



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Certain Women

Taken from Maile Meloy's stories, Kelly Reichardt's wonderful triptych focuses on four women (and, sometimes, the men in their lives) trying to get by in rural America. The narrative is quiet, elliptical, realist, and the performances low-key; the vignettes barely overlap. But the sharp sense of people in a particular kind of environment and the interest in exploring inner lives through external details are very Bressonian.

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Beyond a sliding stable door, a muted but ravishing Montana vista fills the frame with horizontal ribbons of snowy peaks, blue-grey ranges, frosted plains and weathered fencing. In front of it, a lone ranch hand drops off feed for horses, immersed in her daily tasks. Winding women's quiet stories into north-western landscapes traditionally given over by film to men and their noisy Manifest Destiny is Kelly Reichardt's speciality. But rather than the homeless roamers of *Wendy and Lucy* (2008) or *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), the stoical, struggling heroines of this triptych of lightly linked narratives are rooted in town or ranch: lawyer Laura (Laura Dern) is dogged by her troublesome client Fuller, his hostage-taking dropping her directly into his revenge plans; businesswoman Gina (Michelle Williams) plots the perfect rural house to underpin her wavering marriage, seeking authentic local stones from an elderly neighbour; and a rancher (Lily Gladstone) gets a crush on night-school teacher Beth (Kristen Stewart), a frazzled rookie lawyer worn down by working two jobs.

Around the four sharply observed character studies, the landscape lingers without pressing in, to be picked over by acquisitive Gina, worked on by the rancher or traversed by the exhausted Beth. Visible through every window and car journey, the Montana mountains preside over everything. Shot by long-time Reichardt collaborator Christopher Blauvelt in 16mm, giving grain and subtle texture to the film's slate-and-beige palette, they have a painterly look that's never overworked. There's a hint of Milton Avery's blocky landscapes about them, as Reichardt has acknowledged. Looming large, they add to the film's discreet echoes of north-western history, successive inhabitants signalled by the costumed Native Americans dancing in the mall or Gina's townie hunger for the original sandstone blocks that were once the frontier schoolhouse. A meticulous natural soundscape underlines all of this, its outdoor silences embroidered almost imperceptibly with river splashes, birdsong, wind in the trees and the distant hum of a car.

Reichardt is a master minimalist whose style suits the short story form. Laura's and the rancher's tales in particular are delicate, pared-back miniatures that deliver both character and story skilfully. The three tales are taken from Maile Meloy's collections *Both Ways Is the Only Way I Want It* and *Half in Love*, nimbly feminised, and connected so lightly that they just brush past one another; it's utterly unlike Altman or *Crash*'s heavily interwoven plots. But their short span, coupled with Reichardt's austere storytelling, allows us less time to trace the links between character and setting. This only becomes

an issue in Gina's section, where the sliver of story and Williams's deliciously tetchy and contained performance feel slightly ambiguous. Is this cheated-on wife simmering with suppressed rage? Or is she a selfish yuppie pushing others aside in pursuit of her 'authentic' Montana home? Or perhaps both at once. By contrast, Laura's experience with Jared Harris's despairing, life-swiped client is a beautifully sketched mix of frustration and sympathy, expressed in exasperated meetings and a slyly comic hostage standoff where the police cheerfully pitch Laura into danger.

What the triptych structure nicely amplifies, however, are the women's plights and their tiredness, as they struggle with debt or loneliness, unhappy marriage or male neediness. With minimalism as an organising principle, characterisation is pieced together from scant dialogue, worn-in clothes or fleeting expressions. Reichardt shoots her actresses' faces with the same lingering attention that she gives to the landscape – Dern long-suffering and game, Williams pursed and irritable, and newcomer Gladstone shyly eating up a bone-weary Stewart with her eyes.

This last story is the film's best, a slender handful of scenes creating an emotionally engaging tale of infatuation, with Gladstone's standout performance speaking volumes with a bitten lip or darting glance. It's quite an achievement, in a film where the playing is uniformly excellent. Threaded through with the chores that the rancher undertakes daily (reminiscent of the fascination with the work of women pioneers in *Meek's Cutoff*), it's a pitch-perfect portrait of loneliness and longing. Gladstone and Stewart infuse their characters with an exquisite awkwardness, which melts only during a late-night horse ride, a rare tender moment.

In all three stories, traditional 'women's film' territory is traversed (infidelity, a disintegrating marriage, a near-miss love). But just as she made an innovative no-action western of *Meek's Cutoff*, here Reichardt has created a 'women's film' that never tips into melodrama. Her stories pierce the viewer without resorting to violence, marital showdowns or any kind of over-dramatic gesture. Spare but wide-ranging in its concerns, quietly played but emotionally powerful, *Certain Women's* whispers are more penetrating than most films' shouts.

Kate Stables, *Sight & Sound*, March 2017

CERTAIN WOMEN

Directed by: Kelly Reichardt
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Executive Producers: Todd Haynes, Larry Fessenden, Christopher Carroll, Nathan Kelly
Produced by: Neil Kopp, Vincent Savino, Anish Savjani
Unit Production Manager: Nathan Kelly
Production Supervisor: Allison Whitmer
Production Co-ordinators: Bekki Vallin, Emily Pontecorvo
Production Accountant: Catherine Simonson
Location Manager: Charlie Skinner
1st Assistant Director: Christopher Carroll
2nd Assistant Director: Keith Marlin
Script Supervisor: Jillian Terwedo
Screenplay by: Kelly Reichardt
Based on Stories ['Native Sandstone', 'Tome', 'Travis B'] by: Maile Meloy
Cinematographer: Chris Blauvelt
1st Assistant Camera: Jesse Cain
Gaffer: Andrew Thie
Key Grip: Jason L. Stevens
Still Photographers: JoJo Whilden, Nicole Rivelli
Visual Effects Studio: 67 Nights
Visual Effects Supervisor: Chris Connolly
Editor: Kelly Reichardt
Production Designer: Anthony Gasparro
Art Director: Kat Uhlmansiek
Set Decorator: Pamela Day
Property Master: Bruce Corkum
Costume Designer: April Napier
Assistant Costume Designer: Elizabeth Warn
Make-up Department Head: Sheila Trujillo Gomez

Hair Department Head: Jennifer Serio Stauffer
Title Design Studio: And/Or
Digital Intermediate Colourist: Tyler Fagerstrom
Music by: Jeff Grace
Music Consultant: Lyle Hysen
Sound Designer: Kent Sparling
Production Sound Mixer: Paul H. Maritsas
Boom Operator: Heidi Dubose
Re-recording Mixer: Kent Sparling
Stunt Co-ordinator: Cooper Taylor
Digital Intermediate Facility: Cinelicious
Special Thanks: Rosanna Arquette

Cast

Laura Dern (*Laura Wells*)
James Le Gros (*Ryan Lewis*)
Jared Harris (*William Fuller*)
John Getz (*Sheriff Rowles*)
Michelle Williams (*Gina Lewis*)
Sara Rodier (*Guthrie*)
René Auberjonois (*Albert*)
Lily Gladstone (*Jamie, rancher*)
Kristen Stewart (*Elizabeth Travis, 'Beth'*)
Ashlie Atkinson (*secretary*)
Guy Boyd (*Billings, personal injury lawyer*)
Edelen McWilliams (*Fuller's wife*)
James Jordan (*hostage specialist*)
Matt McTighe (*Officer Tommy Carroll*)
Joshua T. Fonokalafi (*Amituana*)

USA 2016©

107 mins

The screening on Wed 29 Jun will be introduced by BFI Director of Public Programme and Audiences, Jason Wood

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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