



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Long Day Closes

Terence Davies wrote in the introduction to the published script for *Distant Voices Still Lives* that he was ‘trying to create ‘a pattern of timeless moments’.’ Yet that picture has stronger dramatic line than *The Long Day Closes*. In *Distant Voices* family life eddies around an immovable rock: the father’s violence to the mother and their children. He has furies, never explained. At Christmas, sat down to dinner, he suddenly pulls the cloth off the table and roars at his wife to clean up. A man can die eventually, but that sort of timeless moment lingers.

The Long Day Closes has violence only at school. There’s a cane in every room, ready to come down on the palm of a hand. Mr Nicholls – who teaches erosion – uses his cane to show the boys who’s boss: ‘You play ball with me, I’ll play ball with you.’ And the hands take the cane’s slap and grow harder, or less hurt, their owners more certain they can hold back the tears. A skin grows, a new surface – or is the hand beaten away, as in the larger world, according to Mr Nicholls, where erosion does its remorseless natural work? In all of Davies’ films there are processes that wear life away and those that let it grow new resources. The school has very limited functions: it canes, it permits bullying, it teaches erosion and it does the ceaseless missionary work of testing the boys’ hair for lice.

After all, this is Liverpool, as 1955 turns into 1956 – and people are a few years away yet from being told they’d never had it so good. The family members wash their hair over a basin using saucepans of hot water and cold; there doesn’t seem to be much variety in the way of food. And there’s no television yet – when that comes, does it add or take away from the easy-going, sing-song atmosphere? There’s just radio and a shilling if Bud wants to go to the pictures.

‘Mam,’ he asks, ‘can I go to the pictures?... I’ve got a penny... If you gave me eleven-pence I’d have a shilling.’ Which is a working definition of mother love and the new version of hard times. And you can tell from Bud’s wheedling voice that he fancies he’s going to get the eleven-pence. He’s done it before. And then he’s standing outside the Hippodrome and Doris Day is singing ‘At Sundown’ from *Love Me or Leave Me*. It would have been an A certificate, so Bud has to ask strangers to take him in. We all did it then, and our mothers knew and went along with it. How old is Bud? About 11? So I wonder what he made of *Love Me or Leave Me*. Not that the ladies or gentlemen who took strange kids in to see A-certificate films often tested one afterwards. There were a couple of old ladies in Streatham who would take me from the Astoria, over the High Road, to Pratt’s, to the restaurant there. They would insist that I had an icecream and ask: ‘Did you enjoy the picture, dear?’

I love *The Long Day Closes* far too much to start any serious consideration of its director ‘cheating’, but I have to say I think Terence Davies is having his cake and eating it. Because, if you recall, he does suggest that Bud has been seeing *Love Me or Leave Me* (1955) and *The Ladykillers* (1955) and *The Robe* (1953 – though it’s a very tattered, eroded poster on the street wall). I will even allow him the song from *Tammy* (which is 1957). That’s not my real

issue. The thing I love in *The Long Day Closes*, but have to complain about, is that Bud seems also to have seen *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). Bet you didn't! Bet I did!

Of course, it is the scholar and the nostalgist summoning up memories of those films for an 11-year-old in Liverpool. There wasn't the chance then to see old pictures in re-runs – not even hits like *Meet Me in St. Louis*, let alone the devastating failure of *The Magnificent Ambersons*. And how could Bud be expected to understand a young man's 'come-uppance' when Orson's dark, dreamy voice tells what happened to George Minafer? Is these films' inclusion legitimate? Yes, because those two extras are near enough in time to be incorporated, and because they enjoy the same rapturous sense of movie palaces where crowds reclined in such hallowed story sense beneath the funnels of projected light where Beowulfs of cigarette smoke wrestled. (Just to show you that anyone can do 11 going on 21!)

But the employment of 'wrong' period films does alert us to this obvious and crucial thing: that *The Long Day Closes* is not actually 'There is a boy', but 'There was a boy', which is already tinged with the mixed feelings of adulthood. And that's where those two extra movies are so suggestive. I can believe that putting his film together (for £1.75 million, for the British Film Institute and Channel 4), Davies took clips where he could get them and afford them. It may be that those two movies are there from forced measure, or chance.

Still, they say so much about family. *Meet Me in St. Louis*, if you recall, is a version of 'our family is perfect'. And if I recall *Ambersons*, it's a heartfelt, rueful story about an imperfect but agreeable family that falls apart. They are the Ambersons and they once gave the best parties in that part of Indiana. But the family flopped. Some of them died. Georgie – the bright young hope – has to eat ashes. And if we'd had the whole film that Welles intended, then we'd have seen Georgie and Fanny living in a low boarding house, wondering if they'll ever recover.

I have to say that Terence Davies' family films don't quite face that alteration in family life. There is tragedy in the violence of *Distant Voices* and a kind of reward in the unmarred love of mother and son in *The Long Day Closes*. The aural quilt of the latter is easier in that there are raised voices, no rows. But I wonder in real life how long it was before, say, Terence started going out with a Protestant girl... or a black boy. There's a wondrous moment in the film when a man from Jamaica amiable in every way – comes looking for someone. And the white family jump as if he were a ghost. In the next few years colour came to Britain and many unexpected adjustments were required. The autobiographical films Davies made – though they are more and less than that – are one of our treasures. But in certain dramatic and sociological ways they stop at a point where life might become harder, and where an angelic mother might open her eyes wide and say 'What?' (like comedian Ted Ray at some outrage) if Bud brought Sal Mineo home, or Monty Clift.

David Thomson, *Sight & Sound*, April 2007

THE LONG DAY CLOSES

Director: Terence Davies
Production Company: Film Four International
In association with: British Film Institute Production
Executive Producers: Ben Gibson, Colin MacCabe
Producer: Olivia Stewart
Executive in Charge of Production: Angela Topping
Production Co-ordinator: Lesley Stewart
Production Manager: Chris Harvey
Location Managers: Andrew Macdonald, Jeff Bowen
Assistant Directors: Gus MacLean, Tommy Gormley, David Gilchrist
Casting: Doreen Jones
Screenplay: Terence Davies
Director of Photography: Michael Coulter
Cloud Photography: Chris Plevin, Jeremy Kelly
Camera Operator: Harriet Cox
Special Effects: All F/X Limited
Model Ships: Areteffects
Editor: William Diver
Production Designer: Christopher Hobbs
Art Director: Kave Naylor
Scenic Artists: Catherine Goodley, Lynne Whiteread
Costume Designer: Monica Howe
Wardrobe Supervisor: Patrick Wheatley
Make-up: Aileen Seaton, Heather Jones
Titles: Plume Partners
Opticals: Peerless Camera Company
Music Director: Robert Lockhart
Music Supervisor: Bob Last
Sound Recording: Moya Burns
Sound Re-recording: Aad Wirtz
Sound Editor: Alex Mackie
Dialogue Editor: Patrick O'Neill
Sound Effects: Cinesound Effects

Cast

Marjorie Yates (*mother*)
Leigh McCormack (*Bud*)
Anthony Watson (*Kevin*)
Nicholas Lamont (*John*)
Ayse Owens (*Helen*)
Tina Malone (*Edna*)
Jimmy Wilde (*Curly*)
Robin Polley (*Mr Nicholls*)
Peter Ivatts (*Mr Bushell*)
Joy Blakeman (*Frances*)
Denise Thomas (*Jean*)
Patricia Morrison (*Amy*)
Gavin Mawdsley (*Billy*)
Kirk McLaughlin (*labourer/Christ*)
Marcus Heath (*black man*)
Victoria Davies (*nun*)
Brenda Peters (*nurse*)
Karl Skeggs (*Albie*)
Lee Blennerhassett, Peter Hollier, Jason Jevons (*bullies*)

UK 1992
85 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

A Farewell to Arms

Sun 1 May 12:00; Mon 16 May 18:15; Tue 24 May 20:50

Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans

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

Tokyo Story (Tokyo Monogatari)

Tue 3 May 14:30; Sat 7 May 15:00; Sat 21 May 11:10; Wed 25 May 18:00

The River

Wed 4 May 18:10 + intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large; Sun 15 May 15:10

El Sur (The South)

Thu 5 May 14:30; Mon 16 May 18:10

Daughters of the Dust

Fri 6 May 20:50; Fri 20 May 14:40; Thu 26 May 20:40

Syndromes and a Century (Sang sattawaat)

Sat 7 May 18:10; Thu 12 May 20:50

Still Walking (Aruitemo aruitemo)

Sun 8 May 15:15; Wed 11 May 17:50 + intro by Dr Alexander Jacoby, Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies; Mon 23 May 20:45

The Long Day Closes

Mon 9 May 18:30; Sun 22 May 12:30; Thu 26 May 20:50

Journey to Italy (Viaggio in Italia)

Tue 10 May 20:50; Thu 19 May 18:10; Wed 25 May 20:50; Fri 27 May 18:20

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Les Parapluies de Cherbourg)

Fri 13 May 20:45; Tue 17 May 20:50; Sat 28 May 18:15

Cleo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)

Sat 14 May 14:45; Wed 18 May 18:10 + intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large

The Miracle Worker

Tue 17 May 14:30; Sun 29 May 11:20

The Incredible Shrinking Man

Thu 19 May 14:30; Tue 31 May 18:20

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