



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Rosetta

I saw *Rosetta* three weeks ago, and haven't recovered from it since. In fact, I didn't see any film since the Dardennes', except films for work. It moves me to the heart of my heart, this film about the necessity of life, the impossibility of morality, the soil of human experience. [A teaching colleague] told me that he couldn't watch it because he thought too much about [Robert Bresson's] *Mouchette*, but precisely, it's at last *Mouchette* today, our *Mouchette*, the one we deserve, without any heaven and any transcendence. Her scream, 'Mama! Va d'la boue! Va d'la boue!' ['Mama! It's full of mud! It's full of mud!'] haunts me, I can't forget it, it's exactly the despair of being in life without any pathos, any margin, just real life in the immediacy of the impulse.

e-mail from film critic Nicole Brenez to Jonathan Rosenbaum, in Rosenbaum, *Essential Cinema On the Necessity of Film Canons* (The John Hopkins University Press, 2004)

Rosetta is 17 and lives in a dreary caravan site with her alcoholic mother. She has a modest litany of small hopes she recites to herself each night in bed: a friend would be nice, but a job is vital. Rosetta fears, quite rightly, that if she cannot secure even the lousiest of jobs she will fall into the ranks of the permanent underclass, the lost souls. Few critics have been able to resist applying the adjective 'feral' to debut actress Émilie Dequenne's remarkable performance as Rosetta – and indeed there's a wildness in her raw need for work. She hurls herself without warning at the people who obstruct or deny her. And in the meantime she's a scavenger, recycling old clothes and touring thrift shops, laying hooks to catch fish in the deep, dank river that runs through the site.

What makes *Rosetta* unique is the dogged way it confines itself solely to its heroine's direct experience. There is no attempt to explain the whys and wherefores of her circumstances, only the immediate reality. In its impassive observation it is sometimes like an anthropological film but without commentary or intervention and with nearly all sense of distance erased. The viewer is plunged with Rosetta into the mire of urgent need. The implacable handheld camera at her shoulder recalls the late television work of Alan Clarke: *Road*, *Christine*, *Made in Britain*. And like Clarke's truculent heroines, Rosetta is a girl driven to desperate measures for whom one can't help but feel a terrible sympathy.

The Dardenne brothers on 'Rosetta'

At Cannes you described Rosetta as a 'war film' and Rosetta herself as a 'warrior'. Could you elaborate?

Luc Dardenne: In writing the screenplay we decided Rosetta would live in a space divided into three. First you have the war zone: the world in which she's fighting to find a job and a place. Then there's the camp: the caravan site where she lives and has her little rituals setting her fish-hooks and so forth – and her mother, because she's an alcoholic, is like a wounded soldier, a casualty, confined to camp. Then between those two spaces is the frontier: the motorway she crosses continually to get from the camp to the workplace. Once we'd established this in the writing we had to decide on our shooting

style. And we decided to follow Rosetta as you would follow a soldier in a war, which means the camera never knows which way she's going to turn. Of course the action is still directed, but the camera never prefigures what Rosetta is doing – it can't look before she looks, and so on. In essence, though, this idea of war comes from our sense that having a job today is a war – you have to fight to get one and usually getting one means taking away someone else's.

Jean-Pierre Dardenne: About 15 to 20 per cent of the population in the rich industrial countries of Europe are living in much the same conditions as Rosetta. We shot the film in the town where we come from, Seraing, which is very similar to the industrial towns of Britain that became rich because of coal and steel. But now all those industries have disappeared, which is why these places are in this state.

It seems to me Rosetta makes the case that there's dignity in labour, even in the lowliest jobs.

Luc Dardenne: We wanted to show what it means to have a place in society, and to have that you need a job. When you're in work you have a contract with society. You have certain obligations and it's not always enjoyable – you can be used and abused. But you also have rights, and you can fight for them. Through the job you can transform society; if you don't have a job you don't have the means to do that. Rosetta is willing to do any job – it doesn't matter. She just wants to belong.

Has your experience in documentary influenced what kind of stories you tell?

Jean-Pierre Dardenne: We made a lot of documentaries about the working-class movement and we concentrated on the workplace because that's where people come together in a common project. But we always told the story of one individual within those groups. And somehow that story was always about trouble at work – either because the guy was protesting at the conditions of his job or because his protest ended up with his employer sacking him. *Rosetta* is about a new generation – the children of that organised working class who didn't inherit the movement their parents created. In Rosetta's world she fights alone.

How did you cast the film?

Jean-Pierre Dardenne: We don't use casting directors because we want a commitment between the directors and the actors and we wouldn't be happy to leave that process in someone else's hands. So it takes a long time, and we do it very thoroughly because if your casting is right, half the job is done. We didn't even ask ourselves the question of professional or non-professional – Rosetta had to be 17 and you're not a professional actor at 17, at least not in Belgium. So we had to find an unknown. Generally we try not to use actors who will impose themselves between the movie and the audience – you can believe in Rosetta because you're not seeing a girl who was this other character in that other movie. She's just Rosetta.

Article and interview by Richard Kelly, *Sight and Sound*, February 2000

ROSETTA

Directors: Luc Dardenne, Jean-Pierre Dardenne
Production Companies: Films du Fleuve, Association des Realisateurs Producteurs, RTBF (Télévision Belge)
With the assistance of: Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel de la communauté française de Belgique, télédistributeurs wallons, Région Wallonne, Loterie Nationale
With participation of: Canal+, Centre national de la cinématographie
Producers: Luc Dardenne, Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Michèle Pétin, Laurent Pétin
Associate Producer: Arlette Zylberberg
Production Manager: Véronique Marit
Production Manager (France): Patrick Millet
Unit Production Managers: Philippe Groff, Philippe Toussaint
Unit Manager: Rüdiger Flörke
Unit Manager (France): Didier Hoarau
1st Assistant Director: Bernard Garant
2nd Assistant Director: Jean-François Tefnin
Script Supervisor: Marika Piedboeuf
Script Supervisor (France): Nathalie Weiss
Screenplay: Luc Dardenne, Jean-Pierre Dardenne
Script Consultant: Léon Michaux
Director of Photography: Alain Marcoen
Camera Operator: Benoît Dervaux
Editor: Marie-Hélène Dozo
Art Director: Igor Gabriel
Costumes: Monic Parelle
Key Make-up: Tina Kopecka
Titles: Arane
Original Music: Jean-Pierre Cocco
Musicians: Marc Descamps, Michel Leclercq, René Stock, Ronny Venta
Sound Recording: Jean-Pierre Duret
Mixer: Thomas Gauder
Sound Editors: Benoît de Clerck, Luc Plantier, Aurélie Muller, Julie Brenta
Sound Effects: Philippe van Leer

Cast

Émilie Dequenne (*Rosetta*)
Fabrizio Rongione (*Riquet*)
Anne Yernaux (*Rosetta's mother*)
Olivier Gourmet (*boss*)
Bernard Marbaix (*camping area guard*)
Frédéric Bodson (*personnel chef*)
Florian Delain (*boss's son*)
Christiane Dorval (*second hand shop sales person 1*)
Mireille Bailly (*second hand shop sales person 2*)
Thomas Gollas (Rocky) (*mother's boyfriend*)
Léon Michaux (*policeman 1*)
Victor Marit (*policeman 2*)
Colette Regibeau (*Madame Riga*)
Claire Tefnin (*cloakroom girl*)
Sophia Leboutte (*woman who is made redundant*)
Gaetano Ventura (*shop boss*)
Christian Neys (*Télé Secours man 1*)
Valentin Traversi (*Télé Secours man 2*)
Jean-François Noville (*ONEM employee*)

Belgium-France 1999©

91 mins

The screening on Wed 22 Jun will be introduced by Dr Edward Lamberti, film writer

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Merchant of Four Seasons (Händler der vier Jahreszeiten)

Wed 1 Jun 18:10 (+ intro); Sat 11 Jun 20:30

Ivan's Childhood (Ivanovo Detsvo)

Thu 2 Jun 14:30; Mon 20 Jun 20:50

The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty

(Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter)

Fri 3 Jun 20:50; Mon 13 Jun 18:10; Fri 24 Jun 20:45

Taxi Driver

Sat 4 Jun 20:45; Wed 15 Jun 20:40;

Sun 26 Jun 18:20

The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena)

Sun 5 Jun 13:10; Tue 14 Jun 20:45;

Wed 29 Jun 20:40

Escape from Alcatraz

Mon 6 Jun 20:45; Sat 25 Jun 17:50

Thief

Tue 7 Jun 20:30; Thu 16 Jun 18:00; Sat 18 Jun 20:30; Thu 30 Jun 20:30

71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance

(71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls)

Wed 8 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large);

Mon 27 Jun 21:00

Rosetta

Fri 10 Jun 20:50; Wed 22 Jun 18:15 (+ intro)

Stranger by the Lake (L'Inconnu du lac)

Sun 12 Jun 18:10; Wed 15 Jun 18:10;

Tue 28 Jun 20:40

Down by Law

Fri 17 Jun 20:45; Tue 21 Jun 20:45

Certain Women

Sun 19 Jun 13:10; Thu 23 Jun 20:50; Wed 29 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by

BFI Director of Public Programme and Audiences, Jason Wood)

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