



NEW RELEASES

The Father

Anthony is 81 years old. He lives alone in his London apartment and refuses all of the nurses that his daughter, Anne, tries to impose upon him. Yet such a necessity is becoming more and more pressing for her, as she can't see him every day anymore: she has taken the decision to move to Paris to live with a man she has just met...

But if such is the case, then who is this stranger who suddenly bursts into Anthony's living room, claiming to be married to Anne for over ten years? And why is he claiming with such conviction that they are at the supposed married couple's home, and not his? Is Anthony losing his mind? Yet he recognises the place: it is indeed his apartment, and only just the night before was Anne reminding him of her divorce... And didn't she decide to go and live in Paris? Then why is she now insisting that this was never the case?

There seems to be something going around, as if the world, for a moment, has ceased to be logical. Unless his daughter, and her new companion, are the ones trying to make him appear as crazy? Is their objective in fact to rob him of his apartment? Do they want to get rid of him? And where is Lucy, his other daughter?

Astray in a labyrinth of answerless questions, Anthony desperately attempts to understand what is going on around him. *The Father* is about the painful trajectory of a man whose reality crumbles little by little before our eyes.

Yet it is also the story of Anne, his daughter, who faces an equally painful dilemma: what must she do with her father? Should she take him with her, even if that means compromising her life with Paul? Does she have the right to live her own life? What happens when one must become parent of one's own parents?

It is an inescapable fact of life that for every relationship between a parent and a child, there is a moment in time where the child becomes a carer, and the parent a dependent.

This is at the core of *The Father*. It is a beautifully wrought family drama that brings together Academy Award winners Anthony Hopkins and Olivia Colman in a heart-rending account of what happens when a relationship which has coloured our every waking moment for decades suddenly and irrevocably changes.

Making his debut as film director is the award-winning French playwright, Florian Zeller, who shares the writing duties with his long-time collaborator and translator Christopher Hampton. Florian steers a dazzling cast headed by Anthony Hopkins and Olivia Colman as an elderly father and his middle-aged daughter struggling to adapt to changed circumstances.

Florian Zeller, who has moved into cinema from the world of theatre, is accustomed to building a relationship with the audience which he describes in French as '*ludique*' – best understood as 'playful'. Far from film's common role as a naturalistic medium, audiences will discover that what we see on the screen does not necessarily give us a true version of the world.

In *The Father* we experience the world through the prism of the character Anthony's confusion, as his dementia set in motion a gradual decline effecting

every part of his reality. But this is not just a film about dementia, and he is more than an unreliable narrator. He is at the centre of a struggle which gives *The Father* elements of both thriller and horror – with Anthony’s mind as the unremitting nemesis. In the words of the director, the audience should feel as if they are ‘groping their way through a labyrinth.’

Despite such apparently dark subject matter, *The Father* is built on a foundation of human empathy, with moments of laughter and even a sense of joy. It celebrates the unbreakable bond between parent and child as they are locked together on a journey into the unknown.

Production notes

Florian Zeller’s assured, elegantly nightmarish film of his 2012 play – deftly transposed to the screen in collaboration with Christopher Hampton – stretches the conceit of the unreliable narrator to a desolate vanishing point.

Zeller’s stage production was previously the inspiration behind the French film *Florida* (2015), a relatively breezy take on the vagaries of old age, significant for providing Jean Rochefort with a startling late career high. *The Father* has done something similar for the octogenarian Anthony Hopkins, providing a somewhat unexpected second Oscar triumph. With a role modified for the screen with Hopkins in mind, this direct adaptation offers a similarly arresting showcase for a veteran’s skillset – a formidable portrayal of an unmoored mind that’s arguably the actor’s finest performance since *The Remains of the Day* in 1993.

At first, it appears that Zeller is playing things fairly straight. A rare exterior shot tracks Anne (Olivia Colman) en route to the capacious Maida Vale flat where her father, Anthony, stubbornly resides alone. A retired engineer who has dementia, Anthony gripes to Anne about his caretaker, suspecting the theft of his precious watch (the absent timepiece becomes a recurring manifestation of his temporal dislocation).

It’s shortly after this initial meeting that we’re left as wrong-footed as Anthony is. In subjectively representing his central character’s fogged perception, Zeller deploys a series of increasingly disorienting transitions. Anthony is spooked by the sudden appearance of seeming imposters in his home, while others’ identities get muddled. He imagines being smothered by Anne, and beaten by her husband. The abrupt entrances and exits within the flat’s four walls betray the film’s stage origins; yet they also bear a trace of the uncanny air that informed Robert Altman’s psychodrama *Images* (1972). The skilful editing, by Yorgos Lamprinos, enhances the disquiet considerably.

So many films detailing mental deterioration are defined by their interior domestic spaces, from *Repulsion* (1965) to what is apparently *The Father*’s closest forerunner, Michael Haneke’s *Amour* (2012). Here, Zeller finds subtle ways to render Anthony’s home ever more unfamiliar: lighting cues, colour changes, camera angles, unexplained omissions. The backgrounds – at first filled with Anthony’s books, music and paintings – dwindle and empty as time goes on, a gradual subtraction of a life’s connective fabric.

Set against these shifting surroundings, Hopkins’s monumental display of confusion and despair is painfully convincing, not least in the film’s wrenching final scenes, which nevertheless close on a contemplative – or perhaps bitterly ironic – image of defiance and dignity.

Matthew Taylor, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2021

THE FATHER

Director: Florian Zeller

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Production Companies: F Comme Film, Trademark Films, Ciné-@

Presented by: Sony Pictures Classics, Les Films du Cru, Film4

In association with: Orange Studio, Canal+, Ciné+, Embankment Films

Executive Producers: Héroïse Spadone,

Alessandro Mauceri, Lauren Dark, Ollie Madden,

Daniel Battsek, Hugo Grunbar, Tim Haslam, Paul Grindey

Producers: Christophe Spadone, Simon Friend

Produced by: David Parfitt, Jean-Louis Livi, Philippe Carcassonne

Screenplay: Christopher Hampton, Florian Zeller

Based on the play The Father [Le Père] *by:* Florian Zeller

Director of Photography: Ben Smithard

Editor: Yorgos Lamprinos

Production Designer: Peter Francis

Costume Designer: Anna Mary Scott Robbins

Music: Ludovico Einaudi

Production Sound Mixer: Will Whale

Cast

Anthony Hopkins (*Anthony*)

Olivia Colman (*Anne*)

Mark Gatiss (*the man*)

Imogen Poots (*Laura*)

Rufus Sewell (*Paul*)

Olivia Williams (*the woman*)

Ayesha Sharker (*Doctor Sarai*)

Roman Zeller (*boy*)

New Zealand/UK/France 2020

96 mins

Courtesy of Lionsgate Films

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Censor + Q&A with director Prano Bailey-Bond

Thu 1 Jul 20:45

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 5 Jul 18:00

African Odysseys Present: European Premiere:

The Milkmaid + Q&A with writer-director Desmond Ovbiagele and producer Oluseun Sowemimo

Sat 10 Jul 14:00

Black Lens Festival Opening Night: UK Premiere:

How to Stop a Recurring Dream + Q&A with director Ed Morris and actor Ruby Barker

Fri 16 Jul 18:00

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Girlfriends

Fri 16 Jul 18:15

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Member Picks: Rumble Fish

Fri 2 Jul 17:30

Projecting the Archive: Trottie True (aka The Gay Lady) + intro by BFI Curator Josephine Botting

Tue 6 Jul 18:00

Silent Cinema: Nell Gwyn + intro by BFI Curator Bryony Dixon

Sun 18 Jul 15:30

Seniors' Free Archive Matinee: Cabin in the Sky

+ intro by writer Marcus Powell

Mon 19 Jul 14:00

Experimenta: Born in Flames + discussion

Thu 22 Jul 18:00

Relaxed Screening (tbc)

Tue 27 Jul 18:00

Terror Vision: Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things

Thu 29 Jul 21:00

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NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

After Love

From Fri 4 Jun

The Reason I Jump

From Fri 18 Jun

The Father

From Fri 25 Jun

Nashville

From Fri 25 Jun

Ultraviolence

From Fri 25 Jun

Sat 26 June 14:20 + Q&A with director Ken Fero and contributor Janet Alder

Supernova

From Fri 2 Jul

Another Round

From Fri 9 Jul

Jumbo

From Fri 9 Jul

Deerskin

From Fri 16 Jul

Girlfriends

From Fri 23 Jul

Mandabi

From Fri 23 Jul

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