who discovered the dead nun and helps the visitors with their inquiries. It should be pointed out that the screenwriters were not as accurate in their depiction of things Catholic as they might have been – one could contribute a list of “Goofs” to the IMDb entry!

Most of the film is in the dark, during the night, in the eerie castle, out in the cemetery – with some early discussion about being buried alive and bells being provided to alert passers-by followed by some moments of tension when Father Burke finds himself buried alive.

The abbess is seen sitting in a high chair in the basement, her face covered with a black veil. Various nuns appear at times, especially in the chapel where, it is said, there is a tradition of perpetual adoration with nuns reciting the rosary. But, then they appear and disappear, the sinister nun looking frightening, the young novice trying to cope.

Needless to say, it builds up to a huge climax, threats to all those concerned – though the novice decides that facing this crisis she should make her first profession and Father Burke officiates (from an alleged book of prayer but the title of the Bible is very clear on the book). The expected mayhem then ensues.

This is what the filmmakers intended to do, make a frightening horror film, borrowing Catholic images – and that is what they have done.

SEARCHING...

US, 2018, 102 minutes, Colour.

John Cho, Debra Messing, Joseph Lee.

Directed by Aneesh Chaganty.

Searching... Is one of those messages that sometimes blinks on our computers. And, this is the key to this film, not only in its plot and themes but in its whole cinematic treatment.

The film has the audience looking continuously at computer screens – which means that if Searching... were to be downloaded on a computer, it would mean watching a small screen presentation of the big screen film of a small screen story and treatment!

Audiences may appreciate the inventiveness of the technique: homepages, photos and uploading, emails, texting, room surveillance, television news, police interviews, phone calls. On the other hand, some may find it at times something of a trial, being fixated on the computer screen for an hour and a half.

On the inventive side, the film quickly establishes the central characters by uploading photos, husband and wife, birth of a daughter, a file of uploads tracing her growth and development, the bonding with her parents, her mother's illness... Most of us can identify with uploading photos.

The main action of the film takes place when Margot, the daughter, is in her final years of high

school. She has many friends, enjoys texting, but there are some tensions with her father, especially in their shared grief at the death of her mother. She is not quite as open with him as she should be or has he expects. The father, David, played by John Chu, is sympathetic, wanting the best for his daughter.

She does some texting but when her father responds, there is no reply. This means that the film moves into the familiar story of the missing daughter, the possibility of abduction, the mystery of what has happened to her, the father and his growing anxiety, making demands on the police, confronting his brother who has been keeping some secrets from him.

A lot of the sequences on line from surveillance in various rooms of the house, split screens, characters walking from one side of the screen into an image on the other – we are continually conscious that we are watching the computer screen.

And the other central character is the detective (Debra Messing) who is assigned to the case, interviews the father, makes investigations, finds that a criminal has confessed to the abduction. These sequences are all done by television newscasts, the on air talking heads, the on-location photography, helicopter shots...

Just when the audience thinks that the film is going along in an expected manner, there is a dramatic twist, leading to an ending that is not quite what was anticipated.

For those who enjoy this kind of thriller, quite satisfying. For those intrigued by the cinema technique and the use of the computer screen in its various guises, intriguing.

SLENDER MAN

US, 2018, 93 minutes, Colour.

Joey King, Julia Goldani Telles, Jaz Sinclair, Annalise Basso, Alex Fitzalan, Taylor Richardson, Javier Botet, Jessica Blank, Michael Reilly Burke.

Directed by Sylvain White.

Every other week there is a new horror film. Many are of the blood and gore variety, probably with a raucous male audience in mind. Not so many geared to a female audience – as is this one.

It is not as if we have not seen this story before. In fact, according to the bloggers, they have seen it before and generally better. Although there are a few who defend the film.

The central characters are four older teenage girls, still at school, with an eye on the boys but happy in one another's company. The boys go off by themselves to be with their computers, to look up the mythological Slender Man online, the girls decide to do the same thing. There is an eerie video, a mysterious gangly male presence in the forest, face concealed, white-masked. There are all kinds of weird touches of information, threats – and, on googling, all kinds of stories, especially about abducted young women.

What else is the screenplay to do but look at the characters of the four girls, put them in difficult situations, put them at the mercy of Slender Man. One disappears in the forest. One has a

frightening experience at home. One is more resourceful, goes to the library to research the phenomenon, has a very weird experience, thinks she has the solution from a book discussing vibrations and force fields, and tries to persuade her friend. Which leaves the main drama to the friend, friendly with one of the boys but then experiencing hallucinations, having a number of nightmares (which often is a bit of a cheat on the part of the writer to have their scares and then back to reality), concerned about her younger sister who seems to become involved in the Slender Man experience and is hospitalised.

The film is literally very dark a lot of the time, especially with excursions into the deep forest. The other camera technique is focusing on the close-ups of the four central characters, the audience being fixed on them and their experiences. Actually, the film does get a bit scarier as it goes on – and does not really let up at the end.

THE SPY WHO DUMPED ME

US, 2018, 117 minutes, Colour.

Mila Kunis, Kate Mac Kinnon, Justin Theroux, Sam Heughan, Gillian Anderson, Jane Curtin, Paul Reiser.

Directed by Susanna Fogel.

No mistaking the direction in which this espionage adventure will go. The keywords are spoof and mayhem. And, in fact, there is plenty of both and increasingly veering towards over the top.

It was James Bond who was “The Spy who Loved Me”. Actually, there is an English agent in this film although he is played by Scots Sam Heughan, a regular in the television series, Outlander. There is also an American kind of James Bond equivalent, played by Justin Theroux. He is the spy who does the actual dumping. The important word, of course, in the title is “Me”.

It doesn't sound particularly grammatical to ask “who is Me?”. But, that is the question. In fact, she is a regular American woman, in her 30s, Audrey, played by Mila Kunis. She is an attractive character, tends to put herself down a bit, is, obviously, more than a bit put out to find that she has been dumped but even more put out to find that the man who dumped her is a spy.

But, she does have a best friend who is the exact opposite of her, Morgan, played by Kate Mac Kinnon. Kate Mac Kinnon has excelled on Saturday Night Live with many impersonations, madcap satire and spoof, was one of the new Ghostbusters, and takes every opportunity here to excel even more. While she is outspoken, zany in her attitudes towards life, even finishing up performing on the trapeze with high wire acts at an arty reception.

When the dumping spy is shot, he asks Audrey to get his important sports trophy and to take it immediately to Vienna where she will find a contact at a restaurant. What else are the girls to do but immediately book a flight, get to Austria, go to the hotel, misinterpret contact and so begin a series of adventures that will remind audiences of the more serious shows while sending them up in terms of danger, escapes, drawing on desperate resources, anything available or improvising, to fend off danger.

And, there are some travels into the bargain, careering around Europe, from Vienna to Amsterdam

and tourist spots in between.

As with all spoofs, some audiences will find a particular episode extraordinarily funny while the person sitting next to them might be offering a mild smile. It is that kind of screenplay, but one rushing from one episode and send up to the next, audiences identifying with Audrey, wondering what Morgan is going to do – and, what Gillian Anderson is doing as the controller at MI 6 and whether the blonde protector is the hero or the traitor.

And that, probably, is enough for a smiling or laughing-out-loud night out.

WAYNE

Australia, 2018, 98 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Jeremy Sims.

In 1987, Wayne Gardner was an Australian celebrity, an Australian sport icon. It was the year that Jeff Fenech was a boxing champion and Pat Cash won Wimbledon. Wayne Gardner was voted sportsman of the year, winning the world championship in motor bike racing.

This is an opportunity to look back on Wayne Gardner's life, his sports history, his achievement, the years after his achievement. So, this is interesting as a piece of Australiana. However, for those who do not have a passion for motor bike racing or motorbikes, it will not be so compelling.

Wayne Gardner himself is an agreeable interviewee, talking straight to camera, quite genial, remembering his past in industrial Wollongong, his first five dollar bike, the encouragement of his sometimes reticent father, his enthusiastic mother, a range of friends from Wollongong itself. Also very agreeable and articulate talking to camera (and being seen in the historical footage over many years) is Gardner's girlfriend, Donna Lee.

While the film is a portrait, generally agreeable, not so many warts and all, it is also a look at the development of motor bike racing throughout the world from the 1960s to the 1980s, many of the personalities, Japanese promoters, American rivals, Australian collaborators. And, it has its excitement, as Gardner comes up through the ranks, eventually achieves his championship goal at quite some energy cost. But it also shows his subsequent history of developing Phillip Island as a venue in the late 1980s for the sport – and the excitement of his achievement on winning there.

The film has some dramatic and romantic overtones with the wedding of Wayne and Donna in 1989 – and a surprise for those who don't know the subsequent history, a divorce after five years, strange given Donna's years of devotion and support to Gardner. The film ends with scenes of Gardner supporting the racing career of his son, Remy.

A film for its niche audience, an opportunity for the wider audience to think about sport in Australia, celebrities, as well as an opportunity to think about the status of motor bike racing.

WEST OF SUNSHINE

Australia, 2017, 78 minutes, Colour.

Damien Hill, Ty Perham, Arthur Angel, Kat Stewart, Tony Nikolakopoulos, Kaarin Fairfax.

Directed by Jason Raftopoulos.

Here is a small budget piece of Australiana – or, more particularly, Victoriana and, even more particularly, of Melbourne's western suburbs. (Those not familiar with Melbourne will not notice but, in fact, most of the action takes place east of Sunshine.)

The film also has a brief running time. It covers the day in the life of Jimmy, a rather dismal and disillusioning day at times, some crises points in his life. He is played convincingly by Damian Hill and he plays against his stepson in real life, his son in the film, Ty Perham.

The film opens with Jimmy waking up, getting ready to go to work, going to his wife's house to pick up his son, Alex, trying to get another friend to mind the sun for the day but he refuses. He is accompanied to work by his good friend, Steve. They work at a delivery centre and, they arrive late for work, Jimmy initially unwilling to use his own car, pride and joy inherited from his father, but he finally agrees and begins his rounds.

This gives the director the opportunity to drive around Melbourne, showing the variety of the suburbs, the skyline of the inner city, the different views of streets, homes, warehouses, cafes, pubs... In many ways, the film offers an arresting portrait of Melbourne.

Jimmy really hasn't made much of his life. He says he loves his wife. He loves his son but there are continued tensions between them as the day goes on, Jimmy forced to have Alex in the car with him, trying to get him to stay in the car but Alex wandering in and, despite warnings, inevitably touching things. He is bored, plays games on his father's phone, gets hungry. And, inevitably, he gets into real trouble when his father does some drug-delivering to get extra cash.

Cash and repayment are at the centre of the plot. Jimmy owes a great deal but has a certainty at the races with the possibility of a big win, encouraging Steve to go along with him. It partly works out – and it partly doesn't which leads to more tensions, Jimmy at first willing to sell his car, finally turning up to the loan shark, and his thugs, who is owed the money.

So, a slice of life from the western suburbs of Melbourne. It is the first feature film by Jason Raftopolous who also wrote the screenplay. It won him an award at the Barcelona International Film Festival and was screened in 2017 at the Venice Film Festival.

REVIEWS OCTOBER 2018

ALPHA

BEAST

BEAUTIFUL BOY

CHRISTOPHER ROBIN

CUSTODY

FIRST MAN

GHOSTHUNTER

HEARTS BEAT LOUD
HOUSE WITH A CLOCK IN ITS WALLS, The
I AM PAUL WALKER
IN LIKE FLYNN
JOHNNY ENGLISH STRIKES AGAIN
JULIET, NAKED
LADIES IN BLACK
McKELLEN
McQUEEN
MERGER, The
NIGHT SCHOOL
PREDATOR, The
THREE IDENTICAL STRANGERS
SIMPLE FAVOUR, A
SMALLFOOT
YOU WERE NEVER REALLY THERE
WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

ALPHA

US, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.
Kodi Smit Mc Phee, Johannes Haukur Johannesson.
Directed by Albert Hughes.

Over the decades there has been a cinema interest in prehistory including *Quest for Fire* and *The Cave of the Clan Bear* from a story by Jean Auel. The storyline of this film is more simple and straightforward.

This is a film that is seen best in the cinema, on a large and wide screen. The cinematography is impressive and striking, prehistoric landscapes, mountains and cliffs, lakes and rivers, the different seasons, snow and ice as well as the primitive village of the humans in Europe, 20,000 years ago. The landscapes were filmed in Canada, the province of Alberta.

The film opens with the men of the tribe assembling, crawling on the ground towards a herd of bison, then an attack, frightening scenes of terrified animals falling over cliffs, the role of the warriors especially when a young man is held by an animal and tossed over the cliff. Prehistoric times were not genteel.

The film then goes into flashback, focusing on the young man, a teenager, Keda (an impressive performance and screen presence by Australian Kodi Smit Mc Phee). There are initiation rituals, some young men failing, others sharpening spearheads showing their prowess and for future use.

The main part of the film is the lone journey of survival for Keda. He finds water. He eats worms for sustenance. His leg is injured and he grinds herbs to make poultices for his recovery. He is pursued by a pack of wolves and takes refuge in a tree – but, one of the wolves is injured and he shares cave with the wolf, overcoming the snarling with some kindness, suggestions of empathy between the wolf and the human, Keda offering him water, hunting a rabbit and then sharing food.

Keda's father has explained to him leadership in the tribe, the literal Alpha male – and Keda gives this name to the wolf.

The two travel together, discover a man frozen in the ice, Keda falling through the ice and Alpha helping in the rescue, confrontations with a giant bear-like beast – and the desperation of hunger as they move through the winter, snow and ice.

The film is impressive in many ways, directed by Albert Hughes (whose previous films were with his brother, Allen Hughes, *Dead Presidents*, *From Hell*, *The Book of Eli*). It also has an international cast with leads from Iceland in Poland.

So, an imaginative and speculative reflection on pre-history and evolutionary developments as well as human/canine bonding (which is taking the place of the rather exclusivist language of dogs as Man's Best Friend).

BEAST

UK, 2017, 107 minutes, Colour.

Jesse Buckley, Johnny Flynn, Geraldine James.

Directed by Michael Pearce.

Certainly, a blunt and frightening title.

This might be described as a psychological horror film, not of the blood and gore type, the sense of this is implied rather than visualised, but a study of character, of characters, of their potential for being beasts.

The setting is the island of Jersey, attractive locations of beach, cliffs, villages. But, very soon into the opening of the film, we see memorials to young women who have been killed. It seems that over the years there have been a number of abductions and murders, wariness about a serial killer. This is the background to the story of Moll (a quite intense performance by Jessie Buckley), a young woman who lives with her mother, sings in the choir which is conducted by her mother, is a tourist guide for busloads of visitors to Jersey. But, we appreciate immediately that there is quite some edge to Moll.

As we learn more about Moll, the demands made on her by her mother, a powerful performance by Geraldine James, we find that she was homeschooled after a violent incident, allegedly bullying of Moll and her response with a pair of scissors. Her mother wants to make sure that all the evil is removed from her daughter. To that end she throws a lavish party but her sister one-ups her by announcing she is pregnant with twins. Moll is also required to babysit her brother's daughter whom she likes but sometimes forgets as she goes out, her mother making her confess to selfishness.

She has a wild side too, going to parties and dances. But, near a cave on the beach, she is rescued from an aggressive young man by a local, Pascal (Johnny Flynn). She is immediately attracted to him. He is a handyman, poacher, has been in prison, is quite direct in talking to Moll's mother.

The immediate drama in the story is that there was an abduction and murder on the night of Moll's party. A local Portuguese migrant is suspected. But what about Pascal and his past? And what about Moll and her inner violence?

The director has made the point that this film is not so much an investigation into the abductions and murders, certainly the work of a killer with beastly instincts, but it is more of an investigation into the psyche of Moll, her attraction towards Pascal, whether she is suspicious of him or not, whether her love for him is dangerous because of her suspicions.

Because of this, *Beast* is an interesting psychological portrait of a disturbed young woman, her alienation from her family (making a toast at one stage to her family and declaring that she forgives them), her somewhat reckless love for the mysterious Pascal.

BEAUTIFUL BOY

US, 2018, 114 minutes, Colour.

Steve Carrel, Timothee Chalamet, Maura Tierney, Amy Ryan, Christian Convery, Oakley Bull.

Directed by Felix van Groenningen.

Watching this film is a demanding, indeed a sobering, experience. The title sounds gentle – and the familiar song is played throughout the film. However, it is a film about addictions, relapses and recovery, the relationship between a father and a son.

The film opens tellingly with a focus on David Shef, an impressive performance by Steve Carrel, proving that not only can he do comedy expertly, but he is a very serious actor as well. David Shef is talking about his bewilderment, his not understanding the son whom he thought he knew and loved so well, an 18-year-old who has become involved in drugs which have taken over his life. Audiences will immediately identify with him as a father driven to search for his son and will be remembering any friends or family in similar situations.

In fact, the film is based on books by David Shef himself as well as his son Nic. For those who do not know this, the final critical climax for Nic is all the more dramatic because the audience is uncertain as to what will happen.

The film goes back one year but, throughout the screenplay, many flashbacks are inserted, not necessarily signalled but the film leaving it to the audience to realise the shifts in time and memory for both father and son.

There are many photos of father and son, especially when he was a charming boy in his early teens. And, there are many glimpses and memories of this time throughout the film. However, during the main action, Nic is 18. He is played most convincingly by Timothee Chalamet (*Call Me by Your Name*, *Lady Bird*). The film lets the audience know that David has been long divorced from his wife, Vicki (Amy Ryan) but that he has custody of his son. There are tense moments and phone calls between mother and father as exasperation increases and there are growing awarenesses of responsibilities.

David has married again, and receives strong support from Karen (Maura Tierney) and they have

children of their own who see Nic as their brother, devoted to him.

David seeks advice, researches addiction, especially crystal meth, appreciates the mood changes and their suddenness, is helped by an expert with diagrams of the brain and the effect of drugs, even prepared to experiment to appreciate what his son experiences. There is a scene where the father and son share pot, the father remembering his experimentation but not wanting his son to experiment at all.

And, as might be expected, there are many harrowing sequences, Nic at home and rebelling against his father's control, leaving home, his father rescuing him in the rain at a dingy drug rendezvous, his going into rehab, relapsing. There are some moments of peace when Nic seems to have overcome the habit, works in the rehab, graduates from college. But, whatever the black hole that he declares is at the core of himself, his life is also one of relapse. He takes up with the girl who overdoses.

The film raises the question as to whether anyone is able to help an addict, whether it has to be the choice of the addict rather than a curer. And, by the end, David is desperate, a powerful scene where Karen pursues Nic in her car and stops angry but helpless. Nic goes into the depths.

The film is very powerful as drama. The performances are well worth seeing. Statistics are given at the end concerning the prevalence of drug suicides, the need for rehabilitation but it seeming difficult if not impossible. However, as noted, this film is based on actual stories and recovery.

CHRISTOPHER ROBIN

UK, 2018, 104 minutes, Colour.

Ewan Mc Gregor, Hayley Atwell, Brontë Carmichael, Mark Gattis, Oliver Ford Davies. Voices of: Jim Cummings, Brad Garrett, Sophie Okonedo, Peter Capaldi, Toby Jones.

Directed by Marc Forster.

There has been quite some cinema interest in the life and writings of the British A.A.Milne, his experience of World War I, rather shell-shocked, his coping and not coping, his relationship with his wife, a rather dominating presence, and his love for his son, Christopher Robin. And Milne created a location, a Hundred Acre forest inhabited by a range of characters who from the 1920s endeared themselves to British children and then to children worldwide. The main character, so well-known, is the toy bear, Winnie the Pooh.

This was all the subject of the 2017 film, Goodbye Christopher Robin, with Domhnall Gleeson as Milne and Margot Robbie as his wife. The end of that film did move into World War II and some of the experiences of Christopher Robin.

Here we are again in Milne country. However, the focus is on Christopher Robin himself. We are introduced to the boy and Winnie the Pooh and the other characters as they farewell Christopher Robin and his leaving home. This gives the audience the chance to look at and, especially, listen to the voices of the range of characters from Eeyore, Rabbit, Piglet, Kanga, Roo, Owl... Jim Cummings is especially convincing, in the low key voice and delivery, as Pooh.

But, the main action takes place after the end of the war in which Christopher Robin served. He is

married, has a daughter, still lives in the family house outside London but is hard at work doing efficiency jobs for a luggage company. He is busy, over-worked, taking the job home with him, not spending enough time with his wife and daughter as he should.

This, of course, is reminiscent of those many films about the busy father and his neglect of family and the need for his eyes and heart to be opened. In fact, a film that comes to mind from a quarter of a century earlier is Steven Spielberg's *Hook*. In this film it is Peter Pan who is caught up in the busy adult world gets the opportunity to go back to Neverland and discover his inner child.

Ewan Mc Gregor is Christopher Robin. Sitting in the forest one day he is approached by Pooh – rather irritating in his insistence on wanting honey and having stomach rumbles! But he tantalises Christopher, accompanies him on his travels to work, is prone to get lost, wants some more honey but, for a time, is contented with a red balloon. Because Christopher needs to get his homework done for the company, he takes Pooh back to the Hundred Acre forest and, rather impatiently and irritably at first, meets again all those old friends.

While this is the story of Pooh and the others, it is also the story of Christopher Robin and his daughter, his encounter with her, frantically travelling to London with her father's briefcase and his papers, an amusing but disastrous taxi ride, with the others being bounced about in a box banging the London streets.

The ending is never in doubt. It is just the interest in the way in which it will happen, Christopher Robin getting a brainwave about how to improve the luggage business. (Answer, create opportunities where everybody can go on holidays not just the wealthy, and they will all buy luggage!). And there is an amusing song with everybody at the beach during the final credits highlighting this.

(For those who were introduced to Winnie the Pooh's world as children, the film would be most engaging. For those who were not, it may (as for this reviewer) take rather a long time to get used to characters who had not been endearing from childhood.)

CUSTODY/ JUSQU'A LA GARDE

France, 2017, 93 minutes, Colour.

Lea Drucker, Dennis Menochet, Thomas Gioria.

Directed by Xavier Legrand.

The original French title is not exactly the same as custody. It translates with an overtone of duelling and fight, "to the hilt".

The English title, *Custody*, is to the fore right from the beginning of the film, lawyers representing children. Initially, the husband seems somewhat sympathetic, steady job, saying he has reformed. The wife does look the worse for wear. They have a daughter, Josephine, turning 18, a boy aged about 12. The decision for the case is made when a lawyer reads out a letter from the boy, Julian, stating his dislike for his father, not wanting to be with him, upset with his father's violent treatment of his mother.

The audience sees something of the background of the family, especially the daughter and her boyfriend, her skipping classes, the preparation for her birthday party. But, Antoine, the father, makes an appearance. There is a very upsetting sequence where Antoine virtually abducts his son, travels in the car, demands that his son look at him, the son refusing and weeping. While Antoine has some momentary relenting, he shows that he does not understand why his wife has left him, why she would stop contact with him, prevent his children seeing him.

There is a rather long scene of the birthday party, exuberant friends and relatives, loud music with a beat, Josephine singing a song. Julian is enjoying the party. However, Antoine turns up outside in the car park, stating that he has a gift for his daughter, badgering his wife, declaring his love for her, jealous on hearing that she is seeing someone else, violent.

In fact, the screenplay is fairly straightforward, offering some key sequences in the interactions, culminating in an alarming, frightening episode where mother and son are in their apartment, Antoine continually rings the bell in the middle of the night, breaks in, with a rifle, bellowing and bashing the doors. Interestingly, the neighbour rings the police and, while a squad is on the way to the apartment block, an officer keeps online with the mother, giving directions, telling them to hide in the bath tub, locking and blockading the door...

In an English play on words the film ends with a different meaning for Custody. Antoine is in custody.

A harrowing French illustration of universal domestic violence, violence against women, wives and mothers.

FIRST MAN

US, 2018, 141 minutes, Colour.

Ryan Gosling, Claire Foy, Pablo Schreiber, Christopher Abbott, Kyle Chandler, Ciaran Hinds, Ethan Embry, Jason Clarke, Corey Stoll, Shea Wiggins, Patrick Fugit, Lucas Haas, Olivia Hamilton.

Directed by Damien Chazelle.

Films about space exploration have been very popular – and award-winning. In the early 1980s, audiences were taken back to the first flights in space, *The Right Stuff*. In the 1990s, there was disaster and success in *Apollo 13*. More recently, there was the story of the African-American women working behind the scenes – and moving in front of the scenes, *Hidden Figures*. Now comes a quite spectacular film about the journey to the moon.

First Man is about as close as most of us will ever get to space exploration. And, it does not fail its audience in immersing them in the experience. In the first few minutes, we are in the cockpit of a plane with Neil Armstrong, a very serious Ryan Gosling, being battered about as he breaks the sound barrier (with a rather adverse comment about his experience of landing in the desert by pioneer of sound barrier breaking, Chuck Yeager). It is 1961.

The screenplay follows the journey of Neil Armstrong from this 1961 flight to his standing on the moon, that the *Eagle* has landed, and that he was taking one small step...

The film is doing two things. It is often a portrait of Armstrong himself, as an engineer, as a pilot, as a

man who was enthusiastic about the US getting to the moon. We see him interviewed, training, blacking out during an experiment but wanting to go again, respected by the NASA authorities, their sending him to represent them at the White House, choosing him to be the leader of the Apollo journey to the moon.

The other portrait that the film is offering is very personal. There is his marriage to his wife, Janet, a strong-minded Claire Foy was not backward in being forthright about what she thinks and what she expects of her husband and children. There is the sadness, very early in the film, of his young daughter with a tumour and doctors unable to do anything for her. Images of his daughter will recur in various moments during the film, most potently on the surface of the moon itself when he leaves his daughter's bracelet. Neil Armstrong is friendly in a reserved kind of way, speaking in low key to press conferences (refusing to be drawn on how excited he was in being chosen for his mission and reiterating that he was "pleased"). There is also sadness in the accidents and deaths of some of the men close to him.

For those of an engineering disposition, for those of complex technical disposition, First Man will be fascinating. For audiences less technical, many of the scenes may well prove overwhelming.

However, it is almost half a century since the moon landing, a singular event in world history that is worth commemorating, for remembering for those who around at the time, some American history worth knowing for those for whom these events are well in the past.

Directed by Damien Chazelle who made an impact with his film about music, Whiplash, and then won an Oscar for directing La La Land. First Man, with its technical know-how, seems rather surprising follow-up to his other films.

GHOSTHUNTER

Australia, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Ben Lawrence.

This is not quite the documentary that might have been imagined from the title.

In fact, there is an introduction to Jason King, a Sydney man in his 40s, who has set himself up to hunt ghosts, fielding applications to visit homes, sensing a strange presence, even hostile presence, and ridding the house of it. Clients are grateful. Jason is proud of his work, the title appearing on his T-shirt as well as on the side of his car.

But, this is something like a Mc Guffin in an Alfred Hitchcock movie – a focus of attention while the real story is elsewhere. Or, perhaps, not exactly like a Mc Guffin but a metaphor for what the film is really doing.

British-born director, Ben Lawrence, saw an advertisement for the Ghosthunter and rang Jason. Jason agreed to an interview – and interviews continued for the next six years, from 2010 to 2016. There are also many interviews with Jason's sister, friends from childhood days, social workers, a policewoman.

This is the kind of film where a reviewer needs to note Spoiler alert. As happened with this reviewer's viewing of the film, knowing nothing, it proved to be an intriguing detective story, step-by-step unfolding a mystery. It is sharing Ben Lawrence's quest through his interviews with Jason. It is sharing Jason's discovery about himself and about his family, recovering memories, disturbing memories, even most disturbing memories.

In that sense, the film is a psychological case study. Ben Lawrence asks many questions, take steps on behalf of Jason to delve into his past. He also advises him, ultimately, to seek out counselling because, as some of the memories surface, as Jason revisits locations from the past, is involved with a childhood friend, a forthright woman called Cathy, an abusive past emerges. Jason has not always been direct with Ben Lawrence either, and has some of his own inner ghosts or demons to encounter.

What begins like a somewhat tongue-in-cheek look at, even exposure, of the ghosthunter at work with his hand-picked team, soon becomes far more intriguing and well worth a visit.

HEARTS BEAT LOUD

US, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.

Nick Offerman, Kiersey Clemons, Ted Danson, Toni Collette, Sasha Lane, Blythe Danner.

Directed by Brett Haley.

This is one of those films which an audience would enjoy if they came across unexpectedly but is not one that they would necessarily seek out. Which means then that it would have more of a life and a wider audience on television and downloading.

It is a New York story, a veteran member of a band, Frank, running a shop full of vinyl records, a tribute to the past. He is played by Nick Offerman, seen on television in Parks and Recreation, often a villain on screen. Gently gruff, bearded, a life with many regrets, he is a sympathetic character here.

While the story of the film does focus on life in the shop, there is also a domestic side of the story, especially with his daughter, Sam (sympathetic Kiersey Clemons) who wants to go to UCLA to study medicine, to chart a new life away from home. She and her father are grieving at the accidental death of her mother 10 years earlier. There is also a complication, seen sympathetically from the point of view of her father and the screenwriter, in her relationship with an artist friend, Alice (Sasha Lane).

The other central character in the film is played by Toni Collette, Leslie, who owns the building in which the shop is stored, is a friend for Frank, buying records, even offering to go in partnership for the survival of the shop.

There is quite some emotion in a sequence where, on the last day of sales in the shop, father and daughter do an extensive gig for the customers – and for the cinema audience.

So, it is a story of interactions, a father loving his daughter and wanting her to stay, to compose music with him because she has a great flair for songwriting, of having to let her go, of acknowledging the

different stages in the development of music in the US, of having to face a future as he gets older – and confiding with his good friend who manages a bar, Dave (a sympathetic Ted Danson), strong memories of his wife, uncertain of his future.

There is quite some appeal through the story and the characters – perhaps more familiar from characters in television series. But, if you chance upon *Hearts Beat Loud*, there is good enjoyment.

I AM PAUL WALKER

US, 2018, 90 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Adrian Buitenhuis.

According to all the talking heads in this documentary about actor, Paul Walker, who died tragically in a car crash and a consequent inferno in 2013, Paul Walker was a nice guy. His family certainly agree. Friends definitely agree. And this is endorsed by co-stars in his films.

Paul Walker was born in 1968. As a child he had some roles in television commercials and television series. He had a younger sister, Ashley. And a little brother, Cody, to whom he was devoted, 15 years younger than he was. Both Ashley and Cody contribute their praise to this film. Both his mother and father speak highly of him.

Writer-director Adrian Buitenhuis has previously made *I Am Heath Ledger*, using a process of offering biography, home movie clips, selections from films, testimony of those who knew the subject. It serves as an effective formula for this kind of cinema portrait – and so it is here.

Paul Walker was an outgoing person, very friendly, and definitely a man of action. In fact, the film suggests that he would have preferred to be involved in these outgoing activities, surfing, driving, and in later years, contributing to shark tagging. Plenty of clips to back this up.

There is information that a lot of this activity is rather hereditary – military serving grandfather, a father who served in Vietnam.

But, what about the film career? He had the opportunity to be cast in some dramas in the late 90s, *Pleasantville*, a jock in *Varsity Blues*, *The Skulls* – directed by Rob Cohen who became friends with him and auditioned him for the first *Fast and Furious* film. And probably that is what Paul Walker is best known for, the range of *Fast and Furious* features where he plays an undercover cop exposing rackets in illegal races. As the series went on – and he is not in all of them – the films became bigger, more spectacular, even a touch of the bloated! But, this was the kind of film that the fans wanted, demanded, received.

The film offers a lot of speculation, including interviews with the star himself, about whether he wanted to continue as a film star or wanted to move back into the blend of relaxation and sport and social action. His daughter was born when he was rather young, grew up with her mother in Hawaii. At 15, she opted to live with her father and he was devoted to her.

This biography is for a niche audience, those who are interested in the life of film stars, their background and their career. Paul Walker was a star more than an actor and so his biography is that

of a phenomenon, a celebrity, rather than a study.

(For those who are interested in the psychology of Carl Jung and his Personality Types, especially as applied in the work of Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers, The Myers Brings Type Indicator, from this film, it would emerge that Paul Walker would identify with ESTP, this documentary providing a case study.)

IN LIKE FLYNN

Australia, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.

Thomas Cocquerel, Cory Large, William Moseley, Clive Standen, Callan Mulvey, David Wenham, David Hennessey, Isabel Lucas, Grace Huang, Costas Mandylor, Lochlyn Munro, Dan Fogler.
Directed by Russell Mulcahy.

Is Errol Flynn household name? The phrase which is the title of the film has entered into the English language, a linguistic memorial, so to speak, to Errol Flynn. So, it depends on knowledge of and/or interest in Flynn as to how engaging this film is.

For those in the know, Errol Flynn was from Tasmania and in his 20s lived an adventurous life. And this is the subject of this film, Errol Flynn before Hollywood and international success.

The screenplay gets down to things instantly. Here is Flynn leading a small expedition, travelling into almost-forbidden territory along Papua New Guinea's Sepik River, locals working with him as carriers and guides, but a Hollywood producer with his cameraman trying to get exotic footage. They get more than they bargained for, painted headhunters attack them; they go beyond forbidden boundaries, decapitated heads, parts of bodies hanging from the trees, more than a touch of blood and gore, arrows, wounds, falling over cliffs, finally escaping the deadly dangers.

This gives something of the flavour of Flynn's story, the cheeky Australian, mentioning that he is son of a professor, wandering the world, drinking, the touch of womanising, plenty of brawls and fights (some of which would describe his subsequent life, especially leading up to his untimely death in 1959). Thomas Cocquerel makes for a handsome and active, a potential swashbuckler.

The main part of this film is action and adventure, Flynn and his friend Rex (Corey Large), a bare knuckle fighter, going to an opium den, being drugged, but Flynn stealing the sailing boat from these Chinese pirates in Sydney. Flynn and Rex are bound for New Guinea again, seeking gold. They are joined by a friend who has the touch of the top, Duke, and Charlie, who originally owned the boat which was captured by the Chinese pirates.

They sail up the coast of New South Wales and Queensland, bond between themselves, find themselves in Townsville which is being run by an absolute rogue who has all kinds of business interests, setting up illegal knuckle fights, serving as religious Minister on Sundays (with David Wenham playing him all stops out).

So, more fistfights, Flynn meeting an old girlfriend, Rose (Isabel Lucas) who ultimately out-Flynn's Flynn. They escape, make their way to New Guinea but don't quite arrive there. Flynn's alternative? To remember the offer from the Hollywood producer, try his luck, go to Los Angeles where we see

him filming Captain Blood with Olivia Haviland (though he had appeared in five films and two shorts before this). Up on the screen comes a close-up of Blood and Olivia and the caption The End. The end of this film – but, the beginning for Errol Flynn who achieved instant success and popularity, top Hollywood presence during the 1930s and 1940s, declining in the 1950s to his death.

A pity that this film doesn't show Errol Flynn's performance for Charles Chauvel in the semi-documentary In The Wake of the Bounty where he plays, rather woodenly and giving no indication of future screen career and presence, Fletcher Christian. The screenplay is based on Flynn's book Beam Ends – where, perhaps, he did not mention Chauvel's film and his performance, preferring the Hollywood image.

JOHNNY ENGLISH STRIKES AGAIN

UK, 2018, 88 minutes, Colour.

Rowan Atkinson, Ben Miller, Emma Thompson, Jake Lacey, Edward Fox, Charles Dance, Michael Gambon, Pippa Bennett-Warner.

Directed by David Kerr.

Is Johnny English the alter ego of Mr Bean or vice versa? At times it is hard to distinguish between the two in their presumptions, ignorance, displays of miming, misadventures.

And, of course, they are all Blackadder himself, Rowan Atkinson. After three films for television playing George Simenon's Inspector Maigret, Atkinson returns to comedy, taking up the character of the inept British secret agent, Johnny English from the two previous films, Johnny English and Johnny English Reborn.

Success through ineptitude might be a slogan to promote this film!

We are in the 21st-century world of cyber espionage with attacks on British communication, air travel, London traffic control. And the film opens with all the secret agents being exposed, faces names and dates all coming up on the screen. Is there anyone from the past who could step into the breach and thwart the cyber-attacks? Three old codgers are called in – a humorous sequence with Michael Gambon, Edward Fox, Charles Dance, reminiscing about their past, but not surviving long enough to go into action. Which leaves Johnny English who has been busy at a high school instructing the students in all the techniques of espionage, forming the future generation.

The British Prime Minister is desperate. She is played in a kind of angry schoolmarm headmistress mode by Emma Thompson, channelling some of Margaret Thatcher and her reliance on American know-how and, in a more contemporary vein, some of the bewilderment and misjudgments of Teresa May.

Johnny calls up his old friend Bough, Ben Miller, genially serving Johnny English but, in fact, infinitely more competent! They receive clues that the sabotage is coming from the south of France, so off they go after visiting the modern equivalent of James Bond's Q where English rejects all the newfangled stuff and, to the surprise of the new Q who is very young, wants a gun which they don't stock and chooses an old-style sports car.

There are lots of jokes at Johnny English's expense, preening with his car but neglecting to get petrol, wanting to get past a group of cyclists and firing rockets at them, encountering the main spy from Russia, a glamorous Olga Kuryenko, and avoiding her attempts to shoot him by taking some pills and getting on the highest of high, and extended dancing routine on the disco floor.

In the meantime, the Prime Minister has sought the help of a young American IT expert, Jack Lacey, who is fairly quickly revealed as the archvillain though the Prime Minister has no clue and invites him to a G 12 meeting where ends of all the nations will sign away their security rights to the villain.

There is an amusing scene where English is introduced to virtual reality, his walking through the villain's mansion but he steps off the platform in the laboratory and goes out into the street causing mayhem in real life while he succeeds in the virtual.

Discredited in the eyes of the Prime Minister, there is nothing left to do but for English and Bough (who turns out to be married to the commander of a nuclear submarine!) to go to Scotland to the G 12 meeting and confront the villain. Again, a number of amusing scenes and English succeeding despite increasing ineptitude. One supposes that that there is a message there that British, this time MI 7, can overcome all obstacles despite...

Not a film for guffawing with laughter but continuous smiles and quite a lot of giggles.

JULIET, NAKED

US, 2018, 93 minutes, Colour.

Rose Byrne, Ethan Hawke, Chris O' Dowd, Phil Davis,
Directed by Jesse Peretz.

This is a much nicer film than might have been anticipated. It is a romantic comedy but with a difference, not the least being that the central couple are in middle age. And, it is not always predictable. And, it is based on a novel by Nick Hornby, best known to filmgoers for versions of his *High Fidelity*, *About a Boy*, *Fever Pitch*. Whatever the difficulty that his central characters experience in those stories, there is always a niceness.

While there are some sequences in the US, the main action takes place in Britain, with filming around Ramsgate and Margate, attractive looks at seaside towns and the beaches.

The premise has more than a little of the ridiculous and plays this up enjoyably. Duncan and Annie have been living together for many years, mutually agree not to have children. She is the daughter of a historian in their seaside town and taking over the management of the museum he set up, continuing his legacy after he died. Duncan, on the other hand, is an enthusiastic teacher of literature at a local college.

But... he has an obsessive devotion, more than number one fan, records, posters, concert programs, memorabilia covering his walls, for an American singer who was popular in the 1990s but disappeared from sight, Tucker Crowe. Fortunately for Duncan, he can share with his fans on his website, a great deal of adulation going on. When Duncan is sent an original studio setting of one of the songs, Annie, not the least bit interested in the singer and getting more and more exasperated,

posts an anonymous comment on the site. And who should respond to it, agreeing with its negativity, but the singer himself, Tucker Crowe!

Annie is played by Rose Byrne, Duncan by Chris O' Dowd.

Because of all the posters and photos, the audience knows that Tucker Crowe is played by Ethan Hawke. Gradually, his background is filled in, the initial success, his band, a crisis concerning a daughter, his alcoholism, lost years, mixed relationships, but living on a property with his ex-wife with access to his young son (an engaging).

Tucker also has a daughter in London and he comes to London with his young son for the birth. Since the initial posting, Tucker and Andy have been involved in email correspondence, able to express their feelings online it than in reality.

Yes, Tucker does go down to the seaside town. Yes, Annie is intrigued by him and falls for him. Yes, Tucker who tends to be dishevelled and offhand, responds pleasantly even though he has a heart attack and is hospitalised. But, what about Duncan who has been beguiled by one of the teachers and abandoned Annie? How will he respond to the real Tucker Crowe? That is part of the enjoyment of the film.

In the meantime, with news in the US that Tucker has had a heart attack, the various members of his extended family turn up. And, in the town, Annie has curated an exhibition, Summer of 1964, with the insistence of the opportunist Mayor (Phil Davis). He even persuades Tucker to sing and play the piano.

No, it doesn't work out exactly as we might have anticipated – but all the better for it and, indeed, is nicer.

LADIES IN BLACK

Australia, 2018, 103 minutes, Colour.

Julia Ormond, Rachel Taylor, Angourie Rice, Vincent Perez, Susie Porter, Nicholas Hammond, Ryan Corr, Shane Jacobson, Nonie Hazlehurst, Deborah Kennedy, Genevieve Lemon, Luke Pegler, Alison Mc Girr.

Directed by Bruce Beresford.

You would have to be something of a stone not to like, not to enjoy this film. It is an Australian story, a Sydney story, 1950s into the 1960s story – but, with a pleasing nostalgia, set in bright sunshine and light. (It is up to the audience to remember something of darker aspects of Australian life, social situations, aboriginal history – although this film emphasises the coming of the post-war refugees, the reffos, the migrants from Europe.)

The author of the novel, Madeline St John, studied at Sydney University with people like Clive James and Bruce Beresford. She moved to England where she wrote her novel, remembering and imagining her past. The director indicates that it took a long time to raise the money for this project – but, as we enjoy the finished product, the wait has been worthwhile.

For those who grew up in Sydney during the 1950s, there will be so many resonances, the use of actual Mark Foys facade, with a new notice “Goodes” superimposed, gives the story of those who work there and the shoppers a feel of authenticity. And, this reviewer identifies with students who had done the Leading Certificate hurrying at 11 PM to the offices of the Sydney Morning Herald to get their results.

The Ladies in Black of those women who serve at the counters of Goodes, under the watchful eye of the veterans played by Noni Hazlehurst and Nicholas Hammond. It is Christmas and there is a rush. The two regulars at the dress counter, Fay, Rachael Taylor, and Patty, Alison Mc Girr, are given some help by young Leslie (who finds this too much of a boy’s name and has asked to be called Lisa) who has just finished the Leaving, wants to be a poet or an actress, and engagingly makes mistakes but learns the routines of the store. She is played by Angourie Rice. And, supervising them, is Magda (Julia Ormond) as a Hungarian refugee of impeccable taste and manner.

We see a lot of life in the store – and in a period where the lady shoppers all wore hats and frocks. In fact, the film champions the women in their various walks of life but also their regrets, the homemakers who yearned for something more, the shop assistants who hoped for happy marriages, the young girls with ambitions. And, while the men are basically sympathetic, but there are some rather telling remarks about men and their foibles, their vanities, some sexual inhibitions, the beer-drinkers and TV race-watchers and some of the stereotypes of Australian husbands of the time.

The screenplay also incorporates a number of jokes about the Sydney- Melbourne rivalry – presented to Sydney’s advantage!

The film does focus on the four central stories, Lisa and her being befriended by Magda, sharing her love for Tolstoy with Fay, hoping for a Commonwealth scholarship to the University, introducing her sympathetic mother (Susie Porter) and her “I’m off to the pub for a couple of hours” father, (Shane Jacobson).

Fay on the other hand has had some bad experiences with men, finds many of the men groping her, is introduced by Magda to a Hungarian refugee, from the uprising in 1956, Rudi (Ryan Corr) who opens her horizons extensively. On the other hand, Patty’s husband, Frank, is rather awkward, from the country, somewhat inhibited as regards sex in marriage, but, with Patty’s support, finding a happy relationship.

When Magda is described as a reffo, Fay indicates “refugee, migrant”. Her husband, Stefan (Vincent Perez) is also from Hungary but they met in a migrants’ camp where they were learning English.

And so, a picture of the time which has its charm, its warmth – but, in its great attention to meticulous detail of the period, it is also a humorous film, many funny moments, but with a light air that (audiences except those who are stony) will enjoy.

McKELLEN: PLAYING THE PART

UK, 2017, 92 minutes, Colour and black and white.
Directed by Joe Stephenson.

Ian Mc Kellen had a life before Gandalf. He had a life before Magneto and the X- Men. In fact, he was praised in the late 1960s as being a great British Shakespearean actor.

This documentary is most interesting and entertaining. It is basically Ian Mc Kellen sitting in a chair, genially talking with his director, Joe Stephenson, taking him and the audience back to his childhood in Wigan, growing up, discovering his delight in theatre, auditioning for Cambridge with a Henry V speech, his studies and early performances. What makes it more interesting is that these episodes are re-enacted, dramatised, in black-and-white, incorporating documentary footage of the times, the 1940s and the 1950s. Mc Kellen was born in 1939.

His delight was in theatre. He performed with the stars at the old Vic under Laurence Olivier. He moved to smaller companies, was acclaimed for his performances in Henry II and Marlowe's Edward II, getting praising reviews and consolidating his choice for life. Mc Kellen also liked going on tour, the response of the audiences around the British countryside.

One of the points that Ian Mc Kellen makes is that he is always playing the part – even in interviews, deciding which aspect of his persona he wants to communicate, to reveal or conceal, adapting to the interviewer and the situation. Yet, there is always his underlying self making itself known.

His career might have continued in the theatre had he not decided in the early 1990s to film his version of Richard III, set during the Third Reich. The film was successful, received good reviews and led Mc Kellen to making films, the example in this documentary is his portrayal of James Whale in *Gods and Monsters*.

Then came the franchises, his serious discussion about graphic novels and their adaptation, the serious themes in X- Men. He obviously delighted in playing Gandalf and there are scenes where he luxuriated in the beauty of the New Zealand countryside.

But, many of Mc Kellen's fans will be wondering how he handles the issue of his sexual orientation in this documentary. He is quite frank. He lived a privately gay life until he was in his late 40s. At this time, the late 1980s, there was a move against homosexuality, this film quoting a clip of denunciation from Margaret Thatcher, the introduction of section 28 and its discrimination, the demonstrations against it. Mc Kellen outed himself in a television interview, discovering that his family and friends were well aware of this and it did not matter. He threw himself into campaigns, interviews, television debates. He remarks that it was if a huge weight was lifted off his shoulders.

In more recent times, he visits schools, discussing these issues with the students, discovering that he belongs to a very older generation and that students today are not always burdened with sorting out their orientation. However, one of the things that Mc Kellen is rueful about is that he has no family and therefore feels a responsibility to hand on something worthwhile to the coming generation. He also says that is preoccupied with death – though he has organised his funeral and memorial service, featuring a song from *A Chorus Line*, *One Singular Sensation*.

THE MERGER

Australia, 2018, 94 minutes, Colour.

Damian Callinan, Kate Mulvaney, John Howard, Fayssal Bazzi, Rafferty Grierson, Josh Mc Conville,

Nick Cody, Penny Cook, Angus Mc Laren, Sahil Saluja, Harry Tseng, Ben Knight..
Directed by Mark Grentell.

Beyond the city of Wagga Wagga, there is the town of Bodgy Creek, in decline, the mill having been closed by campaigns from greenies, the football club buildings to be demolished because of asbestos, the football club itself near collapse. And, not only that, a number of migrants are arriving in the town with some of the diehards of Bodgy Creek dead set against them and the threat of their taking jobs.

At one stage, when some of the migrants have been persuaded that they could play football, some of the locals are interested in where they come from and what their stories are. The new star, Sayeed, a Syrian, mentions that he comes from Aleppo – and one of his friends on the field, consults his phone app, tells him that Aleppo does not come up on Trip Advisor. This is one of the many good lines throughout the film that raise the social issues. And one of the bigoted townies proclaims that they ought learn English, and states that that's all she aks.

Which means then that The Merger of the title is not just the merging of various football teams to make one which might succeed, but it is also The Australian current merger of asylum seekers and refugees finding a place in society.

In one sense, this film is preaching to the converted, those who want to welcome the newcomers to the land and help them find a place and a refuge. One is not too sure how those who share the opinions of the film's diehards, those with a One Nationish type policies, would respond to the comic touches with which have political point.

The film is the work of Damien Callinan. It began as a theatre monologue with the actor speaking his lines. Now it has been amplified, taken outside, onto the football fields, throughout the town, homes and shops. While Damien Callinan does play the central role of the top greenie who led the campaign to close the mill, he also plays the former footballer who takes on the task of building up a new team and – we and they hope – to a premiership.

Central to the film is a young boy, a vigorous Rafferty Grierson, whose father has been killed in a motorbike accident. He is making his own documentary film, focusing on Damien with a touch of hero-worship and searching for a father-figure, along with his strong-minded mother, Kate Mulvaney. The dead father's own father, literally nicknamed Bull, and played with force by John Howard, leads the reactionary group in the town.

We are introduced to quite a number of migrants, many with qualifications in their home country, trying to find jobs in the new country, trying to settle in, make friends – not always easy.

They are persuaded to play football and, gradually, they all combine with the locals to form a team – as well as contribute to business development in the town.

People mention such Australian comedies as The Castle and The Dish in connection with The Merger. In the same vein, the touch of spoof and satire, some engaging dialogue with Australian accent and tones, and an appeal, in football and political terms, for fair play.

NIGHT SCHOOL

US, 2018, 111 minutes, Colour.

Kevin Hart, Tiffany Haddish, Taran Killam, Keith David, Mary Lynn Rajsak, Ben Schwartz, Anne Winters, Megalyn Echikunwoke, Rob Riggle, Romany Malco, Jakob Batalon, Fat Joe, Al Madrigal. Directed by Malcolm Lee.

In recent years, Kevin Hart's star has been in quite an ascendant. He makes several films a year and has his own company Hartbeat. At times Hart can be entertaining. At times Hart can be quite irritating. And, at many times, he can be both.

This is the case with Night School.

Once again, he plays a little (literally) man, Teddy (Theodore), a hustler, cheeky, presumptuous, flexible with the truth, but able to be a plausible salesman along with his good friend Marv (comedian Ben Schwartz). But, in a flashback, we see that he was hopeless at school, dropping out, clashing with the tall white student, Stewart (Saturday Night Live comedian Taran Killam), continually being criticised at home by his demanding father (Keith David). But, that was back at the turn-of-the-century.

But, present day, Teddy is in love with a high-powered executive, Lisa (Megalyn Echikunwoke), is offered the chance of promotion if only he could get his high school qualifications. With his patter, he thinks they can put it over the authorities and get the certificate without any work.

But, this description of the film omits the powerhouse presence of Tiffany Haddish, sparring with Teddy as they stop at red lights, only for him to discover that she is the night school teacher – and, worse, that Stewart is the principal of the school.

In many ways, what happens is predictable enough but also entertaining enough as a group of eccentric characters form part of the class, a Hispanic waiter that Teddy had caused to be fired and who wants to be a singer, an outspoken Muslim character, the put upon housewife and mother, a young girl with a dropout mentality, and unimaginative 50 year old who wants to move up from driving to something executive – and a prisoner in prison who studies via Skype.

When she comes into the film, Tiffany Haddish certainly dominates everything and everyone, including Teddy, challenging him at every moment, diagnosing his disabilities, literally using martial arts to force him to focus, trying to teach and deal with the group, even when they break into the principal's office and steal the mid-term test questions.

For those who liked Tiffany Haddish in her forceful performance in Girls Night, there may be some disappointment insofar as that film was exceedingly raunchy, many moments of crass. Night School is not particularly raunchy at all (it does have, as the Office of Classification indicates, some sexual references/crude humour), but in terms of coarse language, it is generally absent, giving the audience a bit of a rest.

In fact, ultimately, this is a highly moralising film, the value of night school, older people reassessing their lives, regretting the waste of time in the past, ambitious for better things and better relationships, culminating in graduation, speeches, reconciliation all round, including the principal

apologising, but Teddy getting in some public pokes in the eye, pokes in the conscience of his authoritarian father.

Night School will appeal to a more general audience than many of the African-American? comedies – but, it could well find its place in the curriculum for the motivation and rehabilitation of juvenile offenders.

THE PREDATOR

US, 2018, 107 minutes, Colour.

Boyd Holbrook, Trivedi Rhodes, Jacob Tremblay, Keegan- Michael Key, Olivia Munn, Sterling K.Brown, Thomas Jane, Alfie Allen, Augusto Aguilera, Jake Busey, Yvonne Satrhovski.
Directed by Shane Black.

There is a more than centuries-old tradition of novels, then films, about human conflict with aliens. Stories of War of the Worlds have been continually popular, small-budget supporting features in the 1950s, moving to the 1970s with bigger budgets and prestige, Close Encounters. The aggressive aliens received something of a boost in 1985 is The Predator, which had its own sequel as well as an exploitative spin-off with Jason versus Predator. Here is a 21st-century version.

The film was written and directed by Shane Black, an expert in writing tongue in cheek crime adventures, police adventures, like Lethal Weapon. There is also tongue-in-cheek humour in the dialogue in this film but, in some ways, the treatment of the aliens in the invasion is somewhat heavy-handed.

It starts with American military staking out cartel deals in the forests only for it to be interrupted by the arrival of an alien spaceship, the deaths of the military except for McKenna? (Boyd Holbrook) who survives, most unwisely sending some of the armour of the alien to his young son, Rory, who has Aspergers. McKenna? is then rounded up and interrogated by the military chiefs and some stern authorities probing the aliens, led by Sterling K.Brown, and an expert, Casey (Olivia Munn) who is called in as an adviser.

So, this is a basis for an action thriller, the alien coming in wreaking destruction in the investigation facility, Rory being tracked by the alien to recover the equipment, threats to his mother, McKenna? coming to his son's aid along with a band of fellow-soldiers who would not be out of place in The Dirty Dozen.

Casey goes along with the group, the official pursues them, it turns out that there are two aliens but you would need to see the film to work out who was the good one and who is the bad one and why.

Ultimately, buildup to huge action, the dirty half-dozen going into action, and prepared to give their lives for the sake of the boy.

Some praise for the young actor, Jacob Tremblay, who gave a fine performance with Oscar-winner Brie Larson in The Room and continued to show his talent as the boy with the disfigured face in Wonder. He certainly holds his own with all the action in this film.

The American authorities receive a casket, opening it, something alien but possibly friendly, possibly not – at least the premise for a sequel.

A SIMPLE FAVOR

US, 2018, 117 minutes, Colour.

Anna Kendrick, Blake Lively, Henry Golding, Dustin Milligan, Andrew Rannels, Ian Ho, Joshua Satine.

Directed by Paul Feig.

What could be more simple than one mother asking another mother to help her out by picking the children up after school? Needless to say, this film shows a range of complications that nobody could have quite anticipated. And, of course, that is part of the enjoyment.

Women come out quite well from this story – even a strong female villain. The men are also-rans...

One thought that arises is that this is the kind of story that could have been made in the Golden Years of Hollywood (though the language would have been extensively cleaned up). Anna Kendrick has shown herself quite a talent in serious roles but also very good in comic timing. She is a kind of 21st-century Nancy Drew, popular in those past Hollywood years. Blake Lively is a rather statuesque blonde with a commanding presence, the epitome of self-confidence and glamour. As it turns out, it is the kind of role that might have appealed to Joan Crawford or Barbara Stanwyck.

But, a 21st-century audience may not be thinking of these things and just go along with the way this interaction between the two women develops.

Yes, they are mothers and there are the questions of picking up the two little boys, great friends, from school as well as Stephanie (Anna Kendrick), single-mother (though, as with the whole screenplay, there are hidden secrets that do surprise) ultra-busy about doing things for the school, helping everyone out (to the sarcastic responses of so many of the other parents), even with her own Vlog (video-blog for those unfamiliar) for mothers where she cooks her specialities for viewers or does some handiwork.

Emily (Blake Lively) is a businesswoman, in PR, the epitome of glamour, rather hard in her demeanour yet befriending Stephanie. She has a trophy husband, Sean, an author who has only one novel, years ago, to his name. He is played by Henry Golding at the same time as he starred as a Crazy Rich Asian.

For those who have seen the trailer and the advertising, it is clear that Emily disappears leaving Stephanie with the children, falling in love with Sean, being interrogated by the police.

Actually, what has happened is exceedingly complex, audience curiosity on the increase, some developments that might have been guessed other developments beyond guessing.

Stephanie learns a lot about herself in the situation, acknowledging her past, discovering that she could fall in love, always devoted to the children, but determined to find out what actually happened, becoming an effective amateur sleuth.

In fact, with her Vlog, she is able to address all the mothers, speaking to camera (which she has effectively used in her sleuthing) to explain to the mothers that she will carry on with the cooking and her favourite recipes, carry on with her handiwork, but is available to do detective work for solving mysteries.

SMALLFOOT

US, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: Channing Tatum, James Corden, Zendaya, Common, Le Bron James, Danny De Vito, Gina Rodriguez, Yara Shaidi.

Directed by Carrie Kirkpatrick and Jason Reisig.

Of course, Smallfoot is the opposite of Bigfoot.

There has long been belief in the Abominable Snowman, a Yeti, who lives in the snow and ice of the Himalayas. This is one of his stories! An animation film for younger audiences.

This is an entertaining animation film but with several points of view, especially an allegory of human prejudices, racism and bigotry, the need for mutual understanding and reconciliation.

The early part of the film shows life in the community of the Abominable Snowman – an enjoyable pastiche of paralleling this with familiar human society and interactions. However, there is a certain “primitive” set of beliefs amongst the people. Interestingly, and should we suggest, critically, promulgated by the religious leader of the Yeti, the Stonekeeper (Common), a sacred person, entrusted with stones with commandments on them, holding the people under his control and the teaching of the stones, standing above the people with a look of Moses.

It should be said that the perspective of the filmmakers on the Stonekeeper is extremely critical, visuals of drawings of sacred myths about the creation of the people, the world resting on two giant creatures, which are ridiculed. The stones with their messages carved on them are not to be questioned but, eventually, they are found to be false, a means of population control. They need to be exposed – and are. (Some of the visuals and thematics relate to the Hebrew tradition, the behaviour of the strict community more like that of a fundamentalist American society.)

The hero of the film is a bit of a dope, and engaging dope (voiced by Channing Tatum), Migo. His father is the Gongringer (catapulted headfirst towards the gong) who signals the shiny snail rising in the east like the sun. Migo is to take over. However, he ventures down through the clouds, something forbidden, and encounters an American television group filming a nature series, led by British Percy (James Corden) who has had theories about the yeti and then encounters Migo, afraid, his voice to shrill to be understood while Migo's is too loud to make communication. Nevertheless, they begin to communicate and Percy is introduced to a group of rebels who believe in human existence, proving to the group, including the Stonekeeper's daughter, Meechee (Zendaya).

They try to persuade the Stonekeeper but he reveals art carvings indicating past battles between humans and Yeti. He also dominates Migo, persuading him to lie about what he has seen.

The film certainly picks up pace with the encounter between Migo and Percy and with Percy being

taken up the mountain, the reactions of the people, the reactions of the Stonekeeper, Migo being exiled but returning triumphant.

The Stonekeeper's daughter persuades her father to listen and, finally, the humans are confronted by the Yeti, but, of course, are able to be reconciled. Peace and love all round – and Percy getting a solid television contract!

THREE IDENTICAL STRANGERS

US, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Tim Wardle.

Clearly a title meant to intrigue – and it certainly does.

At first, this seems a very cheerful show, an interview with a middle-aged man telling the story of his going to college, everybody greeting him familiarly, his being puzzled, and then discovering that he resembled a young man who had been at the college the year before. He gets in contact and finds that they are identical in appearance and manner.

The two men were 19 at the time of their discovering each other, so all was very exciting, the media was fascinated, journalists were interviewing, articles in the papers and magazines – which then lead to another family looking at the photos and realising that the son in their house also resembled the two and that they all shared the same birthdate and had been adopted out by the same American Jewish adoption service.

So, the audience is carried along with all this cheerfulness, the young men bonding instantly with each other, enjoying the publicity, and all the TV shows, living the high life in New York.

The parents, however, were not pleased that they had not been informed that their adopted child had two siblings, that there were triplets. The mood of the film begins to change, becoming more emotionally demanding as well as puzzling.

Meanwhile, the three young men open up a restaurant, working together. Date, get married, the beginnings of their own families. The different parents also seem to get on pretty well with one another and the audience gets to know them and their backgrounds as well.

And then the mood begins to change further, working like an investigative story, probing the adoption agency and its methods, the secrecy, the choices of the particular families and their backgrounds, and some follow-up to see how the children developed within their families, a project, officers visiting and filming, asking questions, everything being filed.

There is a tragic aspect of the film which also jolt the emotions, issues of health, mental health, questions of heredity. And, there are appearances from a set of identical twins who had been adopted out and then discovered each other, who are also interviewed on television, fascinated by the similarities in their separate lives.

At the beginning, two of the triplets interviewed are in their 50s, looking back with some

exhilaration, some regrets, some angers as they try to investigate what actually happened to them, the agency's choice of their parents and differing family backgrounds, and each of them having an adopted sister two years older.

This documentary is well paced, draws its audience in with its various emotions and moods, some very human experiences but also raising a great number of scientific questions, even more ethical questions, and the ever-continuing debate about nature versus nurture.

YOU WERE NEVER REALLY HERE

UK/US, 2017, 89 minutes, Colour.

Joaquin Phoenix, Judith Roberts, Ekaterina Samsonov, Alessandro Nivola.

Directed by Lynne Ramsay.

If not really here, really where?

This is quite an enigmatic title. And, enigma pervades the whole film. The central character who dominates the film is enigmatic. The situations in which he operates are certainly enigmatic. The snippets of dialogue, sometimes mumbled, sometimes indistinct voices in the background are also enigmatic.

Intriguingly, there is quite a range of popular songs, snippets of songs throughout the film ranging from The Air I Breathe, I've Never Been to Me and If I knew you were coming, I'd have baked a cake!

One of the consequences of all these enigmas is that the audiences could be involved out of curiosity if not emotional involvement. In fact, as we observe the mysterious, often unexplained, activities of the characters, it is as if we become detached observers. And there are enigmatic flashbacks to compound the curiosity and/or the detachment.

The visual style is also enigmatic, a blend of realism with stylised photography, darkness and light, angles, editing.

The central character is played by a rather hefty, bearded and ponytailed, middle-aged, worse-for-wear, Joaquin Phoenix. His name is Joe. We quite don't know what is happening to him at the beginning but we just accept him, glimpses of memories, glimpses of characters, a drug deal, his having a short fuse, his returning home, some banter with his mother, especially with the musical theme of Psycho.

It emerges that he is a hitman. He also searches for young girls. But, his contacts and interviews, his targets also remain fairly enigmatic. There is a young girl, several. A political theme enters with a campaign to re-elect the governor, Joe following him in his car to his mansion, discovering a brutal massacre.

Which raises the question for the audience as to that aspect of the title: where is "here"? Is it in a story of straightforward realism? With flashbacks? Is it in the memory of Joe? Is it in his mind and imagination? Is it in his conscience? Is he going through some kind of purgative experience – with a joltingly dramatic final scene at a diner with the young girl and a moment of violence which can

shock the audience, but then is reversed. And the characters are no longer to be seen, no longer “here”. And, while we saw them on the screen, where were they really?

The film was written and directed by Scottish, Lynne Ramsay, who has made some short films but in a period of more than 20 years, this is her fourth feature film (the others being *rat catcher*, *More than Colour*, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*). She won the award for Best Screenplay at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival. Joaquin Phoenix won Best Actor.

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

US, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Morgan Neville.

A genial question for a title. This is the story of Fred Rogers, a Pittsburgh man, intending to be a Minister for the Presbyterian Church, fascinated by television, establishing a children's program which ran for decades, becoming a Minister, being a significant person in the lives of many children as well as adults.

This is a review – and it is followed by a reflection, a disturbing reflection about our attitudes towards people today, especially suspicions and wariness.

As a film, this is very engaging. Fred Rogers is dead but he lives on in so many images from his program as well as interviews from his life throughout the decades. His show was very simple. No elaborate sets. He voiced various characters, especially a small puppet called Daniel became something of his alter ego throughout the programs. He was assisted at various times by producers and set assistants who are very strong in their memories and praise of him.

He was very much an entertainer of his times, especially in the decade of Civil Rights and Vietnam, courageous enough to raise serious issues for his audience, the nature of war, the reality of mothers and fathers falling out of love and separating. He was also an advocate of Civil Rights and the place of African-Americans, incorporating a singer, François Clemmons, into his stories – symbolised by a sequence where it is a hot day and he has his feet in a tub of water, hosing them and he invites the African-American policeman to join him to cool his feet, no segregation even in cooling off on hot day. (The actor-singer was a gay man, something Fred Rogers did not realise but retained the friendship and supported him even advising him not to make this public at the time.)

There are some very heartwarming sequences in the film, his ease in mixing with the smallest of children, making them welcome, a boy confined to a wheelchair enjoying singing with him (and later, as an adult, coming on stage and a tribute).

The various commentators, including his wife and son, speculate on the childlike simplicity of Fred Rogers' attitude towards people and life, his recognition of goodness, and his statement of being true to the best in ourselves.

And the reflection?

In recent decades, with the revelations of abusive behaviour of adults towards children, of

grooming, many of us are automatically on the alert, suspicious of adults and the behaviour towards children. In fact, at some stages, this happened to Fred Rogers. Critics, journalists, singled out his philosophy of being happy with whom one really is and stating that this led to a spoilt generation adults who are self-satisfied, unwilling to do anything for others. And then, there were some sexual implications, rumour-mongering that he was a gay man and casting aspersions on his role as a television personality for children.

This is the world we have come to live in, revelations of the abuse of children, authorities wanting to do their best to safeguard children – which has led to almost a guilty until proven innocent attitude towards those who do good in society (a consequence of disillusionment with so many abusive clergy of the different denominations and different religions).

This is a reality, but it is a pity. This documentary, with its warmth and charm, shows Fred Rogers was a good man.

REVIEWS NOVEMBER 2018

1%

AMERICAN ANIMALS
BACKTRACK BOYS
BAD TIMES AT THE EL ROYALE, The
BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY
BOY ERASED
CLEANERS, The
DONBASS
FAHRENHEIT 11/9
GHOST STORIES
GIRL IN THE SPIDER'S WEB, The
HALLOWEEN
HUNTER KILLER
INTERVIEW WITH GOD
JOURNEY'S END
OLD MAN & THE GUN, The
PRAYER BEFORE DAWN
SEAGULL, The
SPITFIRE
STAR IS BORN, A
SUSPIRIA
VENOM
WAJIB
WILDLIFE

1%

Australia, 2017, 92 minutes, Colour.

Ryan Corr, Abby Lee, Matt Nable, Simon Kessel, Josh Mc Conville, Aaron Pedersen, Jacqui Williams.

Directed by Stephen Mc Callum.

The title is arresting but could be about anything! In fact, it is about bikies – and there needs to be a distinction immediately between bikie gangs and bikie clubs. One of the meanings of 1% is that these are the gangs who capitalise on drugs and money laundering.

Not everyone will want to see a film about bikie clubs let alone bikie gangs. This one is about gangs. The bikies look formidable sitting on their high-powered machines, helmets which may be protective but make them look sinister. Then there are the jackets, the emblems, the tattoos. Some of them look so hard, tough, that they do not elicit audience curiosity.

This film is frighteningly watchable.

The setting is Western Australia, the focus on to gangs, one of which is led by a rather terrifying Sugar, Aaron Pedersen, the rival gang temporarily led by Mark (“Paddo”) Ryan Corr while the “President” Knuck (a title which he over-relishes), played by Matt Nable, who wrote the screenplay, is serving a three-year sentence in prison. While Mark is temporarily in charge, he is encouraged to make a deal with Sugar for laundering the drug money. He is encouraged by the President’s girlfriend, Hayley (Simon Kessel). They have an audience in prison with the “President” but he resents anyone interfering with his power.

And then he gets out. He throws his weight around, has his loyal followers, especially in the clubhouse, a big area where members can play pool, drink, horse around, indulge in sexual activity. At the bar is Mark’s wife (Abby Lee, model and actress for Victoria’s Secret, Calvin Klein, appearing in both American and Australian film is). We discover that looks can be deceiving. She is pretty and glamorous, even at the bikie club. But, as many have noted, she soon begins to remind us of Lady Macbeth, the power behind the would-be throne.

Knuck is a jealous man, loving his partner but not necessarily in love with her. In prison, he has had homosexual experiences and, on release, has something of a roving eye, especially on a young accountant, friend Mark, who becomes Knuck’s victim.

The action soon becomes quite bikie-Shakespearean, Knuck continually asserting his authority is acting capriciously, Mark having to go to Sugar to try to recently negotiate the deal. Clearly, the setting up of battlelines.

There are brawls at the club. There is even a siege of Mark’s house in a pleasant suburban street. There are bodies lying in the garden and backyard.

The pawn in all of this activity is Mark’s rather simple brother, Skink (a very convincing performance bringing in quite some emotion by Josh McConville), who makes all kinds of mistakes, regrets, dreams of a relationship with a girl but is betrayed by one of the women down at the club, has to be defended all the time by Mark. He also becomes a pawn in his sister-in-law’s ambitions which leads to mistakes, Skink having to be defended, deaths and, as in Shakespeare, the end of an era and a new kingdom being set up. We cannot predict who

will be the survivors.

As was said earlier in this review, frighteningly watchable.

AMERICAN ANIMALS

US, 2018, 116 minutes, Colour.

Evan Peters, Barry Keoghan, Blake Jenner, Jared Abrahamson, Ann Dowd.

“The real” Spencer Reinhard, Warren Lipka, Eric Borsuk, Chas Allen, Betty Jean Gooch.

Directed by Bart Layton.

What to make of the title? Animal animals? Human animals? Animal behaviour? And in America?

This is a very cleverly prepared film, the dramatic narrative-like fiction. But, intercut is documentary material. (Writer-director, British Bart Layton made an award-winning documentary, *The Imposter*, 2012.)

It is a story of a heist, a true story from 2003, the setting a university in Kentucky. It involves four young adult students who share the idea of the robbery, stealing and selling some rare books kept in the University library, especially some manuscripts of the naturalist, Audubon (with some beautiful reproductions during the opening credits). It is meant to be something of an adventure, for them to be ‘special’ – which does indicate something of the basically amoral attitudes and perspectives of the young men, their lives and their future.

But, the key element is interviews with each of the four, designated as “the real...”. And these interviews are intercut throughout the whole narrative, the audience watching the performers and experiencing drama, character development, the building up of the plot and the situations, while looking at and listening to the actual men.

One is an art student who appreciates the books and sketches. He is played by Irishman, Barry Keegan. Interestingly, he is of the slight of build and rather timid compared with the “real” Spencer Reinhard who makes quite a good impression, rather taller and thinner physically, but articulate in his telling the story but also in his moral assessment. Evan Peters is Warren Lipka, the leader of the group, seemingly supremely self-confident, arrogant in manner, even shown in a trip to Amsterdam to make contact with potential buyers (did this actually happen or just his story?). The real Warren Lipka looks and sounds pretty self-confident (which is certainly not justified by how he actually acted during the heist).

There is also the bookish Eric Borsuk (Jared Abrahamson)– not quite sure why he said yes to become involved. The real Eric is also rather bookish and theoretical. The getaway driver is a jock Chas Allen (Blake Jenner).

The librarian is played by Ann Dowd, while the real Betty Jean Gooch is interviewed years later with some wise comments.

Interesting to watch the interactions, the manipulation, different leadership roles – and the planning, diagrams, strategies. Even more interesting to see the fiasco dimensions of what actually happened – the presumptions and expectations versus the multi-mistakes of the

planning.

At the end, there are the personal assessments of each of the men, of their prison experience, and what it has meant for their lives.

BACKTRACK BOYS

Australia, 2018, 90 minutes, Colour.

Bernie Shakeshaft.

Directed by Catherine Scott.

One might call this documentary, “heartening”.

The title refers to a scheme for helping boys and young teenagers to deal better with their lives. It is the brainchild of Bernie Shakeshaft, who appears throughout the film, who spent some time in the Northern Territory when young, appreciated his experience with aboriginal Australians and wants to bring some of this experience to helping the younger generation. And he does.

The setting is north-western New South Wales, Armidale and New England and shows in country towns like Wellington and Condobolin. The audience will feel that they have spent some time living in the area – which is what the director, Catherine Scott, did for two years, embedded in the Backtrack program, sharing life with the boys, with the range of volunteers who work with Bernie Shakeshaft, capturing the ordinary moments, dramatising the boys and their love for the dogs and their training them and helping perform at the local town shows, but also sharing in the drama, the pressures on the boys from their backgrounds, their woundedness, some wilfulness, some hopes.

The opening, with the dogs, and the performances, the boys coming to life by working in training the dogs, is certainly an attraction for dog-lovers.

Once the film has established the work of Bernie Shakeshaft and made the audience welcome at the centre and residence outside Armidale, the film focuses on three young lads who represent all those who have lived and worked at Backtrack.

The teenager, Zach, is the most sympathetic of the three. He has come from Alice Springs, his father has walked out on his wife and children and established a new family, with Zach sent to Backtrack. The experience has been most beneficial for him, bringing out a strong and sympathetic character, his working with some of the younger boys. But, there is a lot of anger in him which has to be dealt with. The audience finds itself very on-side towards him, hoping for the best when he prepares for a job and goes to an interview. But, the rejection brings out his anger, some violence and, to audience dismay, a prison sentence.

The cheeky 12-year-old that Zach helps mentoring is Russell, very brief attention span as he himself confesses. He can be rude, angry, impatient, violent. But, he identifies with the Backtrack program, is more than at home with the dogs and their training. He goes home to his father who loves him but cannot manage him – and, some violence and disruption, leading to a court hearing.

The third boy, Tyler who has had some drug problems, actually goes to jail at the beginning of the film, learns something from his prison experience and, on release, is reunited with his girlfriend.

So, the film is working on two levels, the dramatic story of the boys, the portrait of Bernie Shakeshaft and his vision, a heartening look at someone, with his volunteers, who is concerned about young men in Australian society, drawbacks, trauma, failures, possibilities for hope and success. Heartening certainly and a most worthy enterprise, eliciting admiration from those of us who are not so directly involved.

BAD TIMES AT THE EL ROYALE

US, 2018, 141 minutes, Colour.

Jeff Bridges, Cynthia Erivo, Dakota Johnson, John Hamm, Chris Hemsworth, Cailee Spaeny, Lewis Pullman, Nick Offerman, Xavier Dolan, Shea Wigham.

Directed by Drew Goddard.

Quite a surprise. More than quite enjoyable.

The time certainly are bad. When? 1969. And where? At once glitzy, now rather seedy, big hotel on the border between California and Nevada – with the line marked in red out in the ground and continuing right through the centre of the hotel. One can either stay in California or choose to stay in Nevada!

And, it is a group of people, rather small here, who have come to stay that are the centre of the bad times. Actually, when they arrive, especially Father Flynn and African-American? singer, Darlene Sweet, there is no concierge to meet them or books in. There is, a travelling salesman, full of bravado and boasting (racially insensitive), who welcomes them until banging the bell rings out the rather young and nervous staff member, the only one there, concierge, registrar, barman, speaking this peel about how wonderful the capital Real is.

In fact, this is a rather long film, but it has plenty of action, intriguing characters, unexpected situations, also unexpected time shifts in perspective so that the audience can see a particular event in a kind of re-wind but from another angle or another character's point of view. (Most reviewers mention the name of Quentin Tarantino – so this review has followed suit!).

There have been some strange goings-on at the El Royale. Right at the opening we have seen a guest, 10 years earlier, digging up the floorboards of a room and burying a bag full of cash, replacing the boards, making the room needs – and then a stranger arriving and shooting him dead. So, we know there is money buried and are on the alert to see who will come to retrieve it.

And, it is possible to see because the salesman, not at all the person we thought he was with all the bluster, is in fact a government agent, sent there to debug the phones, knows that there is a corridor with a one-way mirrors in the rooms – and, we get a tour, watching the activities in the rooms, even a microphone being able to be turned on to catch the dialogue, and the discovery of a rather hard-vision young woman who has a younger woman gained and bound

in her room. The agent reports to Washington and is told not to intervene. He does – and that is only the beginning of all kinds of bad times. (And the salesman is played by John Hamm, obviously enjoying himself, until...!)

Father Flynn seemed both the clerical type and not the clerical type, a typical enough and engaging performance by Jeff Bridges. He seems the most likely candidate to be after the money. Arriving with him, is the singer, played by British actress Cynthia Erivo, a subtle performance with several opportunities for her to sing. The brassy young woman is played by Dakota Johnson.

Particularly interesting is Miles, the concierge, played by Lewis Pullman (son of Bill Pullman), who has been part of the mysterious history of the hotel, clearly a rendezvous for politicians and others to misbehave, be spied on, be filmed, he reported, subjects for blackmail...). Lewis is agitated, has a history (and later Vietnam war flashback), and is desperate to repent, to confess, glad that Father Flynn is about. Later, there is quite an effective confession sequence (writer-director Drew Goddard has a Catholic background).

And, there is even more, complications about the two women, flashbacks to an abusive father, to life in a cult where the leader might have some values but is actually preoccupied with sexual relationships. And, he is played quite convincingly, quite the opposite of four, by Chris Hemsworth.

Plenty of tangles, plenty of unmasking is on identities, somebody count, but, all in all, plenty of interest, plenty of action, quite a lot of humour, and, despite a long running time, very entertaining.

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY

UK, 2018, 135 minutes, Colour.

Rami Malek, Lucy Baynton, Gwilym Lee, Ben Hardy, Joseph Mazzello, Aidan Gillen, Allen Leach, Tom Hollander, Mike Myers.

Directed by Bryan Singer.

As the film ends, and, especially in retrospect, many audiences will be very glad that they have seen *Bohemian Rhapsody* – even if they are not familiar with Freddie Mercury and Queen or their music. There is a verve and vitality in the storytelling, music and performance, and some touching human elements. (Some critics and experts have quibbled about aspects of the chronology, action – but it is not a documentary and, as the final notice always says, some characters and events have been fictionalised for dramatic purposes.)

The film begins with Freddie Mercury walking towards the stage for Queen's performance at the Live Aid concert, Wembley, July 13, 1985. Then there is flashback introducing Farroq Busara, often mistaken (and at his work as a porter at Heathrow) for a 'Paki, but who comes from a Zoroastrian Parsi family who had taken refuge in Zanzibar but forced from there in the revolution of 1964 to settle in England.

Farrok is rather defiant of his father, goes to clubs, enjoys the music, encounters a group called Smile (including Brian May and Roger Taylor who share producer credits for this film). They lose their lead singer and, unabashed, Farouk promotes himself. He excels as the lead singer, the atmosphere of the 70s, long hair, flamboyant clothes, dramatic strutting and rock 'n' roll. He is also into promotion, gets Roger to sell his beloved van to pay for a recording session, gets the interest of an agent, John Reid (Aidan Gillan), gets a lawyer, Jim (Miami) Beach (Tom Hollander) as well as the interest of entrepreneur Ray Foster (the final credits remind us that he is played by Mike Myers whom we might not have recognised during those scenes).

The group is almost immediately successful, Farouk becoming Freddie and adding the surname Mercury by deed poll, an extensive tour of the United States where audiences respond vigorously. Freddie also has a camp manner but becomes infatuated with a young woman he sees, Mary Austin (Lucy Boynton), proposes to her, lives with her, introduces her to his family along with the band, but the screenplay begins to insinuate Freddie's homosexual orientation, his telling Mary that he thought he was bisexual and her telling him that he was gay. He has composed a love song to her, they live near each other with phone calls at night on his part, and they remain friends.

The song that Ray Foster found difficult to appreciate and to financially back was Bohemian Rhapsody, with the film giving some glimpses into Freddie's inspirations and composition, falsetto Galileo's from Roger, taking risks, eccentricities.

The screenplay also brings Brian May (an empathetic performance by Gwilym Lee) and Roger Taylor (Ben Hardy) to life, the former and astrophysicist who later became Vice Chancellor at University, the latter a dentist. They are also joined in the band by John Deacon (Joseph Mazello). All four members of the band contributed to creating the songs and the lyrics, and dramatic moments - as Brian May suggests footstomping and clapping which leads to heightened audience participation, We Will Rock You...

Freddie is moody, creative, but the group is able to stay together, ups and downs, for more than a decade. If there is a villain in the piece, it is the PR man, Paul Penther (Allen Leach), with a touch of the predatory and then possessiveness of Freddie as a person, his lifestyle, his career. Which means a decline in Freddie's life, drug taking, alienations.

The chance for redemption comes with Live Aid, Freddie wanting to reconcile with the band, their forgiveness, the opportunity to perform to such an enormous audience, and for a good cause, not from moneymaking. There is certainly enormous vitality in this reproducing of the performance (reminding us that those thousands at Wembley and the millions who watched on television, if they were even 20 in 1985 are now in their 50s, meaning that there are thousands, millions of fans, potential for seeing this film.)

Rami Malek excels as Freddie Mercury. The impersonation is most telling, the mannerisms and voice synching the songs are compelling, and he brings a humanity to his character, even when we are disliking him, with some very emotional moments at the end, admitting what he has done wrong, reconciling with his family and with the band, telling them he has contracted AIDS.

It seems that he had some peace in his life after U Aid, a companion, knowing that he had

become what he was meant to be – and sadly dying at the age of 45 in 1991.

BOY ERASED

US, 2018, 114 minutes, Colour.

Lucas Hedges, Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe, Joel Edgerton, Xavier Dolan, Troye Sivan, Jesse La Tourette, Britton Sear

Directed by Joel Edgerton.

Audiences who choose to see *Boy Erased* will know that it is about conversion therapy, methods of therapy to convert gay candidates to a heterosexual life and orientation. It is based on the book of the same title written by Garrard Conley who is the centre of this film, a character called Jared Eamons. He is played with quite some sympathy and strength by Lucas Hedges (Oscar-nominated for *Manchester by the Sea*, Frances Mc Dorman's son in *Three Billboards*).

An interesting note is that this was released at much the same time as another conversion therapy film, focused on a teenaged girl, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. There are similarities between the two films in the therapy, methods used, qualifications (or not) of those in charge of the program. Both films are worth seeing.

There is also an interesting Australian note. This very American story has been adapted for the screen by actor, Joel Edgerton, who directs as well and takes on the role of the therapist. And, while the setting is Arkansas, Jared's parents are played by Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe (appearing together at last!). Both give interesting and nuanced performances.

So, response to this story will depend on audience attitudes towards conversion therapy, approval or disapproval of its methods, the questioning of the qualifications (as happens in this film) of those who set themselves up to manage such programs. The antipathy towards conversion therapy will be heightened during the scenes of therapy, even the strict and stern entry into the centre, a bit like entering prison and giving up everything to be retrieved on release, filling out forms indicating defects in the family, preparing a diary of past encounters, hard role-plays with a therapist, while mouthing sympathetic and "honest" words of feedback, comes across as bullying.

There are two flashbacks where Jared has encountered a student at college and where he has been attracted to a visiting artist.

The program is not entirely prison-like, the young people not living in generally but going each evening to a local hotel with the parent or guardian, thus giving Jared the possibility of discussing everything with his mother, time to think about his father, an earnest man who runs a car dealership but is also the local preacher. The conversion centre also uses religious language, sometimes focusing on God, but more frequently focusing on behaviour and sin.

The religious background is strongly evangelical, the literal interpretation of God's word as a norm for all behaviour. This raises difficulties for the father, disapproval of his son's orientation, calling in religious elders to advise him, sending off his son to therapy. The presentation of the church and this version of Christianity would certainly alienate many audiences, especially compassionate Christian audiences.

Another strength of the film is in presenting glimpses of other young men and women doing the program, especially a rather hefty boy who is humiliated, literally belted by the family to express their disapproval and urge his conversion. Another boy salutes as a greeting because he does not want to touch anyone. And yet another advises Jared to fake the participation in the course.

Ultimately, Jared will confront the therapist in some highly dramatic moments.

The film ends four years later, Jared a writer, in contact with his mother, hoping that his father would read what he had published, visiting his father and talking very frankly to him. Audiences will leave the cinema with a touch of hope because of the final information about Jared, dismay at the information about the therapist, and a genial photo of the actual Garrard and his parents.

THE CLEANERS

Germany, 2018, 88 minutes, Colour.

Directed by Hans Block, Moritz Riesewieck.

Cleaners? Actually, the technical title for the people studied in this documentary is “Content Moderators”.

The film asks us to consider the Internet and Social Media, specifically Facebook (and other similar, very popular, social media used throughout the world). And the consideration is the posting of what is considered unsuitable material: whether it be Russian propaganda to influence political elections in the United States, racist bigotry anywhere, violent images, sexual images. We hear about them being “taken down”. But who does this taking down?

The film-makers are from Germany but the centre of attention of this film is the Philippines, Manila. As might be expected, there is material from the United States, a number of journalists, Internet technicians, and sequences from Congressional hearings from 2016 with the representatives of Facebook, Google et cetera attempting to answer their interrogators clearly but not always succeeding. With these interviewees, we are somewhat familiar, having heard or read about their opinions on “taking things down”.

However, interest is more than roused many questions are raised by the interviews with the men and women who are employed by the companies in Manila. They refer to themselves as “Content Moderators”. We see them as ordinary citizens, men and women, different ages, at home, sometimes in poor situations, happy to have a job, going off to work where they will sit in front of computer screens for hours, looking at images, thousands a day, and making a judgement when they make their announcement “Delete” or “Ignore”. These are the people who are making the judgements on what can be seen, what should be removed.

It may not be a consideration that has ever come to mind – our simply taking it for granted that people do the removing of the material. But, as we watch these men and women, listening to their being interviewed, all kinds of questions arise. What are their qualifications?

What is their actual training? How much are they influenced by personal attitudes, stances, beliefs? And the answer to that question is that they seem to be influenced considerably. And then the question arises as to who supervises the Content Moderators?

The Philippines is a Catholic country, people devout, devotional, traditional in their attitudes and beliefs – which becomes very evident from the interviews. And, it would seem, that many of the moderators have led fairly sheltered lives, not familiar with some of the gross sexual images that they are confronted by, even having to learn some basics about human sexuality. We see them learning some sexual vocabulary that they find abhorrent. They see a violent war picture – is it proper reporting? Is it ISIS propaganda? And, confronted by an American cartoon – and the example given is that of a satiric painting by a young California artist of President Trump naked – is it obscene, is it pornographic, is it legitimate sender or spoof?

This is not a long film but, as it progresses, shifting to the Congress, back to Manila, back to journalists and experts, back to Manila, computer graphics illustrating information and statistics, back to Manila, the documentary audience have far more questions and puzzles than they might have anticipated.

Yes, there is unsuitable material on social media. Yes, much of it needs to be taken down. Yes, there have to be responsible people from the companies. But, selection of Moderators, training of moderators, assessing their decisions – who is responsible and how do they exercise that responsibility?

The Cleaners might sound an innocuous title – but the issues are far from innocuous.

DONBASS

Germany/Ukraine, 2018, 110 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Sergei Loznitsa.

Anyone contemplating going to see Donbass needs a strong recommendation for a bit of homework about Ukraine during the last decade, the interventions of the Russians, the annexation of Crimea, the civil war in the East, the downing of the Malaysia Airlines plane. Ukraine has been in the headlines but its impact outside Eastern Europe, in western countries and other continents, may seem rather alien and distant.

This is an award-winning film. The director, born in Belarus, moving to Germany, has Ukraine as his main focus for his films, fiction and documentary. He combines both talents here.

Donbass is a town in eastern Ukraine that would not be high on the list of any tourist planning. It is not a place where the audience might like to live. And we are shown why.

The film begins arrestingly, rather of-puttingly, with a group of acting extras being made up for a television performance, some carrying on with high demands from would-be-divas, the make-up artists at work, authorities arriving, counting of the characters, herding them out into

a marketplace for filming, a bus, an explosion, news or fake news? The film returns at its end to this situation with some grim comment.

What follows is a series of vignettes, episodes which seem generally unconnected, but which follow, one from the other, as the camera follows characters and takes the audience with it.

Some pompous officials are at a board meeting when a woman, protesting that she is not guilty of corruption, arrives and unceremoniously tips a bucket of excrement over the president of the meeting. That in itself makes comment about the country and its governing. There is worse when a rather large, pompous businessman rounds up the hospital staff who have complained about lack of food and equipment and points out refrigerators chock-full of food and drink, new equipment – and then goes into the next room where we see him and his associates and how they have set up fake supplies, capitalising on corruption and deals – though he is held up by Russian military on the road and is almost in danger of being exposed and imprisonment, but gets away.

Amongst the other episodes we find a businessman whose car has disappeared, confiscated by the government, leaving him bewildered and desperate. We also see a group of earnest peacekeepers with religious icons and relics approaching an official to persuade him to use these religious items – and he bewildered and criticising them behind their backs.

There is an enormously extroverted wedding sequence, a civil affair, the official trying to get through the required procedures but being overwhelmed by one of the most boisterous brides ever on screen, a seemingly subservient husband who does break out at times, a crowd drinking and cheering, letting loose.

Perhaps the most disturbing sequences involves an old man, considered a traitor, dragged through the city by military, tied to a pole, insulted and tortured, some young toughs joining in the violence, then a seemingly ordinary old lady becoming particularly abusive.

The ending is enigmatic, a camera fixed at some distance and for quite a long time from the caravan where the actors were being made up, each one of them coming out individually, facing the authorities...

A serious film for its themes rather than an entertainment.

FAHRENHEIT 11/9

US, 2018, 128 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Michael Moore.

At last another probing of US society by Michael Moore. There he is, a strikingly lumbering presence, interviewing a range of people, travelling all over the US, speculating on the past, pessimistic about the present – and opening up the future for the audience to ponder. His previous documentary was on war aggression, *Where to Invade Next* (2015).

After he won an Oscar for his expose of American violence and love of guns, *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), he looked at the US pre-and post the attack on the Twin Towers, playing on the title of Ray Bradbury's science-fiction thriller about fires and conflagrations,

Fahrenheit 9/11. Fortunately for him and for the title of this look at the US, the announcement for Donald Trump's attaining of the American presidency was in the early hours of 11 November, 2016. So, Fahrenheit 11/9.

Michael Moore has many admirers, and many detractors. A sentence that has been used for many of his films is: if only 50% of what he presents is accurate and true, then that is most alarming.

We are taken back to the election days of 2016, the campaigning of both Trump and Hillary Clinton, the response of their admirers, the excited atmosphere and expectations, crowds to support Hillary Clinton, a small group assembling for Trump, the changes in the figures coming in, triumph for Trump, tears for Clinton supporters.

While there is a great deal about Trump, his past, his real estate deals, his wealth, his television career, personal details (and some very creepy sequences with his daughter and the way he refers to her with sexual overtones), there is a great deal more.

Michael Moore comes from Flint, Michigan, and made his first documentary, *Roger and Me* (1989) about the motor industry in Flint and the collapse of the town. There is a sequence where Donald Trump says he liked *Roger and Me* (and a sequence where he is interviewed with Michael Moore on the Roseanne Barr show). He has often returned to Flint but this time he has quite a harrowing story, an expose of the governor, a Republican businessman, who developed a scheme to profit by water coming into Flint, pure water from Lake Huron by a pipe system but the governor approving an alternate pipe and Flint being dependent on the chemically dangerous, lead-filled, Flint River. And lots of doubletalk from politicians and PR representatives.

This is an extended story, Moore trying to interview everyone concerned, footage from 2012 on, the inhabitants of Flint, the economically poor, many African- Americans, with deteriorating health, especially the children. At one stage, there is excitement in the town when President Obama decides to visit – which turns out to be a PR disaster when he has not appreciated the problems, people's reactions, and he does a stunt in offering to drink the water (but the glass touches only his lips). Moore is not 100% supportive of Obama does some explaining that previous administrations, from President Clinton and deregulation of banks, through the Bush administration, paved the way for social situations in the US and the coming of Trump.

There is also a story from West Virginia, another Republican governor, strictures on the teachers in the public schools, the rebellion, days of striking and persistence until their winning their case.

Also included is the story of the students after the shooting in the high school at Parkland, Florida, the students getting together, forming office and a committee, going political, using social media, indicating the aspirations of young Americans, issues of and control.

And all throughout there are many interviews on many topics. There are many visits to American communities. There are many statistics. And, throughout, Moore's often comic, often ironic commentary.

Towards the end, there is extensive use of footage of Hitler and the Nazis, Moore pointing

out the similarities between the 1930s, popularism, the characteristics of dictatorship, Hitler throwing out slogans absorbed by the people... And the Trump parallels, especially his throwing out of slogans and ideas, popular bonding with his followers, their absorbing his slogans and believing them.

The film was released just before the mid-term elections for Senate and House of Representatives in 2018. How long before a further episode from Trump's America?

GHOST STORIES

UK, 2017, 98 minutes, Colour.

Andy Nyman, Martin Freeman, Paul Whitehouse, Alex Lawther, Paul Warren, Kobna Holdbrook Smith, Nicholas Burns.

Directed by Jeremy Dyson and Andy Nyman.

The moral of this story, these stories, is that the mind sees and hears what the mind wants. (Perhaps?)

In fact, there are three case studies to be examined in this film – but, the film takes us beyond, into the world of the investigator of the cases, quite sceptical, ready and eager to explain every case in ordinary language, in psychological terms.

The investigator is played by actor Andy Nyman who, along with Jeremy Dyson, wrote this piece originally for the stage, for the theatre. They have now adapted it for the screen. Which means then that they can go into all kinds of realistic times and places, into the world of the case studies.

In fact, the film opens with Andy Nyman as Philip Goodman, exposing a mind reader on stage. Philip is also in admiration of another debunker of such ghost stories, Charles Cameron, who is seen showing an episode to be fake. But, Charles Cameron, seems to have disappeared and nobody knows where... When suddenly, Philip Goodman, receives a communication from him, summoning him to his smelly and old caravan. Goodman expects some praise but instead is criticised by Cameron – and given the folders for three cases and a challenge to solve them.

So, Of the audience goes with Goodman, to examine the three cases.

The first concerns a security guard played by Paul Whitehouse, a tough man who nevertheless is terrified by an apparition, the presence, of wife and daughter. Into flashback, into eerie atmospheres of an abandoned site at 4 o'clock in the morning, power going out, doors slamming, connections being pulled, and a man convinced that he has had a ghostly experience.

The second concerns a young man, Alex Lawther, bullied by his mother and father, keeping his door locked – and with all kinds of photos and posters of sinister and demonic presences. Into flashback, his driving along a country road having failed his driver's test, his father phoning him continually, a sudden crash, fleeing into the forest, ominous presences.

And the third. Martin Freeman is a somewhat suave businessman, taking Goodman on a hike

up a country hill. Into flashback, this time a rather spacious and wealthy mansion, the story of the businessman and his wife and her business competitiveness, becoming pregnant at 40, the call from a hospital, ominous.

So, there are the stories, with Goodman and his rational explanations, going back to Cameron – who pulls quite a surprise, unmasking himself.

That isn't quite the end of the film – there had been home movies at the opening with Philip Goodman and his family, his Bar Mitzvah, his bullying father, and a visit to him in the home for the elderly. And then there is a story about Philip being bullied at school, a simple boy persuaded to go into a stormwater channel with some dire results, especially for Phillip himself who professes that he was helpless to do anything to help the boy...

Actually, the film is not over by any means and to go any further would be an abuse of spoiling the outcome, but, it does have a twist!

THE GIRL IN THE SPIDER'S WEB

UK/Germany//Sweden, 2018, 117 minutes, Colour.

Claire Foy, Sylvia Hoeks, Lakeith Stanfield, Stephen Merchant, Cameron Britton, Vicky Krieps, Sverrir Gudnason, Claes Bang, Christopher Convery.
Directed by Fede Alvarez.

From Elizabeth to Lisbeth. Claire Foy who portrayed Her Majesty in the series, *The Crown*, comes to the well-known Lisbeth Salander (via such films as *Breathe* and *First Man*, as Neil Armstrong's wife).

Millions read Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy. Millions saw the Swedish film trilogy. Unfortunately, the box office returns for the American version of *The Girl in the Dragon Tattoo*, with Rooney Mara, was not as financially successful as hoped and so there were no more American versions of the trilogy.

And Stieg Larsson died.

David Lagerkrantz has taken up the tradition and this film is based on his first Millennium novel. Readers who know the novel say that the film is substantially different. However, as the credits say, "based on characters created by Stieg Larsson"

So, once again, *The Girl*, Lisbeth Salander, the fierce righter of wrongs, black clothes, tattooed, piercings, taciturn, partnering women lovers, ultra-expert on technology, the Internet, hacking, is back. Noomi Rapace play Lisbeth Salander three times, a threatening figure, not engaging in any likeable way. Rooney Mara was more attractive even though ruthless. Claire Foy is also ruthless but not always all-conquering, suffering, a touch waif-like in her appearance, even tearful at the end.

The prologue to the film takes us back to Lisbeth's origins, her father who later became involved in international intrigue, her blonde sister, Camilla, the children playing a game of

chess, the father, a womaniser, summoning Camilla to his bedroom, Lisbeth opting out, falling backwards from a balcony and escaping through the snow. A quick establishing of her character. Then, suddenly, much older, she is threatening a businessman brutalising his wife, hanging him up by his feet, using her taser, rearranging his bank account, especially to benefit his wife.

So, we have been put back in the vein. The main part of the plot is technologically focused, an expert (Stephen Merchant) has given his files about world sites for nuclear warheads to the Americans but commissions Lisbeth to get them back. She does, but it is immediately stolen from her by a gang of thugs, led by The Spider. Her friend, writer Michael Blomqvist (Sverrir Gunadson from Iceland) comes back to work, his magazine taken over, but friends urging him to write. He does some investigations into The Spider gang.

A lot of action, including some car chases, some brutal killings, the scientist's autistic son being held to ransom, an American IT expert (Lakeith Stanfield) is after the missing file, is fobbed off by Swedish authorities, explores on his own initiative, teaming up with Lisbeth and her nerdish expert.

Perhaps this film could be more likened to a James Bond action rather than to a complex Stieg Larsson thriller, a lot of weaponry, a lot of technology, and the audience hoping, perhaps, that this is all very far-fetched.

But, there is also the personal story, going back to that chess game with the little girls, Lisbeth sister's choice of her father – and deadly consequences.

The film ends in a burning conflagration and Lisbeth riding off on her motorbike – to (if the box office is financially successful) another episode attaching

HALLOWEEN

US, 2018, 106 minutes, Colour.

Jamie Lee Curtis, Judy Greer, Andi Matichak, Will Patton, 's Rees, Jefferson Hall, Toby Huss, Virginia Gardner, Dylan Arnold, Miles Robbins.

Directed by David Gordon Green.

Those old enough in 1978 to remember their first experience of Halloween will be wanting to see this climax to the story and to the profitable franchise over the decades. Those not old enough to remember, according to box office figures, certainly want to see this version.

The screenplay fills in the background of what happened back in 1978, the character of Michael Myers, the killing of his sister, the slashing murders, his mask. There is some use of the voice of actor Donald Pleasance from the original film and his analysis of the mind of Michael Myers. And, of course, there is Michael's sister, Laurie, played in those days by a very young Jamie Lee Curtis who now plays not only a mother but a grandmother.

The original film was cowritten and directed by John Carpenter, leading him onto a successful career as a director, often exploring horror themes. Carpenter was also a musical composer and had a memorably evocative piano score and orchestrations for his original film.

He has given his blessing to this production – and also contributes the musical score, drawing on his original themes.

So, audiences are ready for Michael Myers – and his potential demise.

There are quite a number of new characters after all these decades. There is Laurie's daughter who we find was taken into care when she was young, Laurie having married twice and divorced twice, but authorities wary of her. The daughter, Karen (played by Judy Greer), now has a husband and a daughter of her own, Allyson (Andi Matichak), who, of course, will be crucial to the climax.

Two British journalists get permission to visit Michael Myers, interview the new doctor who is looking after him, going to the yard where he is confined to a square, and try to get some response from him – without success. They later go to interview Laurie – and, of course, they will encounter Michael Myers in much less salubrious situations!

Of all things, Myers is to be transferred to a new facility on Halloween. What could go wrong? Well, a bus crash and the prisoners escaping, all being recovered except Michael. His doctor was on board – and the later behaviour of the doctor wonders how much of the crash was his responsibility, his obsessive study of Michael, wanting to understand and feel what was going on in Michael's strange and twisted psyche.

So, the setting is ready. The kids are in their costumes, out on trick or treat. Michael is on the loose and, in the slasher vein that the original Halloween fostered, there are a number of indiscriminate victims, Allyson's boyfriend as well as his friend, Allyson's babysitting friend and her boyfriend, several victims around the town, the pursuing police.

Which builds up to the anticipated climax, the siege in Laurie's house with all its security devices, hiding place in the basement, the three women confronting Michael Myers and his death and the house destroyed in a conflagration.

An apocalyptic ending to the Halloween story.

HUNTER KILLER

US, 2018, 122 minutes, Colour.

Gerard Butler, Gary Oldman, Common, Linda Cardellini, Michael Nyqvist, Toby Stephens, Caroline Goodall.

Directed by Donovan Marsh.

You could hardly have a more direct and blunter title than Hunter Killer. Not exactly subtle. And some of the action throughout the film is not so subtle.

However, it does become more complex in its perspectives, in its military perspectives, in its political perspectives, especially in the confrontation between Russia and the US.

For those who like submarine films, here is another in the tradition of The Hunt for Red October, Crimson Tide, K-19, the Widowmaker. And for those enjoyed these films, this one will be enjoyable, quite satisfying.

Hunter Killer is actually the technical name for submarines which go into action. One is under the water and under the ice in the Barents Sea when it becomes involved with, pursued by, threatened with torpedoes by, Russian submarines. And then the Russian submarine is destroyed – but not by the Americans.

and his advisor, Jayne Nicquist (Linda Cardellini). They have a solution to a possible international crisis, even threat of nuclear war. They have a contact, a submarine commander who did not go through the training at Annapolis but learned on the job. He is Joe Glass, played by Gerard Butler, who has already done quite an amount of action-saving in *Olympus Has Fallen*, *London Has Fallen* (and another *Fallen* action drama to follow). (And, once again, Gerard Butler shows what an effective Jack Reacher he might have been.)

Not everything is as clear-cut in the Pentagon as we might have hoped. The main admiral is played by Gary Oldman, prone to be hawkish. And there is a sequence with Madam President (Caroline Goodall) very reminiscent of and looking like Hillary Clinton (maybe the film was in production before her unanticipated presidential defeat.)

Plenty of complications ensue, the discovery that the destruction of the Russian submarine was not the work of the Americans, that something strange is going on at the Russian port, including the Russian President (the tall dark and handsome actor might make Vladimir Putin more than envious!), his Foreign Minister, a coup.

Also in the act are a group of super troopers who are flown in from Turjikistan, parachuting into Russia, able to set up cameras and audio to give the Pentagon info on what is going on and helping them to make decisions. In the meantime, Joe Glass, with criticisms from his second in charge, rescues some Russians from their doomed submarine – which leads to a scenario for sailing through mine-charged depths, the rescue squad in action, helping the Russian President, avoiding an international confrontation.

So, entertaining submarine action and Russian- American conflicts – and the niggling thought throughout as the audience might wonder as they watch this hypothesis and scenario, what might actually be happening in the real world right now.

AN INTERVIEW WITH GOD

US, 2018, 97 minutes, Colour.

David Strathairn, Brenton Thwaites, Yael Globglas, Hill Harper, Charlbi Dean Kriek, Bobby di Chicco.

Directed by Perry Lang.

The tone of the title indicates that this will be an earnest film. And it is.

Clearly, the themes will be religious. But there are many philosophical issues, especially about evil and free will. The screenplay touches on some biblical themes; the film has been produced by a Christian company, emphasising that the path to God is very much focused on the Judeo-tradition and its culmination in the person of Jesus Christ.

Audiences who have an aversion to explicitly religious films will find their aversion reinforced. Audiences who are sympathetic to explicitly religious films will find a lot to interest them, to provoke them, although they might find the tone the time is rather didactic, at times preachy.

This said, there is a lot of questioning (on the part of the interviewer, of course, but also God being able to reverse the interview, making demands on the interviewer), which demands answers from the audience for their own integrity, authenticity of belief or non-belief.

A large part of the film consists of the interview, although there are storylines which come to the surface. And, which get the attention of God.

It should be said that God is played by the veteran actor, David Strathairn, a man of serious demeanour, intelligent and articulate, a credible incarnation for God in the contemporary world. The interviewer is played by the Australian actor, Brenton Thwaites, eager to score an interview with God, an exclusive for his publication, ready to front up and asked the questions, but frequently thrown off balance when God returns the questions.

Thwaites plays journalist, Paul, who has been on an interview mission in Afghanistan and is seen initially returning on the plane with coffins of military draped in the American flag. He has experienced some of the trauma on the frontline, making him sympathetic to post-traumatic stress disorder, reaching out to help some of the soldiers who have returned home.

He is married, but immediately there is tension in the apartment. Interesting for the audience, the screenplay has been written in such a way that would lead the audience to lay the blame for potential breakup with Paul rather than his wife. It does not quite work out that way. The marriage situation surfaces throughout the film, Paul trying to contact his wife, she busy and not answering her phone, an intervention by his sister-in-law – and some challenging interventions by God.

But, the core of the screenplay consists of the three interview sessions. Paul, earnest, riding his bike around New York City, meets God first of all in a park, their sitting on park benches. Later, they will meet on the stage in an empty theatre. And, finally, in an office in a high-rise building.

The questions raised are those which are expected, which the audience themselves might raise were they to have an interview with God. Actually, God is more skilled at asking questions of Paul than Paul is of God. And, despite his concern about Paul and his life, God is able to keep his cool.

One of the features of the film is the range of clever lines, arresting religious quips, thoughtful aphorisms. Some audiences may find the interview sessions heavy and demanding. They might work better as an audiobook where attention is on the words and expressions rather than focusing on the characters and their reactions during the interviews. To that extent, many audiences might find there is too much talk for them to deal with.

Some examples: faith is not a goal, it's a process; concerning the question why bad things happen to good people, Paul notes that God could be considered a "Cosmic Killjoy"; life is not an audition for the afterlife; most people only notice bad things when they happen to them; some people go through life feeling that they are judged every day by God.

There is an interesting discussion about the Ten Commandments, God noting that in the Gospels, Jesus quotes only six, those focusing on our dealings with our neighbours, not reiterating the commandments about God (and God adds there aren't many polytheists around these days). Ultimately, the challenge to Paul is not so much the theological nor the philosophical but to look at his own life, to look at the command of love, to see whether humans can overcome the bad things, planting of crops for food, psychological assistance for war veterans, marriages being saved. A final theme is forgiveness.

JOURNEY BEYOND FEAR

Australia, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Robin Hughan.

"How many Afghan families have we met? Probably never in Afghanistan itself! But what about in other countries? What about in Australia?"

Documentary filmmaker, Robyn Hughan has had a long interest in the plight of refugees, especially to Australia. Her documentary, *A Nun's New Habit*, stems from her contact with many refugees and the families, her going to Woomera and the exploration of life in detention centres, her contact with a Good Samaritan sister, Carmel Wauchope and her work with the detainees.

Journey Beyond Fear is a more ambitious project. Robyn Hughan, with cinematographer and co-producer, Steve Warne, have spent almost 7 years on this film. While it is a documentary, 99 minutes, it also plays as a humane narrative, inviting and drawing audiences into the life of this family, mother and father and three daughters.

There is no voice-over commentary. Rather, the film relies on the vitality of the personalities of the family, Bismilla and Fatima, the parents, and the three daughters, Zahra, Zeinab and a little girl under ten.

With contemporary news footage, especially from the late 90s, Afghan television and Al Jazeera, the audience learns that the family are victims of a massacre in 1998. While there are violent scenes, there are also glimpses, challenging our responses, of the Taliban harshly beating women.

The family were able to move through Pakistan into Iran where they lived for the best part of 12 years, finding it difficult to settle, the children not being able to be educated, a hard life. This meant that they moved on to Malaysia where this film opens in 2011. It then tracks the family's life in Malaysia for the next four years. It is hard for Australian audiences and audiences from more comfortable Western countries to appreciate what it is like for a family to be uprooted, to be unsettled, on the list with the United Nations for migration to another country but having to wait, year after year, for any news of progress.

The director had access to the family over these years and filmed them in all kinds of circumstances so that we can feel that we are part of the family - older audiences appreciating the pressures on the parents, younger audiences, especially teenage audiences, able to empathise with the girls, perhaps wondering how they might react in parallel circumstances.

In fact, the strong personality of the oldest daughter, Zahra, begins to dominate the story. At first, she is an enthusiastic girl, especially about the possibilities for education. She excels at a special school for Afghan refugees. However, her father earns his meagre keep with 18 hours a day of bread baking with the daughters on bicycles delivering to hard-won customers, which means that Zahra has to find work, sometimes in the stores at an affluent mall, even selling men's underwear, but the proprietors of the stores cannot be held accountable and are reluctant to pay her properly.

As the years progress, she grows older, misses out on education, has passing jobs, she is seen as saying she has become tired of life. At one stage, she does contemplate going up onto the roof and jumping. It is sad to see how a vibrant young girl in her mid teens can become so depressed. Her younger sister keeps a calmer approach while the little sister, still under 10, loves to dance, is something of a roly-poly live wire in the family.

And all the time we are seeing the mother and father, he a genial man, having learnt some English, making the bread but regretting he does not have more time for his family, she a rather extroverted and exuberant woman who has a zest for life.

Because of the title, we know where the drama is leading. In fact, so powerful is the presentation of the years without hope and then the sudden emerging of the possibilities of getting visas and air tickets for Australia (which also have their brief but anguishing delays), we could feel that the film will end with the family arriving in Melbourne.

But, as the title suggests, the journey goes beyond fear and we have a need to see where the journey ends as well as where it leads to.

We see the refugees arriving, welcomed, meeting up with fellow refugees, assisted by locals. The big prospect is the girls actually going to school, getting their uniforms, the discussions whether the girls will wear the scarf or not (Zahra not wearing it, like her mother, but Zeinab opting to wear it). Actually, the film shows pretty well how comfortable life can be in Melbourne. Then there are glimpses almost a year on, then almost 2 years on, the girls and their achievement, the father getting a job, the mother learning English, the family saying that have no home now in Afghanistan. Australia is their home.

While there is some information at the end of the film about the plight of refugees and how few actually are settled, this is not a polemical film. Although it shows so many difficulties, the potential for despair, it is a humane look at a family, lively, colourful, hoping for a new life and actually finding it.

Audiences from countries hosting refugees often know about this from television news, Facebook entries, even perhaps newspapers, but they don't always have direct contact. This film could serve as a kind of bridge towards involvement with refugees, their coming, their staying, their continuing lives."

JOURNEY'S END

UK, 2017, 107 minutes, Colour.

Sam Claflin, Paul Bettany, Stephen Graham, Asa Butterfield, Tom Sturridge, Toby Jones.
Directed by Saul Dibb.

Journey's End was first performed on the London stage in 1928, 10 years after the events that it portrayed, six days in the trenches in March, 1918.

The play was written by R.C. Sheriff who also novelised the play with Vernon Bartlett. In fact, a film version of the play was made in 1930, directed by James Whale who had directed the play on stage (with Laurence Olivier in the central role – but who was not available for the film version). Whale was to go on to make *Frankenstein*, *The Invisible Man*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *Showboat*.

This version comes almost 80 years after the play. The occasion is the centenary of the last year of World War I, once again the events being in March 1918, the expected assault by the Germans in northern France and its being reversed by the Allied troops, leading to the Armistice of November 11, 1918.

There have been a number of striking films about World War I, the psychological trauma effect in *King and Country* and *Regeneration*, the incompetency of the authorities in *Paths of Glory*, the trenches in Turkey in *Gallipoli* and *The Water Diviner*, and the Oscar-winning film that came out in the same year as the original *Journey's End*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

As regards the portrayal of life in the trenches, this film can take an honourable place. While the opening takes place in San Quentin, in northern France, the British troops at an inn, their assembling and marching towards the trenches ("We're Here because We're Here"), going to the one six days, the allotted period for a squad to remain in the trenches before being replaced.

The production design for the trenches is quite powerful, the soldiers walking in the mud and slush, the height of the walls, some of the wood rotting after several years, designed to protect the men from snipers, the paths, the beds and bunks, the officers' mess and kitchen. The audience is immersed in the trenches along with the men.

This film focuses on a group of officers although the men are seen assembled and, eventually, a squad of ordinary soldiers have to go over the top on a mission to capture a German soldier from their trenches in order to interrogate him and get information about the expected German assault.

We are introduced to a genial older officer, Osborne, who explains to the new recruit, Raleigh (Asa Butterfield), just come from school, asking his uncle, a general, to be assigned to the squad of the prefect that he admired at school, that most of the men call him Uncle. He is played very sympathetically by Paul Bettany – a listener, a man who can calm situations. However, the central character whom we have already seen marching at the head of his men out of the village is Stanhope, three years on service in France, brooding, the victim of wear and tear and responsibility, drinking heavily. He is dismayed that Raleigh, whose sister he had courted, should come and be a witness to his deterioration. Sam Claflin gives a powerful performance.

There are some intense scenes with Stanhope and his clashes with Raleigh, his demands on a

fearful officer, Hibbard (Tom Sturridge), being supported by Osborne. However, there is some real light relief for the audience as well as the officers, including Stanhope, with the ever-ready cook, coping with the supplies (mysterious couplets and tins of pineapple which actually contain apricots), a likeable performance by Toby Jones.

The screenplay contains a great deal of the dialogue from the play and the 1930s film version (which is far more talkative and runs longer than this version). But, the action does come, Osborne and Raleigh chosen to go over the top to capture the German, heavy fire, heavy casualties though mission accomplished.

While there is a moment of peace as the audience sees Raleigh's sister at home reading his complimentary letter about Stanhope, the final image is aerial, over the devastation and destruction of the trenches, the information about the German advance, its being repelled, the memory of the horrifying statistics of so many millions, allies and Germans, killed during World War II.

Direction is by Saul Dibb who made the entertaining historical film, *The Duchess* as well as a gritty story of East London, *Bullet Boy*.

THE OLD MAN & THE GUN

US, 2018, 92 minutes, Colour.

Robert Redford, Sissy Spacek, Casey Affleck, Tika Sumpter, Danny Glover, Tom Waits, Keith Carradine, Elisabeth Moss., Isiah Whitlock Jr, John David Washington.
Directed by David Lowery.

This film was billed as Robert Redford's last film appearance. In many ways, it is a pleasant swansong (but, one hopes, not necessarily his last film).

Redford is in his early 80s, his face lined, but his basic handsome presence is strong, a genial smile. In fact, this is very much part of his character. Almost immediately we see him, hat and suit, moustache, briefcase, going into a bank and the audience observing at a little distance, an encounter which leads to him walking out of the bank, his briefcase full of money, his driving away. Added to that, he sees a woman trying to fix her truck on the side of the road, stops to help, admits to having little expertise, but he certainly evades any pursuit and gives the woman a lift.

She is Jewel, played with great charm and empathy by Sissy Spacek, a widow, owning some property and tending a stable of horses.

Redford, claiming that his name is Bob, tells Jewel the truth but then backtracks. However, agreeably, they share phone numbers – and, as the audience would hope, they keep in touch, visits, going to diners, his sketching her horses, visiting her home and the stable.

So, who is this Bob? We soon see that he has two associates, played by Danny Glover and Tom Waits, who sometimes act as diversions and lookouts for robbing banks. And rob banks he does, names and dates coming up on screen, all in the latter months of 1981 as he travels across southern states from Missouri back to California. He and his friends are called the

Over the Hill group. Unfortunately, we don't see as much as we would like of Danny Glover and Tom Waits.

And the police? We are introduced to a rather frazzled detective, John Hunt, played by Casey Affleck, on his 40th birthday, his friends giving him a one candle's cupcake, his wife and children offering him a cake breakfast after his night shift. Thinking of retiring, he is given the case of the gentleman bank robber as people are prone to call him, praising his presence, his charm, his having a gun but not using it, nice threats... And reassuring an upset teller on her first day at the bank.

John Hunt collects boxes of documents, interviews a range of people, builds up something of a picture. He also appears on television discussing the case – and is seen by Bob. There is an amusing sequence where John goes out to celebrate with his wife and Bob and Jewel are also at this restaurant, Bob going into the restrooms to have an ironic and challenging conversation with John.

The police get a name and an identity. His real name is Forrest Tucker. He has been in and out of jail since he was 13 – and has escaped 16 times (and there is an entertaining visual collage of these escapes, even using some footage of Robert Redford in the 1966 thriller, *The Chase*, and his finally building a small boat to escape from Alcatraz!).

Will he be caught? Will Jewel find out the truth? If he goes to jail will he try a 17th escape attempt?

What we do know is that Forrest is actually incorrigible, not wanting to harm anyone, even willing to pay Jewels mortgage unbeknownst to her, but finding the robberies exhilarating, the driving escapes adrenaline-pumping – and that while robbing banks and escaping he knows that he is alive, is living.

But, strange to say, a film about a bank robber is generally very nice.

A PRAYER BEFORE DAWN

UK, 2017, 116 minutes, Colour.

Joe Cole.

Directed by Jean- Stephane Sauvaire.

Tough, hard tough, hardest-tough. This is true of the film itself, of its central character, Billy Moore, of the prison situations, physically and emotionally. And it is certainly tough for the audience to watch. Words that come to mind include visceral, even gut-wrenching.

Joe Cole, in a convincing performance, plays a young Englishman abroad, based in Thailand, a boxer, practising several forms of kickboxing. In the opening bout that we see, after careful preparation and oiling, he loses the fight, loses control and bashes his opponent. We see as well that he relies on drugs for the boost in the ring and is an addict.

He is taken in by the police and sent to prison. Audiences will have seen films about drug dealers and imprisonment in such countries as Indonesia and Malaysia. The Thai prisons that we see here (filmed in Thailand and in the Philippines, Cebu) are places audiences would

never want to find themselves in. The questioning and examination at entry are the usual, but rougher. Because of the heat, the prisoners wear shorts – which enables the audience, perhaps rather astonished at the site, to see so many men and so many tattoos, all over torsos, backs, necks, even faces and scalps, and not just random tattoos but carefully constructed designs and colours.

Washing and toilet facilities are minimum. The prisoners sleep on rugs or on the ground, piled together. And there is a general air of hostility of the prisoners amongst themselves. And Billy is the only Westerner, white Westerner in the prison.

The audience shares Billy's humiliation and endurance – although one of the guards does supply some drugs for him, forcing him to bash some Muslim prisoners on his behalf. With a knife at his throat, Billy is forced to watch a brutal sexual assault. There is no sign of any fulfilment of the title, although there are moments when there are some rituals of prayer and a statue of the Buddha in the prison yard.

There are some moments of lightness with the arrival of prisoner "lady boys" who staff the canteen in the prison, especially one Billy befriends who is called Fame.

It is the boxing which enables Billy to move toward some kind of redemption. He trains, wins the approval of the coach, fights hard, although a doctor examines him and tells him that his spleen is ruptured, he could bleed to death in fights and his whole system has been wrecked by drugs and alcohol. But, one of the authorities is impressed by him and suggests he trains for an inter-prison competition.

There is a final fight, perhaps in the Rocky-vein, but more unexpected and far less triumphant.

A spoiler warning. This reviewer saw the film not knowing that it was based on a memoir – so, it is surprising to find that Billy Moore has transformed himself, that there really was something of a prayer before the dawn, that he has devoted his life to rehabilitation as well as helping others in similar situations. (A final scene has Billy's father visiting him in Thailand – and then the title over the picture of the father indicating that this is Billy Moore himself.)

THE SEAGULL

US, 2018, 98 minutes, Colour.

Annette Bening, Saoirse Ronan, Corey Stoll, Brian Dennehy, Elisabeth Moss, Billy Howell, Jon Tenney, Michael Zegen, Mare Winningham, Glenn Fleshler.
Directed by Michael Mayer.

Anton Chekhov is considered a great Russian playwright, a great world playwright. There are continued performances of his *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Seagull*. 50 years ago Sidney Lumet directed a film version of *The Seagull* with Simone Signoret as the ageing actress, James Mason as her lover and the young Vanessa Redgrave as the aspiring actress.

Chekhov's pre-Revolution world is rather enclosed, the characters often feeling stifled and/or bored – as if a revolution, which Chekhov did not see, was necessary to bring these characters

to real life.

One of the difficulties for an audience is that it may also feel stifled, somewhat trapped in this rather artificial world. The audience needs to concentrate, be willing to empathise with the characters (not an easy task at times) to appreciate who they are and how they live. And, with so many characters on display in *The Seagull*, there are so many/ too many focal points, an array of a great number of characters, and their relationships are tangled.

The initial setting is 1904, the applause for actress, Irena (Annette Bening at her imperious and insensitive-to-others best, including her highly-strung son, Konstantin (Billy Howell), in a Moscow theatre and the immediate summons to go to the country estate where her brother (Brian Dennehy in a welcome appearance) is dying. Then there is a flashback to the summer, two years earlier when most of the action of the film takes place. In an interesting device, the opening several minutes are repeated exactly at the end of the film, the audience reaction to the characters so much more different now that they have got to know and like (or dislike) them.

Irina dominates the summer, narcissistic, insensitive, manipulative. Corey Stoll is Boris, the celebrated author, her lover, seemingly a strong character but his later being criticised as spineless, being able to bend in all directions. Konstantin is moody, disdains popular theatre, writes a play which, at best, might be called poetic, and the young neighbour, Nina (Saoirse Ronan) performs before his mother's loud and sarcastic comments causing him to stop the performance.

Some of the supporting characters do arouse the interest, especially Elisabeth Moss as Marsha, daughter of the maid, Polina (Mare Willingham), infatuated with Konstantin, wearing black because she is in mourning for her life, courted by the teacher who insists on mentioning, always, how hard his work is and with such little remuneration. Jon Tenney as the local doctor, relied on by most of the characters, offering advice, is always on hand.

So, if an audience is attuned to the plays of Chekhov, there is much to commend (although for some ears, somewhat disconcerting to find these early 20th century Russians or talking with strong American accents). If an audience is not attuned, better to find an alternative insight into pre--revolutionary Russia.

SPITFIRE

UK, 2018, 99 minutes, Colour.

Directed by David Fairhead, Ant Palmer.

A documentary tribute to the plane which is credited with winning the Battle of Britain and contributing to the Allied victory in World War II.

The film opens and closes with beautiful sequences of the Spitfire and flight, over the British countryside, through the clouds, a rather rapturous framework for this documentary.

There is some history of the Spitfire, the work of R.J.Mitchell, aircraft designer with vision, the team of experts who worked with him developing aircraft during the 1920s and 1930s. There are some interesting clips from the 1943 feature film about Mitchell, *The First of the*

Few, with Leslie Howard (called Spitfire in the US). The Spitfire emerged around 1937, with continual work on it until it entered the war, especially with the Battle of Britain. In fact, there were 24 machs of the Spitfire, the film touching on these towards the end, quite extraordinary developments for combating the German aircraft. The Spitfire was withdrawn from service in 1957 with the emergence of planes, jets.

Many of those commenting throughout the film praise the ingenuity and innovation of the Spitfire, praising it as the most beautiful of planes. One man mentions that it is the most precious of flying machines except for the spacecraft which brought Armstrong and the astronauts back from the moon. There were 22,000 Spitfires produced.

There is language about the Spitfire as an icon, comment that the aura about the Spitfire was developed after the end of the war. In many ways this is a eulogy of the Spitfire, testimonies of the flyers, many clips from contemporary footage from World War II.

There is also an outline of the role of the Spitfire during World War II, the initial flights, conflict with the Germans and their aerial developments, a focus particularly on the battle for Malta, the role of the Spitfires on D-Day?

And the story is told by quite a number of veterans, all of them worth listening to, interesting and often genial personalities, their love of flying, the exhilaration of flying the Spitfires, some detailed description of confrontations in the air, pursuits, bombings. And some of the memoirs of the Flyers are very vivid, particularly a story about flying to Malta from Gibraltar, losing the lead plane, the pilot not knowing where he was and making the decision to fly back to Gibraltar with the risk of the Allied guns misinterpreting his presence. There is a tribute to the saving of Malta. There are also stories about the night before D-Day?, the number of flights over the channel and back on 6 June 1944, the bombings and fears about the Germans having a secret weapon.

While the film is particularly male-oriented, there is a strong presence of women in this documentary, some of the women who flew planes, including the hundred-year-old Mary Ellis who flew over 400 planes to British airfields, who inscribed her name on one of them – and is invited to write her name over 70 years later on the same plane. There are also the women who are expert in tracking the flights, helping in the war rooms with the maps and indicating the planes and their presence.

The narration is by actor, Charles Dance, rather solemn for the occasion, at times a touch sepulchral.

For those who love planes, an obvious must. For those who are not planespotters, nevertheless a very interesting documentary. For those who have a passion about World War II, the role of Britain, touches of nostalgia and patriotism, they won't be disappointed.

A STAR IS BORN

US, 2018, 135 minutes, Colour.

Bradley Cooper, Lady Gaga, Sam Elliott, Andrew Dice Clay, Rafi Gavron, Anthony Ramos, Dave Chappelle, Alec Baldwin, Marlon Williams, Ron Rifkin, Barry Shabaka Henley.
Directed by Bradley Cooper.

Given the film history of this story, it must be one of the most American archetypal stories, a theme of rise and fall. In that way, it is universal and, in terms of film versions, it has been popular since the 1930s. The first version in 1932 was *What Price Hollywood* (directed by George Cukor who also directed the 1954. The first *A Star is Born* featured Fredric March and Janet Gaynor was in 1937, the Judy Garland- James Mason version in 1954, Barbra Streisand- Kris Kristofferson version in 1976 and, for some reason, nothing in the 1990s, a 40 year gap until this version.

The buzz about the film has been, of course, about the appearance of Lady Gaga in her first dramatic performance as a lead. (She has appeared on small roles in a number of movies as well as television performances.) And, the first thing that most have commented on is how well she has been cast, how well she performs, her talent for acting, her ability at singing and capturing an audience – and with many of the songs written by her, some in collaboration with Bradley Cooper.

And, Bradley Cooper gives a persuasive performance. He is a rock star, seen performing, engaging an audience, but going off with his chauffeur to find a bar to drink. He finds himself in a drag queen bar but, the performers encourage a friend, Ally (Lady Gaga) to sing. She has ambitions but she works, unsatisfactorily, in a diner, is encouraged by her father who likes to tell people that he has been very favourably compared to Frank Sinatra. She does an Edith Piaf song, *La Vie en Rose*, impressing the audience and drawing the attention of Jackson Mayne (Cooper) who is drawn to her. Cooper has a pleasing screen presence, an engaging smile, and a credibility that he would be attracted to this singer.

And he is, inviting her to fly in his plane to a performance, arranging her music and lyrics, singing them and inviting her to join him on stage. It is the beginning of her rise, his fall.

While Ally has some confidence, she is conscious of her appearance, appearing only in controlled situations. But, she is gradually transformed, her songs, her vocal talent, appearance and clothes. She is approached by an ambitious British producer. She makes a record. She rehearses with dances. She appears on *Saturday Night Live* with Alec Baldwin.

And, she is in love and marries Jackson.

The characters in the background remind us of where Ally and Jack have come from. Andrew Dice Clay plays her enthusiastic father, a manager of a car fleet with his driver pals. Jack is supported by his older brother, Bob (Sam Elliot). What might have been idyllic is always threatened by Jack's drinking. Drink, he does, leading to outbursts, clashes with his brother, hurtful attitudes and words towards Ally.

Where can it end? Rise and fall?

One of the features of *A Star is Born* that will appeal to many audiences (though some may be living in their past preferred music tastes) is the music. The film does not stint on the music, the songs – an achievement for the stars, their collaboration in the writing and composing and Bradley Cooper proving himself as a singer, matching Lady Gaga.

SUSPIRIA

Italy/US, 2018, 152 minutes, Colour.

Dakota Johnson, Tilda Swinton, Doris Hick, Malgorzaata Bela, Chloe Grace Moretz, Angela Winkler, Jessica Batut, Elena Fokina, Mia Goth, Clementine Houdart, Ingrid Caven, Sylvie Testud.

Directed by Luca Guadagnino.

This is a remake, a re-interpretation (and then some, to say the least) of the 1977 horror-thriller directed by Dario Argento. It is considered something of a classic, now especially so in the mind and memory of Italian director Luca Guadagnino (*I am Woman, A Bigger Splash*, *Call Me by Your Name*).

Whether Guadagnino has created a new classic is not so certain. While there have been some admirers, many who have written comments on this version have felt disappointed in comparison with the original, or have been bewildered, or thought it was just so much rubbish – some even suspecting that the director might have appeared after the final credits to jokingly tell us that it was all a hoax!

The original was made in 1977 and Guadagnino and his cowriter, David Kajganich (whose following film was the remake of Stephen King's *Pet Semetary*), have decided that they would like to make many references to what was happening in Germany and Berlin at that time, where the old and the new *Suspiria* have been set, memories of World War II, memories of camps and betrayals, references to terrorism and the Baader-Meinhoff group, an RAF crisis. While this is significant, the references seem to be merely allusions, suggestions, verbal and visual, rather than explorations of the theme and connections to the characters and actions. (Although, there is an insertion later in the film where the psychiatrist meets his long-lost love whom he had betrayed – and is to be punished; and this interlude provides an opportunity for a cameo appearance by Jessica Harper, the original Susie).

Since the plot is about a coven of witches, audiences certainly expect it to be weird. As weird as this?

The film opens, somewhat frantically, with a dancer from an Academy seeking psychological help, mentally disintegrating before our eyes, Patricia (Chloe Grace Moretz). And then, a new dancer arrives from Ohio, Susie Bannion (Dakota Johnson after her *50 Shades* films). She is ambitious. She is welcomed. There are memories of her growing among the Amish in Ohio. She makes friends with the other dancers, finds accommodation, shows instantly that she has danced talent. There are complications with her fellow dancer, Sarah (Mia Goth).

Dancing is important to the film. Those who love modern dance, contemporary choreography, may well be delighted by the very long sequences of dance, impressionistic, a work called *Volk* ('People'). There is a frantic score accompanying the dance, dance until one collapses...

And the staff at the dance Academy (a collection of significant European actresses) look and act weirdly (understatement). When it emerges that they are a coven of witches, that the head is a woman called Madame Markos, that there is some rivalry with the teacher who is held on a pedestal by the students, Madame Blanc. So, what is the will of the witches? What did they want with Patricia, to become part of the coven, the discovery of secret powers? What do

they want with Susie – and what does she want?

In the performance of Volk, Susie collapses – and some transformation begins, a revelation of the witches, bizarre confrontations and deaths, the visualising of Madame Markos (very ugly fleshy creation) contrasting with the austere beauty of Madame Blanc.

It might be just as well that there are no quizzes as audiences leave the cinema after 2 ½ hours to test whether they could explain the plot, characters, themes. Most would probably fail.

So, a step in the career of Luca Guadagnino, a reinterpretation of Dario Argento, a display of contemporary dance, an imagining of later 20th century witches (and their depiction and delineation seems more than a little misogynistic).

And the most amazing thing about the film is the presence of Tilda Swinton, extraordinary has always, and the revelation after the event that the make-up artists have been at work because she is also the professor – and she is also Madame Markos.

VENOM

US, 2018, 112 minutes, Colour.

Tom Hardy, Michelle Williams, Riz Ahmed, Scott Haze, Reid Scott, Jenny Slate, Melora Walters, Woody Harrelson.

Directed by Ruben Fleischer.

If The Predator were persuaded to go to the movies, then Venom would be an obvious recommendation. In fact, the hopes and ambitions of The Predator are fulfilled in Venom. The Predator and fellow aliens were involved in coming to earth, taking of the best qualities of humans, and experience of symbiosis. Symbiosis is to the fore in Venom but not quite in a way that was expected – who would have thought an alien and a human coexisting, dialoguing with each other, becoming a kind of superhero and avenger of evil?

This indication of the tone and style of Venom shows that it is both serious in its themes and somewhat humorous in its style.

Tom Hardy looks as if he is enjoying himself in the role of Eddie Brock, a television journalist in San Francisco, high ratings, living with Anne, a legal expert, and, played by Michelle Williams. However, he is ambitious, and a special target is Carlton Drake (Riz Ahmed) a self-made entrepreneur whose spaceship was seen at the beginning of the film, exploding, crash landing in Malaysia, and some of the samples, alien samples, set free during the crash (and taking over one of the scientists, then an old woman at the airport, the alien moving from human to human (and a dog or two), living within them and giving them heightened powers.

One of Carlton Drake's assistants, Dr Skirth (Jenny Slate) has some conscience issues and approaches Eddie, taking him to the plant, his taking incriminating photos, trying to help one of the experimental victims and, of course, being infected himself. (Actually, he refers to having a parasite but Venom really dislikes the word!).

It is not difficult to foretell the directions in which the screenplay will go. Michelle Williams must have been pleased to have the opportunity to have the parasite/alien inside the and take her over. Her new boyfriend, Dan (Reid Scott) is a surgeon and does his best to help Eddie.

Car chases, car crashes, building up to a confrontation between Carlton Drake and Eddie in alien monstrous form, and the realisation that Venom really likes being one with Eddie and that they have an evil-avenging career before them (though Venom is prone to like eating antagonists). And then, early in the final credits, Eddie visits a jail and who should be there but Woody Harrelson... So, more venom/Venom.

WAJIB. (THE WEDDING INVITATION)

Israel/Palestine, 96 minutes, Colour.

Mohammed Bakri, Saleh Bakri.

Directed by Annemarie Jacir.

Well, this is one way to spend a day – a father and son driving around Nazareth delivering invitations to a wedding to family, friends, acquaintances.

While there are some comically cheerful sequences, the underlying themes of Wajib are very serious.

The setting is very important. The focus is on a family living in Nazareth, an Arab city in Israel. For those who have a gospel-image of Nazareth, and have never been there, it might be quite a surprise to see it as a contemporary city, the streets and the constant traffic, the range of buildings, the hills (and the number of houses with many images of Mary who, after all, came from there).

The film is a serious reminder of the difficulties for Arabs living in Nazareth – which are less considerable than for the who live in the occupied territories. Nevertheless, the point is made that there are limitations on the freedoms of the Arabs, the schools and staff as well as curricula are kept under surveillance by officials, some issues prohibited, that some occupations are not open to Arabs, the instance mentioned here being pilots. And, while many aspects of life are comfortable enough, the Arabs feel that they are second-class citizens.

The drama highlighting these perspectives involves father and son. The daughter and sister is about to be married, preparations are underway, there is even a side visit to the dress shop where the young woman is trying out a variety of dresses. The father has been a teacher in a local school and has ambitions to be promoted to headmaster. The son, on the other hand, had something of a controversial background when he was growing up, strong political stances through a cinema club, the father feeling that it was best for his son to move out of Israel. The son now lives in Italy, works as an architect, lives with his companion whose father is a former PLO member. The son has no desire to come back to live in Israel.

In fact, the criticisms come through the dialogue given to the son. There is a powerful sequence of verbal and emotional clashes, especially towards the end when both men get out of their car and there is a strong confrontation, especially on the occasion of the father wanting to invite the Jewish representative whom he sees as his friend but In the son

denounces as a spy, over the years reporting activities to the Israeli authorities, controlling education.

Along the way, as father and son drive around the city side delivering the invitations, there are quite a number of pleasing vignettes, visits to family homes, discussions about family matters, some socialising, the son having a beer with an old friend who is satisfied living in Nazareth...

The action takes place only over the daylight hours of one day so it is really a drama of raising the issues – but, with a somewhat gentle ending, not entirely a resolution, but some hope, if not for Nazareth, for the father and son and their relationship.

WILDLIFE

US, 2018, 104 minutes, Colour.

Cary Mulligan, Jake Gyllenhaal, Ed Oxenbould, Bill Camp.

Directed by Paul Dano.

Wildlife, as a title, does not communicate the mood and meaning of this impressive, rather small-scale, drama. The title comes from a novel of 1990 by Pulitzer-Prize-winning [author](#), Richard Ford. While the novel was published in 1990, the setting for walk and film is 1960, outback Montana.

This is a story of a family, beginning very cheerfully, father and son, Jerry (a sympathetic Jake Gyllenhaal, even when he is exasperating), Jenny (a powerful performance by Cary Mulligan) and son, Joe (Australian Ben Oxenbould through whose eyes we see the action). Jerry and Joe pass and kick the football, Jenny prepares the meal, Jerry goes off to work at a golf club, Joe going to help him.

Jerry is fired. To his surprise and dismay, the reason given is that he is too friendly with the players at the club. He thinks about getting a job, mopes around, sits in his car, stands on his pride when the club offers him his job back. Jerry is stuck in that American (universal) image of what it is to be a man, stand his ground, and his living, be reliable. To Jenny's surprise and upset, and to audience surprise, he volunteers to go out into the mountains to fight the fires whose smoke the audience has seen hovering in the background.

Jerry does not think there will be a crisis. However, Jenny is quite upset, his action and her challenging him about it beginning to undermine the years together, reminding her of the vitality she had when she was young. Joe, who doesn't say much but whose character is communicated most effectively by Ben Oxenbould's body language, facial expressions (and lack of them), alert eyes, does not want his father to leave. He has told his father that he is no good at football. However, he does get a job at the photo studio in the town and becomes dependable and expert. He also befriends a young girl, a student from school.

Joe then has to watch the deterioration of his mother, the positive about her getting a job coaching swimming, the negative about her pretending to get a job at a car sales, benefiting by her coaching the owner, an older man his wife has left him, in swimming. Audience tension will be aggravated by what Jenny says and does, dressing up glamorously, lying to

Joe, taking him to dinner at the house of the businessman – and the consequences. Enormous pressure on a 14-year-old boy who loves his mother and his father.

Jerry returns from the fires expecting everything to be as it was. It isn't, provoking Jerry to act irresponsibly. Where can the drama go? Can the parents rediscover their love? What can Joe do?

The ending is left open to the audience, their understanding and appreciating of each of the characters. However, there is a very fine symbol for the end of the film, not closure of the story – it involves Joe at his work at the photographers, a photo.

Ben Oxenbould and director Paul Dano resemble each other physically. Dano has often performed in melancholy roles (Little Miss Sunshine, Pierre in War and Peace) and brings a sense of melancholy to this screenplay which is written with his partner, Zoe Kazan. They had previously co-written another telling small drama, Ruby Sparks.

REVIEWS DECEMBER 2018

2.0

BLACK '47

BOOK WEEK

CHILDREN ACT, The

COLETTE

COACH

COMING BACK OUT BALL MOVIE

CREED 2

ELLIOT, THE LITTLEST REINDEER

FANTASTIC BEASTS: THE CRIMES OF GRUNDEWALD

GEULA/ REDEMPTION

GOOSEBUMPS 2; HAUNTED HALLOWEEN

GRINCH, The

HOSTILES

INDIVISIBLE

LEAN ON PETE

MADNESS OF GEORGE III

NEW LIFE

NUTCRACKER AND THE FOUR REALMS

OVERLORD

PATRICK

PEPPERMINT

PUZZLE, The

ROBIN HOOD

ROMA

SECOND ACT

SHOPLIFTERS
SORRY TO BOTHER YOU
STRANGE COLOURS
STUDIO 54
WIDOWS

2.0

India, 2018, 148 minutes, Colour.
Rajinikanth, Akshay Kumar, Amy Jackson, Adil Hussain.
Directed by Shankar.

Maybe not so much of an arresting title but an intriguing one.

A bit of background to the reviewing of this film. An Indian confrere sent an email, an alert to the release of this film in India, commenting on its science-fiction story, its interest in technology, its environmental message, writing about it in terms of Gospel messages. By providence and synchronicity, the Australian release was at the same time as the release in India, so off to see the film.

The writer-director is a celebrated Indian director, Shankar. There is some wild imagination that has gone into this film as well as an enormous budget (probably some millions of dollars just for the final credits sequences, elaborate costumes, singing and dancing).

For fans of science-fiction beyond the usual, 2.0 is well worth noting. It is set in the future – but visually it is firmly anchored in the present. Its story and its action are a challenge for the present.

An inventor (Rajinikanath) has been successful with a robot, Chitti, but it has been decommissioned by the government. In the meantime, the inventor has created another robot, an attractive female robot, Nila (Amy Jackson) who acts as his assistant. What immediately happens might send a shudder of terror down the audience spine. Crowds of people are going about their ordinary business, interacting – well, not quite interacting, all on their mobile phones. A lot of details reminding us of all the conversations and preoccupations that people have and their absolute reliance on their phones. Suddenly, all the phones are swooped out of people's hands, drawn up into the sky like a flock of birds. And the population of the city, Chennai (this is a Tamil film), bewildered, lost, then queueing up to reclaim phones or get replacements.

There are many panicky government scenes, officials trying to deal with the situation, some exposed as exploiting corruption deals.

This is a film that runs for almost 3 hours so there is a lot of detail, colourful detail, the government calling in the inventor, his justifying his participation, his resurrecting Chitti (with something of an Elvis lookalike) and going into action.

Throughout the film there are swarms of mobile phones cavorting through the air, along the roads, destroying villains...

Americans and other international audiences will be very impressed by the special effects – and those who sit through credits remembering that in certain many of the American big-budget spectacles, there are many Indian names contributing to CGI and effects. This film certainly proves that they have great skills.

Things change for the second act, audiences reminded that a man hanged himself at the opening of the film and then flashbacks exploring who he was, his love for birds and their conservation, his denunciation of mobile phones and the effects of radiation destroying birds and creation. He is now an incarnation of vengeance, a power of evil must be combated.

So, not only does Chitti go into action (as well as experiencing some demolitions), but multiple robots are created to confront the daemonic avenger (from 2.0 to 3.0). And, smartly, some mini-Chittis.

For the fans, this is all quite absorbing – although, this may be a Tamil thing, the robot Chitti and his facial expressions are a little stupid and offputting even though he achieves his ends. (The inventor and Chitti are played by the same actor.)

So, as the 2 ½ hour mark is approaching, and we have experienced this world of plot and effects, what about the good intentions of the conservationist, what about his villainy and cruelty in getting vengeance, and what about the role of mobile phones and their indispensability? Fortunately, there is little homily at the end combining all the themes coming out on the side of right.

Here is the comment from our Indian confrere, how he has interpreted 2.0:

“The concerns of this cosmos can carry the creatures away from the Creator. But only the constant compassion of Christ can carry them closer to Him. Luke 21:34-36. 2.0 is a brand new movie of a popular Indian director Shankar. He captures the audience with his catchy message that moderate use of radiation, reduction in the number of networks and moderate use of mobile phones can lead the new generation to a constructive development. Hats off to the VFX. The three digits 2.0: starting from 2 can remind the people of the scriptural passage: "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst"; dot (.) persuades us to keep a dot not only to radiation but also to all our negativity; and O reminds us of our constant praise and thanksgiving to the Creator for his wonderful and beautiful creation such as birds. Therefore, let us praise God constantly and courageously like the chirping of the birds in the woods: O, Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder...In solidarity pay a visit to Chevalier Bhavan bird sanctuary.”

BLACK 47

Ireland, 2018, 96 minutes, Colour.

Hugo Weaving, James Frecheville, Stephen Rea, Freddie Fox, Barry Keoghan, Moe Dunford, Sarah Greene, Jim Broadbent.

Directed by Lance Daly.

The title refers to 1847 in Ireland. Very black times. The potato famine. The rule of the British and their oppression.

The film will have quite an impact in Ireland, an opportunity to look back at a particular time, not frequently shown in film, and to reflect on the subjugation of the Irish by the British, the nature of the oppression, the impact of the potato famine and the consequences on starvation in Ireland itself as well as the migration to Britain, Canada and Australia.

Those who have Irish ancestry will find it particularly interesting, especially if some of their ancestors suffered in the famine and migrated at this period.

The framework for the film is a vengeance story. It opens with a British soldier, fraternising with the police and the local authorities in a bar, then going to the prison and brutally interrogating an Irish rebel, choking him for information – and then being charged with murder. The soldier, Hannah, is played with his usual intensity by Hugo Weaving.

But the central character is another soldier, an Irishman who fought with Hannah in Afghanistan, but who left the Army, deserting, taking some weapons, returning to Ireland and finding his family devastated. His mother has died in the famine. His brother has been executed. His brother's widow and children are destitute. This character is Michael Feeney, played by Australian actor James Frecheville, and made to look up like an outlaw, bushranger of the times, severe in demeanour, long beard, travelling by horse.

When Michael Feeney begins to kill those who are responsible for the deaths of his family, the authorities decide to send a young British officer, Pope (Freddie Fox) to capture Feeney. He is to take Hannah along to identify him as well as helping in the arrest. Also in the group is very young recruit played by Barry Keoghan, in charge of the horses, who later is shocked to discover the repercussions of the famine. Interestingly, in 1847, they travel by train to the north to pursue Feeney in Connemara, the bleak and often barren landscapes of the county.

Along the way, the group pick up an Irish traveller, who can spin a yarn, can give information, Conneely (Stephen Rea). He leads them to the town where the local landowner has a mansion. The landowner is played with enormous arrogance by Jim Broadbent, the landowner who loves the land but despises the Celtic people and longs for the day when they will all be eliminated.

Feeney encounters owners of shops who betrayed his family, various officials, and kills them in dramatic and symbolic ways.

It all builds up of course to a dramatic climax, the bond between Hannah and Feeney somewhat rekindled, Feeney skilful in destroying his enemies but ultimately destroyed – with Hannah having the option to stay in Ireland and face prison or, as Feeney advises him, to go to America.

Perhaps a bit specialist for non-Irish and non-Irish ancestry audiences.

BOOK WEEK

Australia, 2018, 92 minutes, Colour.

Alan Dukes, Susan Prior, Pippa Grandison, Airlie Dodds, Steve La Marquand, Nicholas Hope, Rose Riley, Rhys Muldoon, Kant Chittenden.

Directed by Heath Davis.

There is a great deal to be said in favour of a film which promotes books and reading, physical books as well as e-books. The film takes us through book week in a secondary school, the ethos of promoting books and reading, the various activities of encouragement, readings, role-playing, spelling bees...

However, the “hero” of Book Week, Nick Cutler (a wry and ambiguous performance from Alan Dukes), is hardly the hero of any story let alone that of book week in a school, and let alone his own life.

He is a frustrated author, having had some initial success, working on a novel for many years, drawing on the trends in interest in zombie novels. He has an agent who promotes the manuscript to some publishers but, during the interview, he is told that the name has to be changed, that vampires are more trendy than zombies – otherwise they are happy to publish. Nick is a drinker, warned against drinking and making a fool of himself, but immediately goes to a pub, encounters a young woman, spends the night with her, forgetting that he is involved in an affair with the deputy principal of the school and has broken an appointment with her – and then finds that the young woman is to be an intern teacher at the school.

Nick’s father (Nicholas Hope) has little time for his son and gives him tongue lashings. His sister is more sympathetic and is dependent on him for a kidney transplant for her ill husband. Nick is not inclined to comply.

In the meantime, there is a young student who has sized up Nick and is not afraid of being forthright about her opinions, who has written some material and is feted as she does a book reading. She crops up many times, tantalising Nick – who gets his revenge on her with her presumption of winning a spelling bee. He does not fare so well with the deputy after standing her up. She is inclined to be lenient at first, but... He is also responsible for a young student with a propensity for stealing cars, doing drugs, Nick hoping to use him for a promotion interview for the book but finds a journalist whom he had humiliated years before. He has also told off for riding his bicycle drunk by a policewoman whom he had told is a student that she had no prospects.

Tirieli Mora turns up as the principal, nonchalant in some ways, dressed as Gandalf at the role-play session, dissatisfied with Nick and firing him. And then Nick’s novel is not to be published – but the precocious young student gets a contract.

Because Nick is so unsympathetic to most people and to the audience, there is a question whether he can possibly be redeemed. The screenplay says that he can, give the kidney, of course, continue with writing, overcome his antipathy towards e-books, give up some of the drinking. While this is what the screenplay has Nick do, it somewhat defies his credibility as the character previously portrayed. While his redemption is not quite dramatically convincing, the audience might hope.

THE CHILDREN ACT

UK, 2018, 104 minutes, Colour.

Emma Thompson, Stanley Tucci, Ben Chaplin, Fion Whitehead, Jason Watkins, Nikki Amuka- Bird, Rosie Cavaliero, Anthony Calf.

Directed by Richard Eyre.

Emma Thompson plays Fiona Maye, a London judge who administers the Children Act, presiding over court cases with such issues as the separation of Siamese twins, child custody, the decision about a minor who belongs to the Jehovah Witnesses receiving a blood transfusion to save his life.

This is fine British film making.

Emma Thompson has frequently shown a flair for comedy, portraying, for instance, Nanny Mc Phee. However, she won her Oscar for her performance as Margaret Schlegel, a serious character, in the adaptation of E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*. Her portrayal of Fiona Maye is Emma Thompson at her very serious best.

Non-British? audiences may be immediately struck by the quaintness of how Judge Maye is addressed in court. We take for granted "My Lord" but it is something of a shock to hear a judge frequently addressed as "Milady". In court, Milady is well briefed, dismisses superfluous speeches by prosecutors or defence lawyers, is brisk in her moving through the evidence and explaining her judgements. She is well respected.

Because the drama is so well-written, there is no trouble in seeing Fiona Maye as a thinking person. She is clear, reasonable, principled and logical.

However, the drama in this film extends to the judge's home life. She has been married for several decades to Jack, an academic (Stanley Tucci) but has failed to recognise that her almost complete commitment to her work, bringing it home to prepare briefs, working into the late hours of the night, has stranded her husband emotionally. Jack shocks Fiona by suggesting that he have an affair. She is so disturbed, her emotions unable to help her to a response, that she goes into silence, refusal to discuss the situation.

The point is made that the judge is so comfortable in her thinking, reinforced by her dedicated work ethic, not only has she neglected her feelings, she seems to be quite unaware of them.

However, this home crisis does affect her in an important case concerning the blood transfusion. A 17-year-old, Adam (Fionn Whitehead) has terminal leukaemia. His parents are strict Jehovah Witnesses – and the film shows some flashbacks to Witness meetings, scriptural grounds for the ban on blood transfusions, seen as a contamination of life which is found in the blood. A preacher is very strict, quoting Genesis, Leviticus, Acts, to indicate that God has prohibited transfusions.

Audiences will be familiar with these biblical stances and will have formed opinions on the validity well before coming into the cinema. In court, hospital representatives make a case for the transfusion. The father, played by Ben Chaplin, a reformed alcoholic who has found some salvation for himself and his wife in the community of the Witnesses, takes a stand against the transfusion.

In what seems a sudden departure from her well-organised research and decision-making, the judge decides to visit Adam in hospital. She has no children herself. Perhaps it is the shock of her husband's declaration that has touched her innermost feelings and urges her not only to talk with the boy, discuss the issues, his religious beliefs, but talk to him about a guitar,

listening to him sing song based on a poem by Yeats. Then, briskly, she is back to court, delivering her verdict, basing it on the law in the best interests of the child, that Adam have the transfusion (which is actually visualised for the audience).

What triggers the judge's impulse to go to the hospital? We can see an assertion of feeling in her dealings with Adam. She does not. But it begins to surface.

The consequences of her husband's declaration and her visit to Adam emerge gradually (and reluctantly) as well as deeper repercussions in her emotional life, a life which she has relegated to the peripheries of her work and her marriage.

The strength of this unconscious/conscious assertion of feeling is dramatized powerfully in its effect on Adam, quite profound, his emotional response to her visit, the singing, the poetry of Yeats, his finding in her a potential mother-figure – and his emotional demands on her, personally, and her need for a professional response.

The drama provides the judge with an emotional confrontation with Adam, her awareness of professional behaviour and the subjective demands on her from Adam – leading to uncharacteristic behaviour, losing her control at a party and hurrying to Adam's hospital bedside again. But this is the catalyst for her being able to speak to Jack, to acknowledge the distance between them, to reconcile with mutual understanding.

The film is based on a novel by Ian Mc Ewan (*Atonement*, *On Chesil Beach*). The novelist himself has written the screenplay.

For an audience which likes serious drama, well-written, and intelligently articulate use of language, a probing of the relationship between mind and heart, and fine performances, *The Children Act* is well recommended.

COLETTE

UK, 2018, 111 minutes, Colour.

Ciaran Knightley, Dominic West, Fiona Shaw, Al Weaver, Denise Gough, Robert Pugh, Julian Wadham.

Directed by Wash Westmoreland.

Older audiences who have a fondness for the 1958 Oscar-winner, the musical, *Gigi*, are probably aware that it is based on a story by the French novelist, Colette. The viewing of this film may make them realise that apart from the *Gigi* story, they really didn't know much about the author at all.

This film will supply her background and her story during the 1890s and 1900s, to 1906. There is some supplementary information given during the final credits as well as some relevant photos of Colette.

When Keira Knightley is at her best, she is often at her very best. And this is the case here. At the opening of the film, she seems an innocent young French country girl, aged 20, living at home with her parents, a strong mother (Fiona Shaw) and a war-invalided father (Robert Pugh). However, almost immediately, we find that she is not as innocent as she looks. The

family have had a visit from a publisher from Paris (referred to by the screenplay simply as Willy, Dominic West, although his name was Henri Gauthier- Villars). The young girl goes out into the barn, involved in a passionate affair with Willy.

The country background is important for Colette (who is full name was Sidonie-Gabrielle? Colette abbreviated by her for authorship to the simple Colette). In moments of distress she will return to her mother and for her father's funeral. Willy, at one stage, buys her a home in the countryside. And she draws on her experiences when she eventually comes to write stories, creating a character Claudine who resembles Colette in many ways.

The reason for her writing stories is that Willy is an entrepreneur, with a stable of authors who write books on commission which he publishes under his own name. But he lives a high expense of life, is something of a libertine (with a repetition of his rationale that this is what a man does). Generally in debt, he finds ways of tiding over and one of these is a brainwave that Colette write down her memories and stories. He is somewhat critical at first even though he always expresses his love and devotion to her. Potential necessity means publication but he is amazed at the instant popularity of the Claudine stories, the range of readers, especially young women, the instant commercialisation of Claudine and products bearing her name, speculating on theatre performances and auditioning women to take the role. He even persuades Colette to cut her hair in the fashion of Claudine and to wear her dress, something like a school uniform.

Gradually, Colette becomes her own woman. She begins to see through her husband's flamboyance, not taken in by his brazen manipulations, unpersuaded by his bombastic enthusiasm.

There is a further complication, emotionally, when Colette realises that she is attracted to women, at first an American heiress married to an older Frenchman, then an encounter with a strong-minded woman, Missy (Denise Gough), moving into live with her, training to be a dancer and performer, even Willy promoting her at the Moulin Rouge which ends in something of a disaster after an onstage kiss with the audience booing and condemning.

And this is where the film leaves her, and author, a performer, a rebel personality – all of which she continued until death in 1954, even receiving a Nobel Literature nomination in 1948. (While the credits indicate that she spent some years with Missy, they do not mention that she had two subsequent marriages and had a son.)

The 1890s and 1900s were called La Belle Epoque and this film immerses the audience in that era (which did change from Penn and ink to typewriters, gaslight to electric light, carts and horses to bicycles and cars).

COACH

Russia, 2018, 128 minutes, Colour.
Danila Koslovsky, Olga Zueva.
Directed by Danila Kozlowsky.

This is a big and enthusiastic Russian sports film. It was very topical on its release in 2018, in anticipation of Russia hosting the World Cup and participation in the competition (which

turned out to be not as successful as hoped). Nevertheless, here is the spirit of Russian sport.

A critic remarked that he began to count all the cliches that the screenplay incorporated and then gave up because there were so many! One might note that a cliché is based on truth even if it is truth told often and becoming over-familiar. But, an enthusiastic sports film will always have the cliches – call them ‘conventions’. So, there is a hero, misunderstood and failing, down on his luck, getting an opportunity, not grappling with it as successfully as he should, grieved at the unexpected death of his father, falling in love, of course, with one of the staff, not relating initially well with the players, pressurised by advice, making mistakes (especially when he is drunk), finding ways of motivation, bonding the players, beginning to move up the competition with wins, the grand final confrontation and...

Perhaps most of us could have written the narrative outline ourselves. But, there it is. And it is not so much what is being presented as the excitement in the how it is presented.

Danila Kozlovsky, an imposing screen presence, plays Yuri the coach, putting on quite a tantrum in the opening sequences where he should not have taken a penalty kick, left it to another player, and fails in the front of the Moscow supporters. Kozlovsky also directs the film as well as collaborating with the screenplay and producing. While his character is in some ways predictable, he brings an energy to the role, exasperating a lot of the peopling meets, exasperating the audience with his moodiness (which, ultimately, he transforms into energy and enthusiasm).

For enthusiasts of football/soccer, there are plenty of matches, quick-paced editing to give excitement, teamwork, individual players, strategies and tactics.

There is a lot of emotion along the way, Yuri and his initial humiliation, two years without a job, even seen playing rugby in the mud. Initially, he makes a hash of his opportunities for coaching the provincial team, but, with a serious-minded president of the club, the daughter of the town mayor, with an attractive doctor and her sister and, of course, falling in love, he does begin to come out of himself, using unusual tactics to motivate the players. Eventually, in practices before the enthusiasts who come to sit in the stands and watch, they begin to move, to bond, winning matches and, naturally, finishing up in the final, Yuri as coach, deciding to play, urging the diffident young recruit onto the field at the end (and inciting the crowd to yell his name, giving the lad self-confidence), a play-off against his original team.

If you are a football fan, it doesn't matter if you know how it is basically going to play out, what you will want is for them to play on.

THE COMING BACK OUT BALL MOVIE

Australia, 2018, 88 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Sue Thomson.

A sound cultural, personal, anti-bigotry principle is that we need to meet people with whom we differ, whom we do not understand and that this leads to respect and appreciation, even allowing for differences in perspective.

This is certainly the principle to be brought to this documentary. The first thing to say about it

is that it is about elderly people, a sympathetic look at men and women growing old, reflecting on their past, on the relationships, on their careers, on the deaths of partners. Throughout the whole film, there are a lot of interviews, with these people, men and women telling their story with sympathy, sometimes bravado, always enthusiasm.

And this is the first point of entry to appreciating these elderly people. Then, on this basis, we understand that they are members of the LGBTQI community. “Coming out” was not necessarily a part of their past. Many of them kept their sexual orientation secret, some not even aware of it until later in life and after marriage and family. But, in their old age, with changing social perspectives (in fact, the Coming Out Ball taking place two weeks before the decision on same-sex marriage through the Australian postal plebiscite), an era of greater tolerance has emerged.

A ball? This is the brain wave, creative idea of an entrepreneur, Tristram Meacham, whose creation of the ball is at the core of the film. He is an enthusiast – understatement!

The idea was to have a ball for the elderly so that they could come out in old age, even if they had never come out before. The venue for the ball was to be Melbourne Town Hall. Veteran entertainer, Robyn Archer, was to be the host and there were to be some guest entertainers including Carlotta and aboriginal opera star, Deborah Cheetham. (The latter gets the opportunity to sing “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina” with changed relevant lyrics.)

The film audience is introduced by a quite large range of characters, all going back into their past, describing their lives, the relationships, the fears. Some have known all their lives about their sexual orientation, others discovering it in later life. But they all grew up in a period of secrecy and/or cover-up. A number of the characters have undergone gender change. Because the interviewees are so frank, it gives the opportunity for the audience to listen, observe, reflect, understand.

Quite a lot of preparation goes into the ball, the invitees coming to dancing lessons weeks in advance, getting to know one another, getting to know the steps, a number discovering a flamboyance that had previously not emerged. There are decorations, selections of music, the orchestra, those waiting at tables, the preparation of the venue.

As expected, by the end, there is an extended treatment of the ball, the guests all lining up outside in Swanston Street, the staff waiting, the guests coming inside, eating and drinking, the music, the dancing.

Some of the regulars who were interviewed throughout the film get the opportunity to offer their reflections on the experience. One of the characters interviewed earlier was one of the first female shearers, an expert in her daily day, attending the ball but, at the end of the film, going back to the shearing shed proving that after all these years, she still has the strength and skills. She serves as a symbol for those who were part of The Coming Back Out Ball.

CREED II

US, 2018, 130 minutes, Colour.

Michael B. Jordan, Sylvester Stallone, Tessa Thompson, Phylicia Rashad, Dolph Lundgren, Florian Munteanu, Russell Hornsby, Wood Harris, Milo Ventimiglia, Robbie Johns, Brigitte

Nielsen.

Directed by Stephen Caple Jr.

And the answer to the Trivial Pursuit question is: Rocky IV, the question, of course, being: which was the Rocky film in which Drago appeared.

In 2015, Creed, which might be considered a sequel to the Rocky films, proved to be very popular. Michael B. Jordan was very acceptable as the next-generation boxer. And there was Sylvester Stallone again, not only contributing to the writing as he had for all the previous Rocky films, even getting an Oscar nomination as Best Supporting Actor. The director of Creed, Ryan Coogler, had worked with Michael B. Jordan on the thoughtful, Fruitvale Station, and they were part of the team for the highly successful Marvel Universe film, Black Panther.

On release, this sequel received very enthusiastic reviews and responses. It seemed to be exactly what the fans wanted. The screenplay is full of well-worn (or time-honoured) pieces of dialogue, reinforcing the conventions of the boxing film that so enthrall the audiences.

Actually, the plot draws on its predecessors very strongly. Adonis Creed is the son of Rocky's rival, Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers), and then collaborator in several films. But, in Rocky IV, with the introduction of the Russian fighter, Drago (described in 1985 with the adjective, Soviet), Apollo Creed dies and Rocky vanquishes Drago in the ring. Now, more than 30 years later, here is his son, Viktor Drago, a huge hulk of a man, the actor portraying him, Florian Munteanu, credited with his nickname "Big Nasty". (And here is Brigitte Nielsen again as Draco's wife, Viktor's mother – and was actually married to Sylvester Stallone at the time of Rocky IV.)

And for those expecting big things in the fights, they will not be disappointed. First fight sees Creed overcoming an opponent. Then there is the big fight, for the world heavyweight title, between Creed and Drago, a literally punishing fight. And, of course, there has to be a climax, Creed versus Viktor Drago again, a kind of resurrection fight which goes for 10 rounds, powerfully choreographed. For the audience veterans, there is the enjoyment of hearing excerpts from the original Rocky theme music.

And for those who do not immediately take to boxing films let alone the fights themselves, there is quite some humanity in the underlying plot. With apologies to Sylvester Stallone, who has been a decades-long screen presence and who knows how to write screenplays, Michael B. Jordan is a much more convincing actor. There is his relationship with his girlfriend, Bianca (Tessa Thompson) and a proposal seen (after he nervously asks Rocky for advice). There is also the complication that Younger is deaf, with her hearing aid, which leads to some pathos when she becomes pregnant and there is concern about the condition of the newly-born daughter.

And there is the emotion concerning the comeback fight, the recovery after the battering from Viktor Drago, physical and psychological rehabilitation – and, of course, Rocky urging Creed to the most rigorous training program in the desert, exhausting for the audience as they are comfortably sitting in their theatre seats!

It is all as expected – and who would want it to be otherwise?

In 2018 it is interesting to watch an American film where the hero is fighting a Russian, a bruiser of an opponent, seen as the enemy. And then there is also the thought that it is 42 years since the first Rocky film, which means that it could be still another 40 years with Michael B Jordan coaching the champion of 2058!

ELLIOTT, THE LITTLEST REINDEER

Canada, 2018, 89 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: Josh Hutcherson, Samantha Bee, Martin Short, Morena Baccarin, Jeff Dunham, Christopher Jacot, John Cleese, George Buza.

Directed by Jennifer Westcott.

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Another animated film for Christmas audiences. It is probably best suited for primary school aged children – and younger rather than older. At times there is quite some dialogue which might be a bit much for the youngers but they can enjoy the visuals.

We might have thought that the reindeers for pulling Santa's sleigh were above reproach. However, here some of them are coming to the end of their careers (and one of them, in fact, Donner, is revealed as taking too many cookies – and is voiced by John Cleese). So, there is a need for at least one replacement and Santa authorises a competition to select a substitute.

In the meantime, one of Santa's devious assistants (voiced by Martin Short) is planning to do away with the reindeers and substitute rather slick red vehicles to deliver the presents.

But, before we see the competition, we go to North Dakota to a Petting Farm, managed by a former baseball player who suffered from some misplaced focus, who is visited by a rather insistent journalist who wants to make her mark with a fresh story, and visitors who come to see the little goats' run as well as to see the reindeers do their expert running. In the meantime, the poor manager of the farm has been persuaded to do a deal with a most sinister-looking femme fatale, with the most sinister accent, dark glasses and cigarette holder (also voiced by Martin Short – who does some of the reindeers' voices as well). But that is not yet the centre of the drama.

There is an engaging little pony, Elliot (Josh Hutchison) who would love to be a reindeer and spends a lot of time practising reindeer movements – egged on by a pretty-in-pink, though sometimes raucously loud, goat, Hazel (Samantha Bee).

One doesn't need to be a political forecaster to know that Elliott will become part of the competition for Santa's reindeer (trying to be disguised with fake horns which do go askew), rivalling DJ, the competitive reindeer at the farm, persuading authorities to let him into the competition.

There is something of a tangle of themes with Santa not very happy about finding a pony in competition, with the evil associate pursuing his plans, with some rivalry from the other reindeers – leading to a crisis in which Elliott, inevitably, is the one who is able to save the day.

Then a nice moral choice: going home to his friends at the Petting Farm or becoming the next Santa-sleigh reindeer (or, rather, its equivalent). Fortunately, the film takes both possibilities

successfully.

Probably this review is written best for those parents – or grandparents – who might be taking the youngsters to see Elliott and know what's in store for them.

FANTASTIC BEASTS: THE CRIMES OF GRINDELWALD

UK, 2018, 134 minutes, Colour.

Eddie Redmayne, Johnny Depp, Jude Law, Katherine Waterston, Dan Fogler, Kevin Guthrie, Carmen Ejogo, Zoe Kravitz, Callum Turner, Ezra Miller, Alison Siddol, Claudia Kim.

Directed by David Yates.

The Fantastic Beasts series is written by J.K.Rowling. After her extraordinary success with the Harry Potter novels and films (and her alternate career as a crime writer, R.K.Galbraith), and the adaptation of the theatre story of Harry Potter, she has turned her energies to this series. The first film, Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, was very popular. Here is the second instalment.

And while there are some fantastic beasts, the most beastly character is the evil villain from the first film, Grindelwald, played by Johnny Depp, almost unrecognisable in appearance, gaunt, aged, white hair, distorted coloured eyes, but certainly with Johnny Depp's voice.

For those who don't remember all the details of the first film, it is probably a good idea to do a bit of revision before seeing this one, reminding oneself about Newt Scamander, played with a boyish and innocent raffish charm by Eddie Redmayne, the hero of the stories, as well as his American associate, Tina, Katherine Waterston. And, there is his hefty friend, Jacob, Dan Fogler. They all come into the action which becomes quite complicated, especially with flashbacks to Hogwarts and further flashbacks to the origins of Leta (Zoe Kravitz) and of Credence (Ezra Miller).

Fortunately, for comprehension, there is a meeting of a lot of the central characters in the latter part of the film, a discussion about origins, sorting out lost brothers and sisters, past stories in Africa and shipwrecks, sorting out who was who. (And it also emerges that Dumbledore, Jude Law, seen in flashbacks to earlier days teaching at Hogwarts, also has a lost brother...).

At the opening, Grindelwald is in prison in the US, to be deported to the UK, using his magic to defy the authorities, escaping to Paris where he institutes a huge plan to proclaim his leadership and draw his disciples to him – which he does, in a huge arena at the Pere Lachaise cemetery.

In the meantime, the British Ministry of Magic is pursuing him, Newt originally refusing, not liking to take orders, but persuaded by a visit from Dumbledore. There is also the complication of a new character, Newt's brother, Theseus, Callum Turner who is engaged to Leta.

There are mysterious goings-on at the French Ministry of Magic, the visit to an exceedingly elderly alchemist for advice, Jacob reuniting with his old flame, Queenie, Alison Sudol, and her being feted by Grindelwald.

So, if this is all attractive and interesting, then it is on with the journey of the fantastic beasts. The final sequence is set in a castle in Austria, Grindelwald and his disciple, more than a touch of the fascist, hints of Hitler...

GEULA/REDEMPTION

Israel, 2018, 100 minutes, Colour.
Moshe Folkenflik, Emily Granin.
Directed by Yosse Madmoni, Boaz Yehonatan Yaacov.

Winner of the Ecumenical Award at the Film Festival at Karlovy Vary (Czech Republic) 2018. The citation, written by a jury of Catholics and Protestants, reads:
Geula is about a man who goes through the process of redemption and reconciliation while trying to save his ill daughter. The jury awards the film “for overcoming all kinds of narrow-mindedness to discover the healing beauty of openness and hope; for showing that God and humanity cannot be confined just to a set of rules and that one has to have a courage to be; and for its artistic quality where cinematography serves the story adding another dimension to the experience of the struggle it tells.”

A review. This is a very human and humane film. While it would have an impact for Israeli audiences, it has a universal appeal.

Menachem is a religious man, observing kosher regulations, food, reverently touching lintels, avoiding touch with women.... Working in a supermarket, tending his six-year-old daughter, Geula, who has what could be a terminal illness. Menachem is a widower. He is serious, with a look of sadness, but is immensely cheered by the vitality, despite her illness, of his daughter.

We discover that he had been lead singer in a band 15 years earlier with the influence of rock ‘n’ roll. However, he had given up the music, becoming religious (not specifically Orthodox nor Hasidic) and wanted to study but this did not work out. Realising that the medical procedures for Geula were becoming more costly, he has the idea to revive the band, going to visit each of the three former members, some enthusiasm from two but hesitation from one who is now is a successful businessman, restaurateur. However, Menachem is persuasive.

He also comes alive as he sings. The music has traditional tones but often draws on scriptural texts. The group play at weddings, are successful, and bookings come in. Audiences will be moved by the liveliness of the music, impressed by the wedding guests and their total involvement in the music and their intensity – but only the men, a partition separating the women at the wedding celebration, their being able to look in through a gap in the partition.

Geula is able to continue her treatment because of the income, remaining cheerful despite the procedures. One of the members of the band suggests that they do an audition to play in a club, finally persuasive – but his fiancée comes with an appeal to Menachem that he give up the idea, she hoping to become pregnant and build a family.

Menachem’s religious behaviour includes a great deal of God-language, continually thanking God for whatever happens, good or bad, trusting in a Providence. It contrasts with the more

secular attitudes of some of his colleagues and the band. His religious outlook means that Menachem is a man of authenticity and integrity, guiding him and his decisions.

There are many attractive scenes of father and daughter, concern and care, love, hope.

GOOSEBUMPS 2: HAUNTED HALLOWEEN

US, 2018, 90 minutes, Colour.

Wendy McLendon-Covey, Madison Iseman, Jeremy Ray Taylor, Caleel Harris, Ken Jeong, Chris Parnell, Bryce Cass, Jack Black, Mick Wingert.

Directed by Ari Sandel.

Robert Lawrence Stine, R.L. Stine, has written a large number of fantasy stories, ghost and Goosebumps stories. Many of them have been transferred to television and some to the cinema screen. He has contributed to the writing, some of the production – and has some cameo appearances in the two Goosebumps movies.

This is a sequel to the 2015 Goosebumps starring Jack Black as Stine himself, becoming involved in the stories.

This film focuses on Halloween and has all the visuals, images and trappings of celebrating Halloween, some trick or treating, but also a vast range of ghosts and spectres, a haunted Halloween.

Some youngsters find a book, open it, and out come all the ghosts and goblins, led by ventriloquist doll called Slappy who finds his own voice and wants to take control of the story and all the characters. There is mayhem throughout the town. And Ken Jeong provides some comedy and extra mayhem.

Interestingly, there is a focus on the scientist, Nikolai Tesla, the tower in the town named after him – and all kinds of happenings with electricity and characters having to climb the tower.

Besides the children, there is also their mother involved in the goings-on, she finally being trapped by Slappy and her daughter having to leave the children to free her, tied at the top of the tower.

How to control the mayhem? The theory is that the book should be opened and all the creatures drawn back inside. Doesn't always happen. Finally, the girl uses her intelligence, tricks Slappy with a copy of Frankenstein which he thinks is the Halloween book – and all go back into the book, the girl telling Slappy he should not judge a book by its cover!

Towards the end, Stine himself, in the form of Jack Black, arrives, finds that he couldn't compose an ending to this particular story but now he can and put it in the cupboard along with all his other volumes.

A film for children more than adults – frightening for some, exhilarating for others, which is the point!

THE GRINCH

US, 2018, 86 minutes, Colour.

Voices of: Benedict Cumberbatch, Cameron Seeley, Rashida Jones, Angela Lansbury, narrated by Pharrell Williams.

Directed by Yaron Cheney, Scott Mosier.

The character of the Grinch, green and mean, has been very popular since he was invented by the famous storyteller, who provided so much entertainment for children, Dr Seuss. The Grinch is particularly associated with Christmas because the rest of the title is: How the Grinch Stole Christmas.

Once upon a time, in 1966, it was Boris Karloff who played The Grinch on television. Some years ago, there was a live-action version of the story using the full title. And The Grinch was played, hairy, green and mean, by Jim Carrey, drawing on all his mannerisms, facial tics, menacing voice... This particular version, simply titled The Grinch, is very much G/PG rated, very much geared towards children (and pleasing for those who remember the story from childhood). The Grinch is voiced, American style, by Benedict Cumberbatch, Dr Seuss's verses by singer, Pharrell Williams.

This is an animated film, the background of the town of Whoville situated in the mountains, in the winter, around Christmas. All very colourful. The townspeople are preparing for the celebration of Christmas, three times bigger than usual, the emphasis on gifts and goodwill. Even Angela Lansbury voices the mayor. (There is a pleasing brief sequence with reference to the Gospel story and the singing of carols and the basic meaning of Christmas.)

But, the Grinch! He is a misanthropic type, living in his cave on the mountain, shunning all human company, yet devoted to his dog, Max, who has all kinds of technical skills, especially with all the equipment in the Grinch's house. Everybody, including The Grinch, likes Max a lot. He also befriends (if that is the word) Fred the large reindeer who actually comes in handily to help the Grinch.

The Grinch comes into town only when he needs food and is completely irritated by the loud and good feelings, made even worse at Christmas. There are amusing scenes about his dislike of people – and his meanness towards them. Then he decides to dress as Santa and steal all the Christmas gifts – which he does.

Happy ending was rather difficult with Jim Carrey and his Grinch weirdness. However, here, there is not only a happy ending but very explicit themes of redemption! The Grinch encounters a little girl, Cindy Lou, who pleads with him about the gifts, help for her mother, the joy that he is depriving the town of. At first, this is not really easy, and The Grinch entangles himself in problems and needs to be rescued.

But, ultimately, with a great deal of heart-thumping, very nice words, The Grinch discovers humanity and humanity within himself. Dr Seuss created what might be called “moral fables” – and this version ends exceedingly happily, exceedingly morally, gifts returned, peace restored, and great hope in view.

INDIVISIBLE

US, 2018, 119 minutes, Colour.

Sarah Drew, Justin Bruening, Jason George, Tia Marie- Hardrict, Skye P.Marshall, Tanner Stine, Madeline Carroll, Michael O' Neill, Eric Close.

Directed by David P.Grant.

We learn very early that the “indivisible” of the title refers to the United States and the Pledge of Allegiance.

In fact, this is a very patriotic film with some substantial sequences in Iraq, including some action from the American troops and rebels in villages.

However, it should be said very early in a review that this is an American faith-based film. For more than a decade now, the United States has produced quite a number of faith-based films, designed especially for religious audiences, church-going audiences. They are intended as inspirational.

Most reviewers and most audiences are not attracted to faith-based films, finding difficulty in the God-language, the sentiment, the touch of preaching. However, it should be noted that the inspirational film is in itself a particular film genre (like romance, thriller, action show) which has its own particular conventions as do the other genres. The faith-based film needs to be appreciated for its intentions and how the intentions are communicated on screen. The faith-based film is meant to be edifying.

Some years ago *The Grace Card* was an above-average faith-based film. The director, David P.Grant, has now directed *Indivisible*, also an above-average faith-based film.

It is based on a true story (with photos of the central characters and their family included in the final credits). It is a story of chaplains. Even to that extent, it offers interesting material, most audiences not pausing to think what the role of the military chaplain is, what demands are made, what is the overall effect of being in support in combat, that chaplains could be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Which is what happens in this film.

While the director and writers have a religious background and the film is supported by various Baptist churches, the cast are better known than usual, having featured in a lot of television work, television series. Justin Bruening is Darren, previously a college chaplain, with a Masters in Ministry degree, sent to Iraq and to a base there in 2007. Sarah Drew plays his wife, Heather, mother of three children, having shared in her husband's Ministry. They live a happy and committed life.

However, across the street, Tonya and her two daughters are harassed by her angry and drinking husband. There is also a young unmarried woman with a son, criticised by her mother. And a young couple, she diffident and pregnant for the second time, fearful for her husband in action.

Darren, the angry man, Michael, Shonda, the unmarried mother, and the young man, Lance, find themselves together in Iraq. The commanding officer in Iraq, before the day's work, or before going into action, advises Darren “to do what you do”. Darren is a scripture man, quoting the Psalms, especially, very aptly and briefly – though, interestingly, not referring to

Gospel stories except for Jesus' crucifixion. Michael, on the other hand, advises Darren not to mess with his life, thinking that that is what chaplains do. And, after a fateful mission with deaths, Lance is very angry, asking all the familiar questions about God, not intervening to save people, allowing them to suffer.

Intercut with all the Iraq scenes are sequences concerning the wives, bonding, doing support work for their husbands, comforting otherwise in distress, visiting after a wife has received the sad news of her husband's death. There is a focus also on the children, Michael has teenage daughters, Darren's three children are devoted to him, one an asthmatic who has some crises, Heather trying to do her best to raise the three children by herself. One consolation in contemporary warfare is communication by phone and, especially, communication by Skype.

Darren experiences vehicles under sniper attack, his hands begin to tremble, he writes a diary, records himself talking, tapes for Heather to look at should he die.

There are harrowing moments in the latter part of the film, especially with Darren's reaction on return, distant, cold, even Heather telling him that he is mean. He does not cope well with the post-traumatic stress.

However, as we know, this is an inspirational film and there will be a positive ending. Almost needless to say, Darren and Heather have a continued ministry, Darren resuming his military chaplaincy, but their both working with soldiers, their wives, and stress.

Edifying and interesting.

THE MADNESS OF GEORGE III

UK, 2018, 135 minutes, Colour.

Mark Gatiss, Adrian Scarborough, Deborah Gillett, David Houslow, Nicholas Bishop, Stephanie Jacobs, Louise Jameson.

Directed by Adam Penford.

The longest-reigning King of England prior to Queen Victoria was George III, from the house of Hanover, who ruled from 1760 to 1820, 60 years. He is famous for having been the reigning monarch who lost the American War of Independence. He was also King for the explorations of Captain Cook in the Pacific as well as the sending of the First Fleet.

But, he suffered episodes which were interpreted as madness. His son George, the Prince Regent, later to be George IV, was in waiting to be proclaimed in his father's stead.

Alan Bennett, celebrated British playwright (*Lady in the Van*, *The History Boys*) became interested in the story in the early 1990s, the nature of mental illness, the relevance to the royal family, the Prince of Wales in waiting to ascend the throne... His play was very successful, being transferred to film in 1994 with Nigel Hawthorne as the king and Helen Mirren as the queen.

This is a filmed version of the play, performed in the Nottingham Playhouse. It is a play full of movement, many scenes, continual motion of the characters, elaborate scene changes, a re-

creation of private episodes, the medical treatment (mistreatment in many cases) of the king, the political background and machinations of parliament and the crown.

For those not familiar with the characters and with their history, this is an interesting opportunity to learn as well as to encourage further research.

George III is played by actor-writer, Mark Gatiss, well-known for theatrical performances as well as roles in film and television, including his portrayal of Mycroft Holmes in the television series, *Sherlock*, which he co-created and for which he wrote a number of screenplays, as well as appearing as Lord Cecil in the television series, *Gunpowder*. His performance is a tour de force, especially his having to perform the episodes of madness, the medical torture, his confused mental state and ways of communication. One believes, in watching Gatiss as the king, that he is actually experiencing the pain, the torture and madness.

Adrian Scarborough leads the supporting cast as the parson turned Dr Willis, who has his own asylum on a farm in Lincolnshire, taking over the management of the king, trying to master him and command him into subjection and cure (which he achieves), clashing with the bevy of doctors who are intent on their own particular methods, of blistering the legs and the scalp to bring out the poisons, a variety of medications, of examining the king's stools and urine. (In fact, there are many satirical lines on this kind of medical quackery.)

Interestingly, the three main doctors, the quacks, played by female actors, female actors also taking rolls of servants, political advisers, and even of Charles Fox, the Whig leader in the Parliament. Fox wants power despite his overt democratic declarations. In contrast, there is William Pitt the Younger, staving off Parliamentary votes about the king's madness and the taking over of George as the Regent, a dour man, whose own father had experienced madness. There is also the manipulative Lord Chancellor, Thurlow, changing sides, feathering his own political nest.

There is a sympathetic portrait of Queen Charlotte, Deborah Gillett.

Alan Bennett is always an articulate playwright often with a sense of ironic humour. This is to the fore in this production. It is an opportunity to appreciate Bennett's theatrical talent, to see quality performances, especially that of Mark Gatiss, and to delve into this 18th-century experience of the British monarchy.

NEW LIFE

US, 2016, 88 minutes, Colour.

Jonathan Patrick Moore, James Marsters, Erin Bethea, Terry O' Quinn, Barry Corbin, Bill Cobbs, Kris Lemche, Irma P. Hall.

Directed by Drew Waters.

New Life has a very positive tone about it – however, while there are themes of life, there are also themes of death and grief.

Many date the popularity of faith-based films on the commercial success of Mel Gibson's

The Passion of the Christ. For more than a decade, many of the faith-based films have been in the top ten box-office films at the time of their release. This has encouraged many similar films, finding an audience especially in the United States with the churches and Evangelical communities. This film fits the pattern of these faith-based films.

However, there is only one brief reference to church in New Life and, nuns are seen at an orphanage at the end of the film. Which means that this film could be described as faith-based, emphasis on faith, lower case. Probably the common denominator word for all of these films is “inspirational”. The film makers believe in values, creating stories which dramatise these values, something the equivalent of cinema sermons. As might be expected, there is a cinema-going public, television and downloading public, who do not like their entertainment to be so explicit in terms of values. Obviously, New Life is not geared towards that audience.

Rather, its appeal is to those one might call the converted, audiences who like films which could be called wholesome.

The narrative is fairly straightforward, much of it easily anticipated. In many ways, the audience knows where the film is going and they willingly go with it. Two children meet when they are seven, one a little American girl, the other a little boy who has come from the United Kingdom. As the years pass, they enjoy their friendship.

The main part of the film shows their friendship, their growing in love, some tensions as Ben (Jonathan Patrick Moore) studies architecture and design, intending to work with his successful father, but also in partnership with a friend, driving limousines. Ava (Erin Bethea) is studying at college away from home, putting some strain on the couple meeting, phoning, he having to drive, meals together, his being busy. Ava becomes friendly with a pleasant young man, an alternative after a quarrel with Ben. She also has a French roommate in whom she confides.

But, of course they reconcile, marry, start a happy home life, he with his architecture work, she with teaching children. When one of Ben’s designs is chosen for an important project, it means that he has to spend long hours at work, travelling to New York, putting a strain on the harmony of married life.

The most important aspect of the film, however, is illness, a dread diagnosis, treatment, concern from the parents of both Ben and Ava, treatment by a stern doctor... As audiences would suspect, there is some temporary respite, the recurrence of the illness...

Ben is very much affected by Ava’s illness and death – but, while he is deeply absorbed by grief, unable to respond to life, there is a providential opportunity offered him, an opportunity to choose life, be more outgoing, be hopeful...

The makers of the film have been connected with inspirational films for many years, the director being involved as an actor, and Erin Bethea, appearing in films with such titles as Fearless Faith, God’s Compass’.

While the film will appeal to its target audience in the cinema, it will have a life on television and other media for downloading and watching films.

THE NUTCRACKER AND THE FOUR REALMS

US, 2018, 99 minutes, Colour.

Mackenzie Foy, Keira Knightley, Helen Mirren, Morgan Freeman, Matthew Mc Fadyen, Jaden Fowora- Knight, Omid Djalili, Jack Whitehall, Richard E. Grant, Meera Syal, Ellie Bamber, Eugenio Derbez, Misty Copeland.

Directed by Lasse Hallstrom, Joe Johnston.

There have been quite a number of versions of the Nutcracker story, animated, live action, based on the story by the Russian author, Hoffman, but, probably, the best-known version is that of Tchaikovsky, the Nutcracker Suite. In fact, while this story is based on Hoffman's tale and the narrative tale for the Nutcracker ballet, there are excerpts from Tchaikovsky's Suite throughout the film – not entirely integrated with the plot, just a number of excerpts now and then.

This film is rather like an over-rich Christmas cake. Plenty of ingredients, all mixed together, some very tasty, some that you would put aside, some where one wonders why they are there in the first place.

The film was codirected by Swedish director, Lasse Halstrom, who has been directing a wide range of films for the last 40 years, especially in the United States. He is joined by action director, Joe Johnston. One might wonder which sections were directed by which director.

While the opening has the look of London, the family has very Germanic names, and, once the audience is taken into the Four Realms, the main castle looks like the Cathedral of St Basil in Moscow.

Matthew Mc Fadyen is a rather stern father, mourning his wife, trying to make emotional contact with his grieving daughter, Clara (Mackenzie Foy) demanding that she go to a party celebration with her brother and sister and dance with her father. Instead, she goes to the basement, finding a friendly inventor (Morgan Freeman looking and sounding Americanly bizarre in this context), wanting to open the gift of a decorated egg from her dead mother. It has the key to her future – and, we guess, she will be guided to look into herself and her strengths. She is.

For most of the action, she is led into the Four Realms, encountering a sympathetic Captain, going down a hole which is immediately a reminder of Alice in Wonderland, encountering strange and I would characters and Sugar Plum, all eccentric sweetness and light, Keira Knightley. There are some revelations About Clara actually is, the identity of Clara's mother, the effect of her leaving the Four Realms, and searing power struggles and Sugar Plum revealing sinister ambitions, bringing toy soldiers to life, mischievous mice, battles and some derring-do. And, Mother Ginger appears, played sympathetically by Helen Mirren.

All's well and ends with but it has been something of a gluggy journey to get there.

PATRICK

UK, 2018, 94 minutes, Colour.

Beattie Edmondson, Ed Skrien, Jennifer Saunders, Emilia Jones, Cherie Lunghi, Meera Syal,

Gemma Jones, Peter Davison, Adrian Scarborough, Emily Atack, Bernard Cribben, Tom Bennett.
Directed by Mandie Fletcher.

Who would have thought that a well-bred British pug would be named Patrick! But, he he is.

Review recommendations are easy this time:

- for dog lovers, of course.
- For dog non-lovers, of course not (except with the caution that Patrick might prove himself somewhat engaging by the end).

At the opening of the film, a genteel old lady is multi-coddling Patrick, spoiling him rotten (as they say). By contrast, Sarah, and we soon learn she is the old lady's granddaughter, experiences her partner leaving, collapses in a complete mess, overeating, oversleeping in compensation. She goes home for her grandmother's funeral, arriving late, picked on by her mother and her high-achieving sister, and, when the will is read, she learns that her grandmother has left her Patrick as a bequest.

In fact, Sarah does not like Patrick all that much and definitely does not want to take him home. But, she does. Initially, there is mayhem, a literal cat-and-dog fight, mess in the house, and in her neighbour's house, while Sarah goes on her first day on her new job at teaching English in high school, and Patrick eats, and eats, anything and everything. Will there be any bonding?

Sarah is played by Beattie Edmondson, daughter of comedian Adrian Edmondson of the Comic Strip – and her mother, who does appear in the film, is Jennifer Saunders. There are quite a lot of character actors in small roles, Cherie Lunghi and Peter Davison (a one-time Doctor Who), as her parents, Bernard Cribbins as an old widower, Gemma Jones as a neighbour with the dog, Meera Syal as the school principal, Adrian Scarborough as the initially prissy and over-critical teacher. And there are some younger players, romantic possibilities, including Ed Skrien as a vet and Tom Bennett as Ben, with whom she entangles, literally, while taking Patrick for runs in the park.

A lot of the action takes place in the school while Patrick is at home. Sarah has a recalcitrant class but she also brings a klaxon to bring them to attention and tells them the plot of Jane Eyre in rap style. There is a girl with problems, Emilia Jones, whom she helps. There is a sympathetic fellow-teacher, Emily Atack. That is where we find Jennifer Saunders, in the staff room, offering a different range of cakes every day!

The plot also involves a fund-raising run, Sarah absolutely reluctant, with the most gawky running style ever seen on screen, pressurised to do the run – and, eventually, getting their... just.

The very British film, British humour, obviously targeting dog-lovers of every age.

PEPPERMINT

US, 2018, 101 minutes, Colour.

Jennifer Garner, John Gallagher Jr, John Ortiz, Juan Pablo Raba, Annie Ilonczeh, Jeff

Hephner, Cailey Fleming, Eddie Shin, Method Man.
Directed by Pierre Morel.

As well as the savours of sweetness in peppermints, in peppermint ice cream, there is also the touch of the sharp and the bitter. At a crucial stage in this actioner, a little girl is enjoying a peppermint ice cream when she is killed.

Audiences know from the outset that this is going to be violent film because we see a deadly confrontation, the camera moving in on a shaking car, going inside the car, and Jennifer Garner killing the men within. And then the action moves to 5 years earlier. Explanations, yes. Justifications, perhaps?

The word used for this kind of film is, of course, vigilante. 45 years before Peppermint, Charles Bronson appeared in *Death Wish*, an ordinary citizen whose wife is raped and killed, who is so emotionally affected that he goes out into the streets to mete out justice, beyond the law. The film made an impact in the 1970s and was followed by several sequels. After that, the vigilante thriller became something of a genre with its particular conventions about crime, victims, revenge, justice, the role of the law, the vigilantes being seen as criminal on the one hand and hero on the other.

And so, Peppermint fits entirely into this genre. Where it is different is that the vigilante is female. Jennifer Garner appeared in the television series in the early 2000s, action lead in *Alias* (and then followed this as *Electra*). In the meantime, she has made a number of family films and romantic comedies but here, as Riley, she is more than back in action.

We learn that the villains of the piece are drug lords and drug dealers, merciless and vengeful, no scruples in killing Riley's husband who had been invited to be a driver by his partner in a car repair job but who had phoned to refuse.

Riley had been wounded in the attack but had escaped and disappeared for the five years, information then coming in that she had been involved in all kinds of martial arts and training.

Sometimes vigilantes also appear as "avenging angels" and this is what she seems. With expert skills, timing, ability to conceal herself, split-second action, she seems to be cleaning up the city. But, on a bus, she encounters a little boy and gives him a toy, only to find that the drunken father brutally throws the toy away – and she follows him into a store and gives him a lesson in child consideration that he will never forget. It is clear that while she is avenging, she also has the Guardian Angel qualities.

In the past, she had encountered a detective, Carmichael, John Gallagher Jr, as well as his superior, Beltran, John Ortiz. They become involved in completing the work they had been involved in five years earlier, tracking down Riley, working within the law, but not against her bringing down the drug lords, especially in the final violent confrontation where, once again, innocent children are involved, taken as hostage.

Riley is rugged, to say the least, and the film writers know this and provide possibilities for a sequel – and the suggestion would be that she should become part of Special Ops and might find some causes in Afghanistan or the Middle East! (The director is Pierre Morel who has had a successful career in France and in the US in this kind of action thriller, especially the

Liam Neeson action thriller, Taken.)

PUZZLE

US, 2018, 103 minutes, Colour.

Kelly Macdonald, Irrfan Khan, David Denman, Austin Abrams, Bubba Weiler.

Directed by Marc Turtletaub.

For the most of the time this is a rather quiet film – but it builds up a great deal of interior momentum, surfacing doubts, fears, angers.

The puzzle of the title is actually a jigsaw puzzle (and it is a remake of a very sympathetic Argentinian film of 2009, Rompecabezas). The setting this time is Bridgeport Connecticut with excursions into New York City.

The central character is Agnes, a sympathetic Kelly Macdonald, married for almost 20 years to Louis, who works in a garage (David Denman). They have two children, the older working in the garage but wanting to be a cook, and the younger preparing to go to college but wanting a gap year in Tibet with his Buddhist girlfriend.

What could be likely to happen in this family, especially with Agnes who has lived the life of a subdued housewife (taking it for granted), mother, church worker (with some scenes at the church, comments about lessening crowds for confession, receiving and wearing the ashes on Ash Wednesday)? Louis is a man who has lived an enclosed life, moving from home to garage to home, his hobby of fishing one of the most important things in his life, never watching the news, thinking his older son is lazy because he dislikes working in the garage, wondering about his younger son and his going to college.

There is a telling sequence at the beginning where Louis clumsily breaks a plate at a birthday party while Agnes is working and cooking – and the audience then discovering it is Agnes's birthday party – and Agnes searches for the pieces to put them together again. This prepares us for her response to one of the gifts, a jigsaw puzzle. She finds that she can put the puzzle together very quickly, feelings of exhilaration and achievement.

When she goes into New York to buy some more puzzles, she finds a number to text, someone wanting a puzzle partner. In a moment of daring, she texts and receives a reply. Without telling the family, she goes to New York to meet the partner, Robert (an inventor played by Irrfan Khan). She is very tentative, rather prim, not realising she is intrigued by Robert and his personality, way of life. They are very successful in working together at the puzzles – and he enrolls them for the championships.

What will happen to Agnes in this opening up of her life? Will she tell her husband or not? How will she deal with her sons and their hopes? What if she persuades Louis to sell their holiday home and property to fund their sons? What if she becomes emotionally involved with Robert?

These are the many questions which we would expect to be raised by the screenplay – and they are. We empathise with Agnes. We hope that Louis will change. We wonder what influence Robert will have on Agnes.

From quiet beginnings, serious questions, serious emotions, serious moral decisions.

This is a film about the lives of ordinary, very ordinary people – which most audiences could identify with, empathise with, even learn from.

ROBIN HOOD

UK, 2018, 116 minutes, Colour.

Taron Egerton, Jamie Foxx, Ben Mendelsohn, Eve Hewson, Jamie Dornan, Tim Minchin, Paul Anderson, Ian Peck, F.Murray Abraham.

Directed by Otto Bathurst.

Probably best to forget about most of the stories we know concerning Robin of Locksley, Robin Hood. The action of this film takes place before the outlaws of Sherwood Forest, this episode finishing as Robin, Marian, Little John and the others have to escape from Nottingham.

In fact, the initial voice-over advises audiences to forget all that they knew about the Robin Hood Legends. There is a rather ironic tone taken, tongue in cheek humour, an interpretation of Robin Hood for 21st-century audiences, especially those who have indulged in Marvel and DC comic hero films (reinforced by the style of the final credits, parallel to those used in these films).

With Tarn Egerton (the Kingsman films as well as The Rocket here as Elton John), we have the youngest of actors for Robin. He is the Lord of Locksley, he does encounter Marian who was involved in some shady thieving behaviour, they fall in love. However, he is drafted to go to the Crusades for four years, not to Palestine or Jerusalem, but to Arabia (echoes of contemporary Middle East intentions, the battle against Isis). Robin is a daring hero, Guy is when is a rather dastardly Conqueror, there is a back story of an Arab who opts to be called John – the tall Jamie Fox who becomes Little John.

Meanwhile, back in Nottingham, the dastardly sheriff (Ben Mendelson at his most dastardly) has been taxing the townspeople beyond their being, forcing them to work in suffocating mines. He has confiscated Robin's Castle and destroyed it. John has appreciated Robin's help in Arabia and is bent on some kind of vengeance, bonding with Robert, giving him extensive training in archery (introducing an extraordinary machine for firing arrows like a Gatling gun), perfecting Robert's skill and speed.

We can guess where this is going – however, Robin decides to fawn on the sheriff, pretending to be a donor and all the time robbing the sheriff and recycling his money. Marianne has teamed up with a very earnest reform, Will, but is involved in espionage in rebellion, along with an odd Friar Tuck. It becomes worse when the hypocritical church officials are revealed as plotting with the money – especially in the form of the beyond-Salieri Cardinal, F.Murray Abraham.

Audiences have never seen a mediaeval city looking like this, quite a different set design, including a mediaeval cathedral that looks nothing like a mediaeval cathedral! It all builds up to a dangerous climax, getting the people inside for revolution. All throughout the film, there

has been quite a lot of action, excitingly-paced.

And, it turns out, that the critics did not like this interpretation. And, it seems, that many audiences preferred the familiar story rather than this 21st-century version.

, for the record, this reviewer rather enjoyed it.

ROMA

Mexico, 2018, 135 minutes, Black and white.

Yalitza Aparicio, Marina de Rivera.

Directed by Alfonso Cuarón

Roma? Rome Italy? No, this Roma is a middle-class section of Mexico City. The setting is the early 1970s.

In fact, this film is a fictionalised memoir written by the director, Alfonso Cuarón (who has had quite a varied career with films in his native Mexico as well as a broad, a version of *The Little Princess*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *P.D. James Children of Men*, and Oscar for his direction of *Gravity*).

Roma has received quite a number of awards, including the Golden Lion in Venice, 2018, and Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film. (And, it could be noted that Roma won the SIGNIS (World Catholic Association for Communication) award in Venice.)

Technically, the film has won great acclaim for its qualities in black-and-white photography and its use of 65 mm film. It is a reminder of how much can be achieved and the beauty of black-and-white photography.

The film is quite episodic in its structure, a series of events that takes place over a year, events for a middle-class family, a devoted mother, her shock at her husband leaving her and her pretence that he is away in Canada on research, her four children, three boys and a little girl. The audience is taken inside the family, sharing the details of its life.

While the family events provide the framework for the film, the focus is on the young maid, Cleo, an indigenous woman from a village, only moderately educated, employed as a servant, but the children devoted to her. She figures in the episodes, the film providing a portrait of Cleo (expertly portrayed by Yalitza Aparicio), a contrast to the Hispania-Mexican[?] family in her slight appearance, her quiet and respectful manner.

Many have rightly commented that the film invites the audience into this world and immerses it in the world. There are episodes in the home. There is an episode where a big group of families goes on a holiday together, extroverted jollity, then everybody being called on to put out some forest fires at the back of the house.

On the personal side, Cleo has an encounter with a young man who vainly demonstrates his progress in martial arts. When she goes to the cinema with him and tells him that she is pregnant, he disappears, although she tracks him down at an extended sequence out in the countryside of people watching a large group of young men, going through their martial arts

paces, presided over by a Guru who asks them to do a simple movement, hands joined above their heads, one leg on eighth I and keeping balance – most of them are unable to do this but, in a quite simple way, Cleo achieves this.

There are scenes at the hospital where the sympathetic mother of the family takes Cleo and she is treated well by the doctor – and this will be repeated later in the film when Cleo gives birth. The background to this sequence of birth is quite powerful, Cleo going to a fashionable store for the family to buy her a cot for the baby, watching crowds of young people outside, joining for a protest, watching the police attack from the store windows, some of the young people pursuing others through the store (including the violent father of Cleo's baby). There is shooting, traffic is jammed, and urgency to get Cleo to the hospital.

There is a sequence towards the end when the mother takes the children, invites Cleo to the children's acclaim, to go to the seaside where she explains the family situation to the children. When they go into the surf, they go out too far and Cleo, who does not swim, quietly goes out to save them and bring them in.

A synopsis of the film might not seem too exciting but there is a humanity about the situations and characters, the memories of the director, which make an emotional impact.

And, at the end, the film is dedicated to Libo. In fact, she is the servant in the Cuarón family life whose life and devotion is dramatised on screen as Cleo.

THE SCHOOL

Australia, 2018, 86 minutes, Colour.

Megan Drury, Wil Mc Donald, Jack Ruwald, Alexia Santosuosso, Milly Allcock, Nicholas Hope, Leah Ashwood.

Directed by Storm Ashwood.

A very general and unrevealing title for a film! No, it is not the expected kind of school, definitely not.

This is a very small budget Australian feature by a young director and writer. He is wanting to draw on the traditions of horror films, nightmares... And this is what he presents. This is a film for devotees of the horror genre – although, there is not so much physical violence or gore on display here, but rather nightmare and menace, it might better be described as 'creepy'.

It takes a while to sort out what is actually going on, the audience immersed in a dramatic puzzle, a psychological puzzle, worlds of dream and reality.

The focus is on a skilful doctor (Megan Drury) and her career. However, she emerges from a drain into a mysterious basement, not knowing what has happened to her, sometimes getting flashes of illumination, remembering who she is. She has been professionally successful and the veteran doctor at the hospital (Nicholas Hope) is concerned about her welfare. Gradually, the audience realises that there have been tensions with her husband, his devotion to their son, her concentrating on her career and advancement, an accident for the son and his going into coma, her continued concern over so many months.

These are her memories. But there are also her nightmares, concerned about her son, the possibility of threats.

How real are the nightmares? She finds that she is in the remains of an old school, and that there are mysterious students still roaming the school, some very wary of her, some sympathetic, a number of small children and she tries to protect. But, there is also the arrogant leader of the young people, Zak (Wil Mc Donald). Audiences who might feel in a literary frame of mind as they watch the film might be reminded of *Lord of the Flies*.

And so, in and out of reality, in and out of nightmare, the mission for the doctor to save the children, to confront their violent and malicious leader. Who are the children? Have they been victims of neglect? The doctor and her saving mission – and some atonement.

So many films of this kind have been made, in Australia as well as in America, small-budget, independently produced, experiments in their own way – and an invitation to audiences who like this kind of genre to allow for some shortcomings but to encourage the writers and directors to continue with their film careers.

SECOND ACT

US, 2018, 103 minutes, Colour.

Jennifer Lopez, Vanessa Hudgens, Leah Remini Treat Williams, Milo Ventimiglia, Freddie Stroma, Charylene Yi, Alan Aisberg, Dave Foley, Larry Miller, Annaleigh Ashford.

Directed by Peter Segal.

Second Act is the kind of light entertainment that used to be referred to as a “women’s picture”. And, it will have a particular appeal to a female audience, especially with the strong characters all being women, men somewhat in the background.

Is also star vehicle for Jennifer Lopez who had been around in films for over 20 years, her heyday in the late 1990s, early 2000s. Her fans will appreciate her in *Second Act*, a strong screen presence.

She plays Maria, a very practical woman who has worked in sales in a supermarket, expecting to be promoted but powers that be noting that she has no major education background or degrees. Fortunately, she has three friends who work in the store, always helpful, always with advice – Leah Remini standing out as Joan, the kind of wisecracking, common-sensed friend (played in the long ago past by Eve Arden, in the recent past by Joan Cusack). Maria is in a somewhat tentative relationship with Trey (Milo Ventimiglia), a baseball coach who has a desperate desire to have a family. Maria does not.

And, a second act? Maria makes a wish on her birthday and Joan’s son, an ultra-computer whiz, decides to produce documents of top education qualifications, personal abilities (Peace Corps, climbing Kilimanjaro...!) As well as Facebook page. Maria gets an interview with a pleasant executive, Treat Williams, although she clashes with his daughter, Zoe, Vanessa Hudgens (10 years after her *High School Musicals*). Despite her apprehensions, Maria makes a good impression, gets a job – and, with her knowledge of and criticism about ineffective facial products, gets a commission to develop a better organic product while Zoe leads a team

to modify the current project and make it more organic than it has been.

Then, suddenly, although we realise it as it is happening, this is not exactly the second act that the action so far has indicated. It is much more – and audiences should have the opportunity to discover this for themselves without any advice or spoilers!

While Maria and Zoe are rivals, they also develop some bonds, especially in their dislike of the go-getting executive, Ron, the pushy scientist, Felix, who work with Zoe while Maria bonds with the very nervous assistant, Ariana, and the nerdy laboratory scientist, Chase. Not difficult to predict who wins – but it is interesting to see how they win and what they have developed.

But, of course, there is the issue of the truth and when and how Maria will confess it. Fortunately, she has the continued support of the three friends as well as her ingenuity in creating business and online sales.

Hollywood is often referred to as a dream factory and, in many ways, Second Act is one of those manufactured dreams. Could it happen in reality? We would like to think so – and it is enjoyable watching the roll-out of such a dream.

SHOPLIFTERS

Japan, 2018, 121 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Hirokazu Koreeda.

Japanese director, Hirokazu Koreeda, is a specialist in making films about ordinary people, opening up this world of ordinary people, of characters who are less well-off than the cinema audiences, but enabling those audiences to see how the other half live, their struggles for survival, the effect on their lives.

Koreeda has explored how children, orphaned, might organise their lives and survive for some time, a film called Nobody Knows. Of the film is in this vein include, Like Father, Like Son, Our Little Sister.

This time he invites us into a world of survivors, men and women, children, and an old grandmother.

But, the title is telling. While the group finds it hard to survive, one of their means is literal shoplifting. Almost immediately, we are in a supermarket, the father doing the shopping with a basket, a young boy scouting the goods, making signals, hiding things in his clothing, walking out of the store undetected.

The next sequence adds to the complexity of the story. On the way home, they call into a store and buy some croquettes, eating them happily as they walk through rather dingy streets, but glimpsing a little girl looking forlorn, offering her a croquette, overhearing her parents arguing about her. They take her to the very busy house, give her something more to eat, she responds happily, they try to take her home but are disturbed and bring her back to the family, her staying the night, the giving her a name, dressing her, keeping her – and they will later be accused by the police of kidnapping.

We get an opportunity to look briefly at the story of each of the characters at home. The shoplifting boy is an orphan. The grandmother presides – but we find her going to a wealthy family and getting a subsidy, later learning that there were some sordid aspects in her children's marriage, including infidelity and murder. A young adult daughter branches out to console men clients. Despite an exhilarating train journey and day at the beach, life is hard.

While what seems to have been something of a genial storytelling, despite the shoplifting at the opening of the film, it moves into more dramatic, or melodramatic situations, moving also towards resolutions which may well be for the better for each of the characters but make some harrowing demands on them.

SORRY TO BOTHER YOU

US, 2018, 111 minutes, Colour.

LaKeith Stanfield, Tessa Thompson, Jermaine Fowler, Omari Hardwick, Terry Crews, Kate Berlant, Michael X. Sommers, Danny Glover, Steven Yuen, Armie Hammer, Robert Longstreet, Forest Whitaker.

Voices of: David Cross, Patton Oswalt, Lily James.

Directed by Boots Riley.

This is an unexpectedly striking film. Judging by some blogging comments, a number of viewers have loathed it. But also judging by some blogging comments, many find it quite an exhilarating experience, serious, funny, realistic, imaginative, fantastic. This review will be in support of the latter view.

The film was written and directed by musician, singer and rapper, Boots Riley. It takes us into an African-American world in contemporary Oakland. We see the central character, Cassius (a versatile performance by La Keith Stanfield who appeared in *Get Out* and was the American official authority in *The Girl in the Spider's Web*) is spruiking for a job, false credentials, immediately exposed by the interviewer – but also immediately hired because he is committed to persuasion and that is what is needed for the job, telemarketing.

This is very much a message film about capitalism, oppression and exploitation, and the theme of “what does it profit to gain the whole world...?). But, while the message is familiar, this film communicated in idiosyncratically creative ways.

Cassius is living with Detroit (Tessa Thompson, an artist, who also support herself by creating and wearing big signs outside shops and diners). They also live in a garage. Cassius goes off to work, get his particular booth for phoning, the director using an amusing visual device of Cassius being lowered into the scene where he argues, cajoles, is cut off by potential clients. At first a failure, he is persuaded by his neighbour, the elderly Langston (Danny Glover – who uses his famous old saying from *Lethal Weapon* for his new situation! – to put on a white American voice and assume that kind of personality (David Cross supplying the voice). He is a great success and is on the verge of promotion.

Actually, there are quite a number of strains and subplots. The main one concerns a company called Worry Free, organised by an entrepreneur, Steve Lift (Armie Hammer also at his best). The commercials for Worry Free have to be seen to be believed, people signing away their

lives for perpetual work contracts and reduced to living in dormitories, canned food, the commercials praising this way of life and campaigning for others to join. There are some dire consequences as this particular strand is pursued.

There is another subplot concerning an extreme Reality TV show where a host encourages guests to be victims and to be bashed and humiliated on screen. And this will have its place and later consequences.

And, as well, there is a character called Squeeze (Stephen Yuen) who travels around to different workplaces, urging union activity, organising protests and demonstrations, with picket lines outside companies. Cassius and Detroit are caught up in the protests even as Cassius receives his promotion and is taken upstairs to become a Power Caller, living in luxury, and discovering some unhappy truths about contemporary capitalism, arms-deals and people-slavery.

And there is far more to come, far more, Steve Lift and his cohorts planning something even more drastic, moving the film into the realm of science-fiction, science-fantasy (including an unrecognisable Forest Whitaker who is one of the producers of this film).

And, of course, it doesn't end there and, while for a few moments it looked like a pat happy ending, it certainly isn't!

If this all seems too much, probably let it go. If this sounds the least bit intriguing, certainly go to see Sorry to Bother You.

STRANGE COLOURS

Australia, 2017, 86 minutes, Colour.

Kate Cheel, Justin Courtin, Daniel P.Jones.

Directed by Alena Lodkina.

When considering Strange Colours, it is best to check one's mood, to check one's admiration for cinematic colour photography, to check one's interest in small-budget Australian dramas. If the answer comes up that these are important, then this film, supported by the Venice Biennale as well as Australian government film offices, goes on to the list. On the other hand, if the answer comes up that sometimes these are not so important, then best to check on reviews of the film.

For many, this is an admirable film from a young director, Alena Lodkina, Russian background, her first film, her writing and directing. For others, it is a very slow-burner, probably too slow for those who prefer pace rather than feeling like they are watching paint drying. Certainly diverse opinions.

The strange colours of the title actually refer to opals, very strikingly presented as background to the final credits. The location for this film is lightning Ridge, north-western New South Wales, a mixture of outback, desert, bush, mines. And, of course, the title could refer to the strange colours of the different characters.

There is some initial focus on mining and drilling but also highlighting the consequences for

health, a young woman giving up her studies to come to visit her mining father from whom she has become alienated. He is impatiently in hospital, ready to get out.

The camera follows the young woman and the range of townspeople she meets, setting up in the house, getting some help from the locals, invited into their way of life, satisfying for those who are mining and looking for the opals, but also satisfying for those who are happy to move out of the big cities, preferring the isolation of the bush.

There are some emotional issues which come to the fore, a young woman coming to terms with her father, a rough diamond (opal) if ever there was. There is also an agreeable man to whom she forms an attachment, swimming, the sexual advance which he rejects – and her having to discover his traumatic story. There are some genial old blokes around Lightning Ridge, the pub where some of the young and old blokes go, pool tables, the young woman beginning to feel at home.

Whatever the response to the film, admiration or feelings of tedium, the audience can appreciate that this is a visit to a town that that very few are likely to visit and an opportunity to see and reflect on the characters and their way of life.

STUDIO 54

US, 2018, 98 minutes, Colour.
Directed by Matt Tyrnauer.

Studio 54 had fame and notoriety at the end of the 1970s, a disco nightclub in central New York City, becoming a venue for the rich and famous and for the would-be rich and famous. Its popularity lasted only a short time but it became part of the consciousness of New York City and its lifestyle. A feature film, *54*, was directed by Michael Christopher in the latter part of the 90s – somewhat truncated for release and a longer director's cut released a decade later.

Which means that cinemagoers do have some awareness of Studio 54 and of its flamboyant part-owner, Steve Rubell (played by Mike Myers in the film). The film focused on life in the club, the attraction for young men to work there, friends, celebrities, drugs, sex. At the end of the film, there was an indication of what would happen in terms of the IRS examining the files on the books and Steve Rubell going to prison. This documentary, while highlighting the high life, takes the story on after 1980.

Ian Schrager, the co-owner and manager of Studio 54, was not a character in the feature film. Here he is centre screen. After almost 40 years of reticence, he is prepared to look back to the past, his friendship with Steve Rubell and growing up with him, their venture in buying the CBS studio and redecorating it elaborate, a gala opening which attracted crowds and the media, the continued success, the notoriety, media response, the range of famous people and faces who visited (and these are prominent in the footage and photos of the period).

However, Ian Schrager preferred to work behind the scenes, enjoying the life of the club, caught up in the IRS difficulties, issues of liquor licenses, going to court with Steve Rubell, with the famous Roy Cohn, of the Mc Carthy era (and key character in Tony Kushner's

Angels in America) as their defence. Substantial footage of Cohn appears in this film.

Steve Rubell was homosexual, contracted AIDS, died in 1989. Ian Schrager emerged from prison, the two men buying hotels and setting up boutique hotels, Schrager continuing over the succeeding decades and making a considerable name for himself – and, with the advice of the lawyer who prosecuted them, pardoned by President Obama in 2017.

A glittery story of rise and fall.

THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD

UK/New Zealand, 2018, 99 minutes, Black-and-white/Colour.
Directed by Peter Jackson.

This documentary, sponsored by the Imperial War Museum in London, as well as by committees for the celebration of the armistice to and World War I, is a very striking cinema experience.

It was directed by New Zealander, Peter Jackson, Oscar-winner for his third film in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, director of horror films in his early career, a transition to drama with Heavenly Creatures, following up Lord of the Rings with the Hobbit films, creating a version of King Kong as well as The Lovely Bones.

Jackson is rightly admired as a technical innovator as well as a creative writer-director.

On the one hand, audiences will be moved at this re-creation of British troops fighting on the continent. On the other hand, the creative technical aspects of the film will elicit great admiration.

For those familiar with World War I history, this is a visual and audio recreation, beginning with the outbreak of the war, moving to the enthusiasm for enlisting, the hopes that the war would be over soon, the young men from all walks of life joining up. It explores the training, over a few weeks, before the soldiers moved across the Channel. The narrative follows the young men as they go into action, move into the trenches, the hardships of life in the trenches, yet the fellowship that was built up. The narrative concentrates on this small group, the preparation for going over the top, the personalised warfare as the men ran through the no man's land for combat with the German soldiers, rifles, machine guns, bayonets. There was also the discovery that the German troops and their trenches were like the British, very similar – and, ultimately, wishing that the war was over. There are many deaths, atrocious wounds, medics, carrying the wounded, the burial of the corpses on the battlefield.

Audiences may have expected the film to end with the armistice but it continues on with the soldiers returning, difficulties with unemployment, the refusal to employ soldiers, so many in the population not understanding or appreciating what the soldiers had been through.

This narrative is communicated in striking technical ways. Throughout the film, there is continued voice-over by veterans of the war, audio interviews supplied by the Imperial War Museum, edited in such a way that the narrative is continuous and relates to the range of visuals which have been chosen.

The visuals range from initial newsreel footage of the outbreak of the war, patriotism and enlistment, details of the military training, embarkation to go across the Channel. However, there was not a great deal of footage of actual close-up warfare. Instead, this film relies on sketches, two-dimensional cartoons, expertly chosen to illustrate the grimness of warfare, especially in close-up, the camera moving in, providing extreme close-ups to communicate very effectively what the experience of battle was like.

But, there was film of the soldiers themselves, the trenches, carrying and tending to the wounded. Peter Jackson and his team have restored this footage, adapted the pace from the speed with which it went through the projectors then and now. He arranged for lip readers to watch the footage and write down what the soldiers were saying so that these words could be dubbed, audiences feeling that they were listening to the actual men. And then the sequences have been colorised, making a vivid impression of action, sound, colour – realism.

For audiences who want to appreciate something of the atmosphere of World War I, albeit through a small group of British soldiers and a limited focus on their action, this is an important and moving film.

WIDOWS

US, 2018, 129 minutes, Colour.

Viola Davis, Liam Neeson, Michelle Rodriguez, Elizabeth Debicki, Cynthia Erivo, Colin Farrell, Robert Duval, Brian Tyree Henry, Daniel Kaluuya, Jacki Weaver, John Bernthal, Garrett Delahunt, Lukas Haas.

Directed by Steve Mc Queen.

This is a film for those who enjoy a complex drama but, especially, for those who are fans of crime novels and films, detectives, investigations, betrayals...

The screenplay has been adapted by the director, Steve Mc Queen, from Lynda La Plante's story, adapted for British television in the 1990s. While Mc Queen is a celebrated British director (with quite a wide range from the Irish Troubles drama, *Hunger*, to the exploration of male sexuality, *Shameless*, to his Oscar-winning *12 Years a Slave*), he has transferred the action to Chicago.

In many ways, this is a very ugly Chicago. After a very intimate scene between Viola Davis and Liam Neeson (which has quite some dramatic repercussions throughout the film), there is a dramatically staged heist and chase, ending disastrously with the deaths of the thieves. The widows of the title are those of the men killed in the ill-fated chase and explosion. The leader of the gang from the robbery is Harry, played by Liam Neeson. His widow is a tough woman, Veronica, Ronnie, played by Viola Davis, expert in her variety of roles in film and on television. There is also Linda, Michelle Rodriguez, a great opportunity for her and versatility in comparison with her continued presence in the *Fast and Furious* franchise. The other widow is Alice, from a Polish background, played by Elizabeth Debicki, also a very versatile actress (*The Great Gatsby*, *The Night Manager*, *Breath*) – with a nice touch of casting with Jacki Weaver playing her mother.

So, those are the widows and how they became widows.

But, there is quite some political and political corruption in the foreground. Two American-African brothers are working towards nomination and election in the local ward. They have a great deal to do with the money that was robbed. And, one of the brothers, Daniel Kaluuya (also versatile when we think of *Get Out* and *Black Panther*) is a brutal and callous thug, not shrinking from any violence.

On the other hand, there is a long-time boss, Tom Mulligan (Irish tone) who is played by 86-year-old Robert Duvall, also versatile over a very long career, playing a man who knows he is boss, and he dominates his son, Colin Farrell (versatile actor again) wanting to prolong the dynasty.

It is very clear from the trailer that the women are going to join together to steal back the heist cash. In the latter part of the film, we see more of the characters, Ronnie dominating them, Linda and Alice having to do deals to get vans, buy guns, the women and their target practice. But, they need a driver – and she comes in the form of Linda's babysitter, Belle, played by Cynthia Erivo (an award-winning singer who made such an impression in *Bad Times at El Royale*).

There is quite a twist towards the end of the film which gives the action a great deal of further energy. And, the re-take robbery does not go entirely as planned.

As has been said, those who like the genre conventions should find this thriller very entertaining, backed by sharp writing and plotting and that excellent cast.