



SEEN & HEARD

Thirteen

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Thirteen was made in 26 days on a small budget by set designer and first-time director Catherine Hardwicke. Filmed in and around LA, it portrays the emotional chaos raging within teenager Tracy (Evan Rachel Wood). Like Larry Clark (*Kids*, *Bully*), Hardwicke gained the trust of the young people she filmed, constructed her script from their everyday talk and adopted a naturalistic shooting style. But unlike other films that trade on the raw edginess of youth culture and claim special insights into contemporary teenage malaise, *Thirteen* provides a much stronger, more compassionate identification both with Tracy and with her mother Mel (Holly Hunter), who recognises that the trials of growing up are pushing her daughter into a familiar but terrifying madness.

Two simple devices enable *Thirteen* to move beyond the usual explorations of adolescent identity crises. The filmmaking style is frenetic, with rapid editing and shaky handheld camerawork creating an effect of fragmentation and compression. The soundtrack too jolts and jars to echo Tracy's emotional landscape, with fragments of speech interrupted by loud noises, shrieks of childish exuberance juxtaposed with expletives and dark mutterings. These elements produce a narrative which only just hangs together, but which vividly evokes the margin between recklessness and sublime hope that is the terrain of a 13-year-old girl growing up in America today. Hardwicke uses the same breathless camerawork to record the bewilderment, fear and panic of Mel, and the film acts as a formal reflection of the disintegration of the mother-daughter relationship under the influence of a dangerous interloper Tracy's new best-friend Evie. Without a hint of heavy-handed psychoanalysis, *Thirteen* plays out the mutual pain of mother-daughter separation.

The second dynamic that shapes the film is the nature of the script, a collaboration between the director and Nikki Reed (who plays the part of Evie) based on the latter's account of her daily life aged 13. Hardwicke was Reed's father's girlfriend at the time, and as Nikki (like Tracy in the film) lost track of her other interests, Hardwicke was able to encourage her to enter into a co-writing project that didn't feel intrusive, judgmental or exploitative. The narrative brings out their shared shock and fascination at the teenager's precarious state of 'becoming' and mutual uncertainty about the origins of much of her rage.

The story covers a few months during which Tracy falls under the spell of the more sophisticated and glamorous Evie, known as the 'hottest chick' in school. Tracy's desire to become Evie's friend pushes her to transform herself, dispensing with the trappings of childhood to create a body image based on low-rider jeans, midriff-skimming tops and lots of jewellery and make-up. But saying goodbye to childhood also requires distancing herself from the comfort of her relationships with her elder brother, her less grown-up friends and her mother.

Evie swaggers around high school, pulls as many boys as she wants, experiments with drugs and enjoys the excitement of shop-lifting from boutiques crammed with thongs, makeup and bright baubles. Tracy wins her approval by exploiting a theft opportunity and from then on gains access to a

dangerous universe. Her schoolwork deteriorates and Mel moves from alarm to panic as her daughter's often drug-fuelled anger leads her to lash out at those who love her most, subjecting everyone around her to torrents of verbal abuse before locking herself in the family bathroom. She calls Mel's ex-coke-addict boyfriend a loser and steals a purse from one of her home-hairdressing clients.

One drug experience leads to another, the dangers far outweighing those of the sexual rituals of learning how to make out with boys. Evie, who has been partly abandoned by her parents and guardian, moves into Tracy's home, while Tracy's inexplicable anger pushes her to ever more aggressive forms of self-mutilation. Eventually the girls separate, and a degree of calm and exhaustion prevail.

Thirteen depicts a world where the fashioning of a credible female self brings with it incalculable injuries and loss and the coercion involved in the requirement to become a 'real girl' gives rise to an unfathomable rage. While the girls flaunt their sexual confidence with boys in the outside world, back home they become children again, jumping up and down on the bed, shrieking on finding the family dog asleep in their room. The film probes the pain and anguish involved in departing from this childhood and explores what makes Tracy so angry with life and with herself.

Indeed, Tracy's most intense feelings are by no means for the usual heterosexual object of desire. There's a good deal of girl/boy 'snagging' in the film and at one point the two friends set themselves up as teenage temptresses in the style of porn queens with a hilariously silly dance routine and an attempt to snare an older neighbour into something more dangerous. But all the passion here is between Tracy and Evie, who inhabit an undemarcated zone of intimacy, attraction, proximity and exclusiveness.

Such early-teenage female friendships – frightening because they are so passionate – unfold in a realm of still polymorphous perversity where heterosexuality is by no means established but beckons as what is assumed. What is the nature of these girls' love for each other – is it about being as close as possible, becoming mirror images of one another? Tracy's desire is apparent early on as she catches sight of the enviable in-crowd girls as they parade catwalk-style through the schoolyard. Once she's managed to give herself the right kind of look she lands a date with Evie and is triumphant. After Tracy proves her mettle by stealing from a woman's purse, the pair become inseparable, even sharing a mother when Evie moves in (she shows an unconscious understanding of the psychoanalytic dynamics at work by fulsomely kissing Mel in appreciation of her generosity and liberality). Amid such ambivalence, uncertainty and danger, desire and enjoyment are heightened.

Young girls in the affluent, postfeminist west have been subject to new kinds of freedom, no longer restricted by the knowledge that soon their horizons will be limited to fulfilling designated roles as wives and mothers. Here there are no differences in the expectations of boys and girls (both Tracy and her brother experiment with drugs and look for sexual opportunities) and it is Tracy who pushes down the barriers and her brother who eventually confronts her and tells her she needs help.

But the world these young girls move in is also full of difficulties, and to go hurtling through it in a drug-induced purple haze is indicative of the need for a chemical to dull the pain. *Thirteen* shows its intelligence in refusing to find a

simple external scapegoat for the girls' plight. It carefully avoids simplistic suggestions about consumer culture fuelling their anxieties, nor are they preyed on by drug dealers. There's no hint that they are paying the price of a previous generation's feminist successes nor that they will learn their lessons and return meekly to the safety zone.

Yet despite the lack of easy resolutions, an understated hopefulness emerges. Mel's ex-coke-addict boyfriend, whom Tracy scorns, is decent and respectful of her suffering. In an America where teen films still skirt round mixed-race relationships, mixed-race intimacy is here an unremarkable norm. In a low-income household, a mother can not only make ends meet and care for her children but can also look attractive and maintain a warm circle of friends. (So much for the dysfunctional, poor-looking 'single mom'. So much for the end of community.) The film also holds out for sustaining an intergenerational bond between women. Whenever motherhood veers towards overprotectiveness at just that point where daughters need to safeguard their own intimacies, a drama of repudiation sets in. *Thirteen's* careful observations help us to understand what it means to become a woman for a new generation.

Angela McRobbie, *Sight and Sound*, December 2003

THIRTEEN

Director: Catherine Hardwicke
©: Venice Surf Club LLC
Presented by: Universal Pictures, Le Studio Canal+
Presented in association with: Michael London Productions, Working Title Films
Production Company: Antidote Films
Executive Producers: Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Liza Chasin, Holly Hunter
Produced by: Jeffrey Levy-Hinte, Michael London
Co-producer: Rosemary Marks
Associate Producers: Canada Gordon, Christina Sibul
Production Co-ordinator: Greg Dunigan
Location Manager: Peter James
Post-production Supervisor: Beau J. Genot
Production Consultant: Scott Ferguson
Staff of Antidote Films: Mary Jane Skalski, Takeo Hori, Susan Leber
1st Assistant Director: John P. O'Rourke
2nd Assistant Director: John T. Melick
2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Jason R. Dudek
Script Supervisor: Tracey J. Merkle
Casting: Jakki Fink, Shani Ginsberg
Extras Casting: Deedee Ricketts
Casting Assistant: Inessa Freylekhman
Written by: Catherine Hardwicke, Nikki Reed
Director of Photography: Elliot Davis
Camera Operator: Kara Stephens
B Camera Operator: Kara Stephens
Editor: Nancy Richardson
Associate Editor: Hilary Schroeder
Assistant Film Editor: Alessandra Carlino
Production Designer: Carol Strober
Art Director: Johnny Jos
'Chicken Trick' Inventor: Alden Wallace
Set Decorator: Dorit Oberman
Artwork: Irene Hardwicke Olivieri, Richard Edson
Costume Designer: Cindy Evans
Assistant Costume Designer: Anne Laoparadonchai
Make-up: Judy Lovell
Hair: Elaine M. Cascio
Main Titles Designed by: Susan Burig
End Titles: F-Stop, Scarlet Letters
Digital Colour: Technique
Tech (Executive Producers): Evan Edelist, Peter Sternlicht
Digital Intermediate: Technique
Music Composed by: Mark Mothersbaugh
Additional Music: Lavant Coppock
Musicians: Mark Mothersbaugh, Lavant Coppock, Michael Miller, Gordon Peeke, DJ Swamp
Music Supervisors: Amy Rosen, Michelle Norrell
Music Produced by: Mark Mothersbaugh

Music Editor: Richard Henderson
Music Engineered by: Lavant Coppock
Musical Sound Design: Ron Small
Sound Design/Supervision: Frank Gaeta
Utility Sound: Eric J. Naughton
Recordist: J. Aloysius Flanagan III
Production Sound Mixers: Steve Morantz, Steve Weiss
Technician: Michael Cruz
Re-recording Mixers: Lance Brown, Derek Marcil
Sound Editors: Jed Dodge, Dennis Twitty
ADR Loop Group: Lala Paloopers, Beth Wernick
ADR Recordist: Rogers Masson
ADR Mixers: Chris Philp, Mike Fox
Foley Artist: Phyllis Ginter, Craig Ng
Foley Mixer: Marilyn Graf Hubbard
Stunt Co-ordinator: Chuck Borden
Tracy's Poem was written by: Eliza Mae Smith

Cast

Holly Hunter (*Melanie*)
Evan Rachel Wood (*Tracy*)
Nikki Reed (*Evie Zamora*)
Jeremy Sisto (*Brady*)
Brady Corbet (*Mason*)
Deborah Kara Unger (*Brooke*)
Kip Pardue (*Luke*)
Sarah Clarke (*Birdie*)
D.W. Moffett (*Travis*)
Vanessa Anne Hudgens (*Noel*)
Jenicka Carey (*Astrid*)
Ulysses Estrada (*Rafa*)
Sarah Blakely-Cartwright (*Medina*)
Jasmine Salim (*Kayla*)
Tessa Ludwick (*Yumi*)
Cece Tsou (*businesswoman*)
Jamison Yang (*science teacher*)
Frank Merino (*tattoo artist*)
Cynthia Ettinger (*Cynthia*)
Charles Duckworth (*Javi*)
Steven Kozlowski (*skanky guy*)
Javá Benson (*rapper 1*)
Motough (*rapper 2*)
Brandy Rainey (*girl*)
Yasmine Delawari (*English teacher*)
Hampton (*himself*)

USA 2003©
100 min

SEEN & HEARD: DARING FEMALE COMING-OF-AGE FILMS

Thirteen

Wed 2 Feb 20:40; Fri 11 Feb 18:10

House of Hummingbird (Beolsae)

Sat 5 Feb 20:20; Sat 26 Feb 17:40

It Felt Like Love

Sun 6 Feb 18:00; Wed 16 Feb 20:30

Fish Tank

Thu 10 Feb 20:30; Sat 19 Feb 20:40

Mustang

Fri 11 Feb 20:30; Sat 26 Feb 13:40

In Between Days

Sun 13 Feb 18:30; Sat 26 Feb 20:40

Rafiki

Mon 14 Feb 18:20; Fri 18 Feb 18:00; Wed 23 Feb 20:30

IN THE EYES OF A SILENT STAR: THE FILMS OF ASTA NIELSEN

The ABC of Asta Nielsen

Thu 3 Feb 18:20

The Abyss (Afgrunden) + The ABC of Love (Das Liebes ABC)

Thu 3 Feb 20:30 (+ intro by season curator Pamela Hutchinson); Fri 11 Feb 18:20

Zapata's Gang (Zapatas Bande) + The Eskimo Baby (Das Eskimobaby)

Fri 4 Feb 18:00; Sat 12 Feb 18:00

The Black Dream (Den sorte Drøm)

Fri 4 Feb 20:40; Sat 12 Feb 15:40

Dora Brandes

Sat 5 Feb 15:20; Thu 17 Feb 18:00 (+ intro)

The Queen of the Stock Exchange (Die Börsenkönigin) + The Guinea Pig (Das Versuchskaninchen)

Sat 5 Feb 18:00; Thu 17 Feb 20:40

Towards the Light (Mod Lyset) + Asta Nielsen

Wed 23 Feb 18:10; Sun 27 Feb 15:50

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

African Odysseys UK Premiere: African Redemption: The Life and Legacy of Marcus Garvey + panel discussion

Sat 5 Feb 14:00

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 7 Feb 18:10

Preview: The Worst Person in the World (Verdens verste menneske) + Q&A with director Joachim Trier and actor Renate Reinsve

Sat 12 Feb 20:15

The Proposition + Q&A (special guests TBA)

Wed 16 Feb 18:00

Preview: La Mif (The Fam) + Q&A with director Fred Baillif

Sat 19 Feb 18:00

A Tribute to Roger Michell: Preview: The Duke + Q&A (guests TBA)

Thu 24 Feb 18:00

BFI Expanded: World Premiere: UNIQUE

Fri 25 Feb 19:00 and 20:30

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Ali & Ava + Q&A with writer-director Clio Barnard

Mon 28 Feb 20:20

NEW RELEASES

Parallel Mothers (Madres paralelas)

From Fri 28 Jan

The Souvenir Part II

From Fri 18 Feb

Flee

From Fri 18 Feb

La Mif (The Fam)

From Fri 25 Feb

RE-RELEASES

South: Sir Ernest Shackleton's Glorious Epic of the Antarctic

From Fri 28 Jan

Jules et Jim (Jules and Jim)

From Fri 4 Feb

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