



**CRUEL FLESH:
FILMS OF THE NEW FRENCH EXTREMITY**

The Ordeal (Calvaire)

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

When Marc (Laurent Lucas), a cabaret singer heading from one Christmas performance to another, breaks down in the woods, he's left with little choice but to follow the strange man searching for his dog to a secluded inn run by one Bartel (Jackie Berroyer). Bartel warns him to stay away from the local village, but it's quickly apparent that the villagers are the least of Marc's problems. Knocked unconscious, stripped and dressed as the innkeeper's long-gone wife, Marc's ordeal reaches its peak in a brutal overhead tracking shot as the village men descend on the inn.

Director Fabrice du Welz works wonders with atmospheric textures, a dance sequence in the village bar playing like a psychotic outtake from Bela Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994). That stalwart of French cinematic grimness, Philippe Nahon, shows up as leader of the village loons, but *Calvaire's* trump card is undoubtedly Berroyer's Bartel. Despite being so obviously unhinged, there's something oddly touching in his joy at a first family Christmas in years – even if said family consists of another deranged yokel, a sodomised cow and a crying man dressed as his dead wife.

Matthew Thrift, bfi.org.uk

In the wake of Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* and Alexandre Aja's *Switchblade Romance* (not to mention Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi's *Baise-moi*) comes another gruelling European endurance test straddling the divide between American grind-house cinema and continental arthouse experimentation. Chillingly lensed by Benoît Debie (DoP on *Irreversible* and Dario Argento's *The Card Player*), and boasting another impressively worrying appearance by the monumental Philippe Nahon, *Calvaire* is a stripped-down, surrealist (and borderline satirical) slasher yarn in which a naive young singer is stranded in a Grimm-ly darkened wood where he swiftly falls prey to monstrous desires. With an unsettling soundtrack which slips from easy-listening sentimentality to carnivalesque grotesquerie via a cacophony of animal grunts and inhuman groans, this is a claustrophobic mood piece notable for its pervasive sense of melancholic nastiness, a nastiness that is undercut only by its rankly knowing genre-literacy.

'Obstinacy is the key to everything!' announces insane innkeeper Bartel (Jackie Berroyer), whose grief at the loss of his spouse has robbed him of both his award-winning sense of humour and his grip upon reality. Offering Marc Stevens (the lurking Laurent Lucas) refuge in his run-down hotel, Bartel mistakes the fey singer for his errant wife and vows that he/she will never leave him again. Meanwhile, Bartel's troubled companion Boris (Jean-Luc Couchard) – an inbred cousin of one of David Lynch's woodland eccentrics – makes a similarly obsessive imaginative leap, stealing a cow he thinks is his lost dog, and thus bringing down the wrath of the bestial local villagers who are 'not like you and me'. From the dreamy grey-green mistiness of the forests of Belgium's Hautes Fagnes region, to the blood-red interiors of Bartel's private hell, Fabrice du Welz's gruelling feature debut lumbers

engagingly between satire and sadism as it drags the audience through a catalogue of tortures (including gang and animal rape) designed to achieve a strange blend of the 'aggressive and poetic'.

The title *Calvaire* invokes the martyrdom of Christ, signalled on screen by an enigmatic crucifixion in the film's final reel. Fittingly, Marc's symbolic role is to take upon himself the sins of the world into which he has stumbled, becoming a focal point for the unrequited desires of all those whom he encounters. In an early scene, an elderly woman to whom he has crooned seductively from the stage, mistakes his act for projected passion. Later, a cache of furtive Polaroids reveals the depths of another admirer's longing. Yet it is only when Marc meets the doggedly obstinate Bartel that the preening star learns the true price of enduring love. The fact that Bartel's nemesis turns out to be the physically similar Robert Orton (Nahon), a villager with whom the innkeeper's late wife seems to have been intimately acquainted, adds a slyly soap-operatic twist to the proceedings, even as events veer ever further into the realms of screaming madness.

Lifting its narrative riffs from a string of well-recognised shockers (the male-rape anxieties of *Deliverance*; the twisted fandom of *Misery*, the siege mentality of *Straw Dogs*) and playfully nodding toward a string of cult-movie connections (the name Bartel references the writer-director-star of *Eating Raoul*); Jo Prestia, who played the rapist in *Irreversible*, appears as a farmer), *Calvaire*'s savage bite is constantly softened by its cinematic self-referentiality. One sequence, depicting a grisly Christmas celebration at which Marc/Gloria is an unwilling guest, exactly mimics the dinner-table scene from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, right down to the gurning shots of howling rustics and extreme close-ups of victimised eyeballs. The most effective scene, in which the sinister villagers engage in an increasingly frenzied zombie dance, recalls the ending of *The Wicker Man*, in which the hero is gaily burned alive to the strains of 'Summer Is A-Comen In'.

As a cleansing snow settles on *Calvaire*'s other-worldly finale, one is left with a dreamy sense of having been here several times before, often in more original circumstances. It's derivative stuff, and unashamedly so. Yet the haunting tunes and vile images which litter this lovelorn journey have a deeper and more haunting resonance than its magpie surface may imply.

Mark Kermode, *Sight & Sound*, January 2006

THE ORDEAL (CALVAIRE)

Director: Fabrice du Welz
Production Companies: The Film, La [Parti] Production, Tarantula
In co-production with: StudioCanal
With the support of: Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Communauté française de Belgique
With the participation of:
Fonds National de Soutien à la Production, CinéCinéma
With the support of: Bang!
Executive Producers: Vincent Tavier, Michaël Gentile, Eddy Gérardon-Luyckx
Producers: Vincent Tavier, Eddy Gérardon-Luyckx
Associate Producers: Philippe Kauffmann, Guillaume Malandrin, Donato Rotunno
Key Unit Production Manager: Olivier Guedj
Unit Production Manager: Louis Lechevalier
Unit Manager: Laurent Macchietti
Production Manager: Ludovic Douillet
Production Consultant: Felix Sorger
1st Assistant Director: Jean-Louis Frémont
2nd Assistant Director: Sebastien Fernandes Tasch
Script Supervisor: Laora Bardos-Feltoronyi
Screenplay: Fabrice du Welz, Romain Protat
Director of Photography: Benoît Debie
Camera Operator: Benoît Debie
Gaffer: Jim Howe
Stills Photography: Luca Etter
Special Visual Effects: AutreChose
Special Effects: Alain Couty
Editor: Sabine Hubeaux
Art Director: Emmanuel Demeulemeester
Set Decorator: Isabelle Girard
Storyboard Artist: Didier Kinsella
Properties: Laurent Coutellier
Construction Manager: Bertrand Renault

Costumes: Géraldine Picron
Key Make-up: Aurélie Elich
Titles: Monsieur & Madame
Colour Timer: Dirk Vandewalle
Music: Vincent Cahay
Choreography: Savéria Thomasi
Sound Recording: Marc Engels
Additional Sound: Fred Meert
Sound Re-recording: Benoît Biral, Manu de Boissieux
Sound Editor: Fred Meert
Sound Effects: Bertrand Boudaud, Benoît Biral, Manu de Boissieux
Animal Handler: Pascal Jacqmin

Cast

Laurent Lucas (*Marc Stevens*)
Jackie Berroyer (*Paul Bartel*)
Philippe Nahon (*Robert Orton*)
Jean-Luc Couchard (*Boris*)
Brigitte Lahaie (*Mademoiselle Vicky*)
Gigi CourSIGNY (*Madame Langhoff*)
Philippe Grand'henry (*Tomas Orton*)
Jo Prestia (*Farmer Mylène*)
Marc Lefebvre (*Lucien*)
Alfred David-Pingouin (*Roland*)
Alain Delaunois (*giant*)
Vincent Cahay (*Stan the pianist*)
Johan Meys-Rosto (*Rosto*)
Pierre Van Braekel, Romain Protat, Damien Waselle, Viktor Mikol, Nedzad Kurtagic, Yves Vaucher (*bar extras*)
Borhan du Welz, Maxime Dewitte, Alexis Dewitte, Liam Gilson, Raphaël Schmidt, Eliot Cahay, Farkhad Alekperov (*children in wood*)

Belgium-France-Luxembourg 2004
92 mins

CRUEL FLESH: FILMS OF THE NEW FRENCH EXTREMITY

Carne + La Bouche de Jean-Pierre

Sun 1 May 11:50; Thu 12 May 20:45 (+ Q&A with Lucile Hadžihalilovic)

Baise-moi

Sun 1 May 18:20; Sat 7 May 20:50

The Ordeal (Calvaire)

Mon 2 May 12:30; Sun 22 May 18:20

Man Bites Dog (C'est arrivé près de chez vous)

Mon 2 May 15:10; Tue 10 May 20:55

Sex and Death, but Make It Arthouse

Tue 3 May 18:10

Trouble Every Day

Tue 3 May 20:30 (+ intro by writer and creative Sophie Monks Kaufman);

Tue 24 May 20:45

Criminal Lovers (Les Amants criminels)

Wed 4 May 20:50; Sat 14 May 12:00

Pola X

Thu 5 May 20:25; Sat 28 May 17:50

Romance (Romance X)

Fri 6 May 18:00 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, King's College London);

Tue 17 May 20:45

Philosophical Screens: Romance

Fri 6 May 20:00

In My Skin (Dans ma peau)

Sat 7 May 17:50 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, King's College London);

Thu 19 May 20:40

High Tension (aka Switchblade Romance) (Haute Tension)

Mon 9 May 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by author Alexandra West);

Sat 28 May 12:20

Inside (À l'intérieur)

Sat 14 May 20:50; Thu 26 May 18:20

Them (Ils)

Mon 16 May 20:50; Sun 29 May 18:20

Irreversible (Irréversible) (theatrical version)

Sat 21 May 17:45

Martyrs

Sat 28 May 20:50; Tue 31 May 20:40

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