



TERROR VISION

The Shout

Jeremy Thomas on 'The Shout'

I came back to England via a short stay in America, and a friend called Michael Austin, who has since written screenplays for Fred Zinnemann and the script of *Greystoke*, wanted to make a film of a short story, 'The Shout', by Robert Graves. It was my idea to have Skolimowski direct. I loved *Deep End*, and I thought he was just the person to make this film fascinating. I had great support from John Terry at the National Film Finance Corporation, who was right behind it. The production was very confined, it was shot in six weeks on location in North Devon. It was a lovely summer, with short working days and no disasters. But the film had the same quality as *Deep End*, of somebody in a foreign land. I thought, here's the most English of stories, set at a cricket match, and in the hands of an English director you'd run the risk of something that is not cinema, just a cricket match and a story being told. Skolimowski, I thought, would bring something extraordinary to the film, and I'm very happy with what he did.

Interview by Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1983

Jerzy Skolimowski on 'The Shout'

What attracted you to the story?

The ambiguity, and the sense of the absurd. I think we are surrounded by ambiguity; double meanings can be seen in everything. Remember, I started as a poet, I published three books of poetry, my mind was trained along the path of poetic associations. So I'm not afraid to wander away from direct narrative, and I feel safe with a story that tempts you both to believe and to disbelieve.

As for absurdity, there again, it is all around us – I'm just exploring my own recognitions of whatever one can get in touch with. Who's more absurd: Bates, or the world around him? Is he a mental patient because he is not normal? How do you tell whether a tree is 'normal' or not?

Did you make many changes to the text?

The first development of the script was by Michael Austin, and I liked this first draft enough to drop everything else. Then I worked on it for three weeks in between casting and location hunting, and wrote my own version. In the Graves story it's not a duel between two men, it's just the account of a man who shouts and kills with the shout. Bang, and that's it. Graves says the husband is a composer, but he doesn't go any further. The film has to show what kind of instruments he uses, so I did put a lot of work into building up that part and I have to take responsibility for the John Hurt character. I also invented the cobbler's wife, the girl the husband is interested in.

Are the aboriginal references part of the original story?

The sharpened death-bone and the soul-stones, yes. I didn't research them. I felt that Robert Graves was sufficient authority! I understand that these same things are part of the story of *The Last Wave*, which I haven't seen. It's an odd coincidence, but it would imply that back in 1926 Graves was right about the aborigines. Maybe he was right about the shout as well.

I know you say that you like to shoot very fast, in effect to create the film as you go along. But to what extent did you improvise The Shout? It gives the impression of being very precisely shaped.

I'm surprised at that, because the pattern of working was actually very chaotic. There are some films where one can feel a little bit jealous that one wasn't involved, not necessarily as a director but it would have been nice to be co-author or an actor in a supporting role, or anything. It must have been good to be there; it would have been a great creative atmosphere. I feel that *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* was like that, and I believe we were able to create this kind of atmosphere during *The Shout*. It wasn't coolly calculated, it erupted like a kind of volcano.

At the same time, your introduction of the 'death shout' itself must have taken careful planning...

Yes, this was where I used the Dolby system; it had to be applied just at the right moment so that we would be hearing something special. The shock of the sound is not a question of loudness or richness – it is sudden and it is complex, because the human voice is helped on 40 or more tracks by all the things that came into my mind that might be helpful, the Niagara Falls, the launching of the Moon rocket, everything. But over the top is the real human voice of a man shouting like hell.

What makes the shouting sequence so effective is that there are so many surprising camera angles around Bates as he shouts, and the posture he presents is really just as horrifying as the sound itself.

I must say we had the most difficult conditions to shoot this scene, on top of the dunes on a very windy day. I placed Bates facing the wind but leaning over backwards, so that he had to fight against the wind to come forwards, and already the physical effort was pretty strong. We had to stop him with a rail from pushing past the focus point, so all the elements of fight were there. It was very painful for Alan, his mouth was full of sand – but this was a way to achieve something really expressionistic and natural without special effects.

Do you see the Bates figure in a sympathetic light, do you admire what he represents, or do you regard him as an intruder?

Well, obviously I'd prefer not to be the husband. I'd prefer to be the man, Crossley, but I see the negative side of him as well and I show this. He's not a likeable character. So the answer is that none of the characters is closest to me – I try to be a little bit of each one. I both like and dislike them.

Interview by Philip Strick, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1978

THE SHOUT

Directed by: Jerzy Skolimowski
©: National Film Trustee Company Ltd.
A Recorded Picture Company production
For: National Film Finance Corporation
Presented by: The Rank Organisation
Produced by: Jeremy Thomas
Associate Producer: Michael Austin
Production Manager: Joyce Herlihy
Accountant: Tony Hedges
Project Development: Peter Van Praagh
Production Assistant: Jane Moscrop
Producer's Secretary: Sevilla Delofski
1st Assistant Director: Kip Gowans
2nd Assistant Director: Arnold Schulkes
3rd Assistant Director: Peter Waller
Continuity: Ann Skinner
Casting Directors: Mary Selway, Patsie Pollock
Screenplay by: Michael Austin, Jerzy Skolimowski
Based on the story by: Robert Graves
Director of Photography: Mike Molloy
Camera Operator: Laurie Frost
Focus Puller: Eamonn O'Keefe
Loader: Peter Biddle
Gaffer: Edward Cross
Electricians: Terence Potter, David Hughes
Generator Operator: William Thornhill
Camera Grip: Peter Butler
Stagehand: Chunky Huse
Stillsman: David Farrell
Editor: Barrie Vince
Assistant Editors: Michael Saxton, Tim Jordan, William Diver, Sara Jolly
Art Director: Simon Holland
Assistant Art Director: Keith Pain
Props: John Leunberger, Bobby Hedges

Carpenter: Peter Verrard
Painter: John Davey
Wardrobe: David Paddon
Make-up: Wally Schneiderman
Hairdresser: Betty Glasow
Processed by: Rank Film Laboratories
Theme & Incidental Music: Anthony Banks, Michael Rutherford
Electronics: Rupert Hine
Sound Mixer: Tony Jackson
Sound Maintenance: Michael Basset
Boom Operator: John Ralph
Dubbing Mixer: Gordon K. McCallum
Sound Editor: Alan Bell
Dialogue Editor: Michael Crouch
Publicity Director: Dennis Davidson
Photographed entirely on location in North Devon and completed at: Pinewood Studios

Cast

Alan Bates (*Charles Crossley*)
Susannah York (*Rachel Fielding*)
John Hurt (*Anthony Fielding*)
Robert Stephens (*chief medical officer*)
Tim Curry (*Robert Graves*)
Julian Hough (*vicar*)
Carol Drinkwater (*cobbler's wife*)
John Rees (*inspector*)
Jim Broadbent (*asylum fielder*)
Susan Wooldridge (*Harriet*)
Nick Stringer (*cobbler*)
Colin Higgins
Peter Benson

UK 1978©

85 mins

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Joanna Hogg

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