



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

In the Cut

In one of *In the Cut*'s early scenes, English professor Frannie is teaching her students about Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. They look bored, apathetic. One complains that all that happens in the book is 'some old lady dies'. Frannie asks how many women have to die to make it interesting. 'At least three,' comes the reply. A sensuous study of desire and masochism wrapped around a straight-up thriller (or perhaps vice-versa), *In the Cut* gives us three murdered women to keep these students interested while director Jane Campion attends to more troubling preoccupations. The result is one of her most provocative and complex films yet.

Largely faithful to Susanna Moore's compelling if slightly airless novel, *In the Cut* plays out like *Bluebeard* meets *Sea of Love* for the *Sex and the City* generation. Meg Ryan's Frannie and her half-sister Pauline are urban singletons, almost burnt out with bad relationships. Pauline, who lives above a friendly strip bar, has started specialising in safely unavailable married men while Frannie is practically celibate. Their distrust of men seems to have set in early due to a caddish father, seen courting Frannie's mother on a frozen lake in an oneiric flashback in which his skates score lines of blood into the ice and later amputate her mother's legs, surreal touches reminiscent of the fantasy sequences in Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Nearly every man here has the potential to transmute into a killer, from Frannie's student Cornelius with his John Wayne Gacy obsession, to her ex John Graham, an actor training to be a doctor and therefore familiar enough with anatomy to 'disarticulate' (an apt word in a film preoccupied with language) women's limbs. Even Frannie's love interest, the elusive Detective Malloy who promises Frannie he can be 'whoever [she] wants him to be', shows a disturbing side while joking with his partner Rodriguez (who himself tried to kill his wife). They josh that all men need from a woman is a 'hole, tits and a heartbeat'. Upping the misogynist ante, Malloy observes, 'You don't even need the tits.' Rodriguez goes one further: 'Or the heartbeat.'

What makes the film so provocative is that the more things point to Malloy being the killer, the more Frannie is drawn to him, turned on not just by his cunnilingus technique but also by his potentially lethal power. A woman of few, choice words, attracted to a man with a gift for spiel and animal magnetism, Frannie's relationship with Malloy recalls the sexual chemistry between Holly Hunter's mute, cerebral Ada and Harvey Keitel's gone-native Baines in *The Piano*. The sex scenes are especially pungent, scored with a kind of electronic keening on the soundtrack, and marked by a fetid grubbiness in the set design. The outstanding use of New York locations emphasises the sweltering atmosphere: scenes are observed as if through a heat haze of desire. The work of cinematographer Dion Beebe (*Holy Smoke*) is nothing less than extraordinary. Particularly innovative is the use of the travelling focal point that defocuses most of an image apart from one key detail in the frame, suggesting a sort of ecstatic subjectivity, a correlative of the 'bitch vision' Cornelius boasts of mastering in his prose. The poetic look of the movie interlocks nicely with its literary sensibility. Frannie's eye is often drawn to the poems posted on the subway, which comment obliquely on the action.

As finely wrought as *In the Cut* is, one could argue that it fails as a genre exercise. Experienced thriller fans will guess the killer quicker than it takes to recite an Emily Dickinson poem. But once the mystery's burned away, what's left is a minutely etched study in mood and female psychology.

Leslie Felperin, *Sight & Sound*, November 2003

Jane Campion on 'In the Cut'

In the cut, much like The Piano and The Portrait of a Lady, deals with female masochism.

I think I relate to emotional masochism rather than physical because I hate to hurt myself or to see someone else hurting themselves. Susanna Moore's book is quite nihilistic and deals directly with female self-sacrifice – even when she's dying (which she does in the book), the lead character Frannie is imagining how her male killer would see her, wondering if he'd notice she'd scratched him and his flesh is under her fingernails. In our culture male ideas so dominate our psyches we tend to think of ourselves through a male screen. It's inherent in the myths of romance and love we live with – if you haven't got a man loving you or you're not in a relationship it's as if you're not alive, as if what happens to you has no value.

You seem to be developing a riposte to existing gender mythologies.

I enjoyed making this film because I got the opportunity to read a lot of poems and to think about love, romance and sex and how they've infested people's psyches. And it's not often you see sex on screen that's designed to be pleasurable for the woman.

Meg Ryan reinvents herself as an actress to play Frannie, much as Nicole Kidman did in The Portrait of a Lady. Is it important for you to find new aspects to your actors?

I think Nicole had got stuck in a string of bad Hollywood movies that were depressing her, and Meg felt the same. She'd started getting acting coaching and a coach called Sandra Secat called me and said I should audition her. I hadn't thought of her, but she's an amazingly emotional actress.

She has referred to Klute as an inspiration for her acting style, but there's also an aspect of Nicole Kidman there. Was that deliberate?

They look similar, but we didn't try to make her look like Nicole. We did think of Jane Fonda in *Klute* and also of Antonioni's styling in *Blowup*. I looked at Coppola's *The Rain People* as well for its *vérité* style and at *The Godfather* for the acting style.

You've combined a naturalistic acting style with rich textures in the cinematography.

It's an observing camera most of the time. I did storyboard it, but tended to throw them away and find the scene as we were doing it. And we were very influenced by the locations.

The film couldn't be set anywhere but New York.

New York is a magnet for hopes and dreams, as well as a port where people who once had those dreams still hang around. I think of Pauline as a veteran of too many sexual adventures. She isn't dismal, though – she has problems but she's intelligent about them.

The city is very eroticised in the film.

Much of the eroticism comes from the locations dictated by the story. Pauline lives above a strip joint, and the one we used actually exists. We knocked on the door of the flat above it and there were students living there. The red lighthouse is clearly a phallic symbol, but with all these images I tried not to oversweat them. What I focused on was getting the detective story working well in the hope everything else would take care of itself.

Jane Campion interviewed by Lizzie Francke, *Sight & Sound*, November 2003

IN THE CUT

Directed by: Jane Campion
©: Pathé Productions Ltd.
Production Companies: Screen Gems, Red Turtle
Executive Producers: François Ivernel, Effie T. Brown
Producers: Laurie Parker, Nicole Kidman
Associate Producer: Ray Angelic
Pathé Head of Physical Production: Susanna Wyatt
Production Manager: Christopher Goode
Production Co-ordinators: M.J. Magbanua, Lara Ford
Production Accountant: Sean Hogan
Location Managers: Gayle Vangrofsky, Chris Marsh
Post-production Supervisor: Gordon MacPhail
2nd Unit Director: Laurie Parker
1st Assistant Director: Timothy Bird
Script Supervisor: Mary Cybulski
CASTING: Billy Hopkins, Mark Bennett, Suzanne Smith, Kerry Barden
Screenplay: Jane Campion, Susanna Moore
Additional Screenwriting: Stavros Kazantzidis
Based on the novel by: Susanna Moore
Script Consultant: Stavros Kazantzidis
Director of Photography: Dion Beebe
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Nils Benson
Camera Operator/2nd Unit Operator: Nils Benson
Visual Effects: Animal Logic, Andrew Brown
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Drew Jiritano
Graphics Design: Nils Benson
Edited by: Alexandre de Franceschi
Production Design by: David Brisbin
Art Director: David Stein
Set Decorator: Andrew Baseman
Property Master: Dan Boxer
Costume Designer: Beatrix Aruna Pasztor
Wardrobe Supervisors: Laura Downing, Robert Tesar
Make-up Designers: Noriko Watanabe, Neal Martz
Special Effects Make-up: Neal Martz
Key Hair Stylist: Lori Guidroz
Title Design: Andrew Brown
Main Titles: Animal Logic
Digital Optical Effects: Atlab, Anthos Simon
Music Composed by: Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson
Conductor: Árni Hardarson
Sound Designer: Peter Miller
Production Sound Mixer: Ken Ishii
Boom Operator: Schavaria Reeves
Re-recording Mixer: Martin Oswin
Supervising Sound Editor: Andrew Plain
Dialogue Editors: Linda Murdoch, Nicholas Breslin
Stunt Co-ordinator: Julius Le Flore

Creative Consultants: M.J. Robinson, Joshua Green, Anthony Vasquez, Detective Michael De Lorenzo, Detective Hal Sherman, Detective Craig Weinberg, Detective Arthur Nascarella, Susan Batson, Carl Ford, Roberta Wallach, Penny Allen, Sandra Seacat, Jorge Muniz, Louis Brown, Antonio Ferrera
'Thank you fabulous Kevin Bacon!!!'
Thanks to: 'Mayor' Harvey Keitel
Dedicated to: Alice Allegra Englert
Animal Wrangler: Steve McAuliff, Animal Actors Inc
Unit Publicist: Robert Levine

Cast

Meg Ryan (*Frannie*)
Mark Ruffalo (*Detective Malloy*)
Jennifer Jason Leigh (*Pauline*)
Nick Damici (*Detective Rodriguez*)
Sharrieff Pugh (*Cornelius Webb*)
Michael Nuccio (*Frannie's young father*)
Alison Nega (*young father's fiancée*)
Dominick Aries (*attentive husband*)
Susan Gardner (*perfect wife*)
Heather Litter (*Angela Sands*)
Daniel T. Booth (*Red Turtle bartender*)
Yaani King, Frank Harts, Sebastian Sozzi, Zach Wegner (*Frannie's students*)
Patrice O'Neal (*Hector, Baby Doll bouncer*)
Funda Duyal, Theo Kogan (*Baby Doll bartenders*)
Sandy Vital, Sharon Riggins, Karen Riggins, Nancy La Scala, Ami Goodheart (*Baby Doll dancers*)
Upendran Paniker (*taxi driver*)
Kendra Zimmerman (*café waitress*)
Michelle Hurst (*teacher at Frannie's school*)
Sunrise Coiley (*Frannie's young mother*)
Hal Sherman (*forensic detective*)
Dana Lubotsky (*laundry room murder witness*)
Jacinto Taras Riddick (*detective in precinct*)
Arthur Nascarella (*Captain Crosley*)
James Firo (*Detective Halloran*)
Cordell Clyde (*informer*)
Tim House (*Baby Doll bar customer*)
Julius Le Flore (*cursing motorist*)
Vinny Vella Sr (*concerned bystander*)
Kevin Bacon (*John Graham*)*

USA 2003

119 mins

* Uncredited

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