



GLEND A JACKSON

# Sunday Bloody Sunday

Daring and controversial at the time of release, this film grapples with the emotional fallout from a polyamorous relationship between young artist Bob (Murray Head), lonely doctor Daniel (Peter Finch) and divorcée Alex (Glenda Jackson). Under John Schlesinger's sensitive direction all three performances were highly praised, with Jackson winning a BAFTA for best actress and receiving another Oscar® nomination. The film has continued to resonate across the years.

## A contemporary review

John Schlesinger is not a director whom one readily associates with tenderness. Where that emotion has existed in his previous films – Bathsheba's eventual reconciliation to the patient devotion of Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, for example – he has tended to be dwarfed by louder and less disciplined elements (in that case, nature, with disaster lurking behind every thunder cloud and giant gorse bush). Rather more frequently, the bravura presentation of these elements (the fantasticated imaginings of the hero in *Billy Liar*, the brittle immorality of the heroine in *Darling*, the neon dazzle of New York in *Midnight Cowboy*) has effectively precluded the emergence of tender feelings, whether in the stridently delineated characters or in the audience on their behalf.

But in *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, Schlesinger has at last discovered the virtues of understatement and the wisdom of making no statements at all. Although its minimal story abounds in temptations to trendiness (a bisexual triangle, a kinetic artist, a terrifying family of left-wing intellectuals), Schlesinger has maintained this material as a social parenthesis to the rawly exposed but tightly controlled emotions of his central characters. And the result is a beautifully disciplined work, affectionately laughing at its characters' pretensions and shot through with a rare and unsentimental compassion.

The apex of the triangle is Bob, an egotistical young artist in his early 20s (played by Murray Head with just the right mixture of superficial charm and spontaneous solicitude), passionately involved with his work and the fame he feels sure of finding on the other side of the Atlantic. He enjoys the doubtful blessing of receiving rather more emotion than he is capable of giving from the two people he professes to love – Daniel Hirsh, a middle-aged Jewish doctor, and Alex Greville, a discontented divorcée trying to find out what she's good at doing – and commutes from one to the other whenever a problem or a demand rises too close to the surface. Although the film never articulates this, his tough self-sufficiency very obviously derives from a youthful faith in his own future, just as the anxieties of both his lovers spring directly in their greater experience of life – the fact that both their faith and their futures have to some extent already been used up.

Six years ago, Bob might have provided the hero for a male *Darling*, but here his function is essentially catalytic, and he is not presented as being in himself of any great interest. Instead, Schlesinger focuses attention on two characters more used to analysing their emotions and less used to indulging them. Their

dramas never explode, since they reside precisely in the knowledge that they must never articulate the full extent of what they feel. And in very different registers (he, sad-eyed and stoical; she, tense and apologetic) both Peter Finch and Glenda Jackson achieve a convincing and vulnerable tension between what they permit themselves to say and what they involuntarily reveal, what they irrationally want of their love, and what they know to be possible.

It is characteristic of the new Schlesinger that they never do break down and ask for it, that the crisis which threatens their separate relationships with Bob never erupts but is painfully side-stepped by his eventual decision to visit New York. The tension accumulates, is checked, but is never relieved by dramatic or melodramatic confrontation. Time and again, the *scène-à-faire* is set up but never actually made. When Daniel learns of Bob's imminent departure by discovering the vaccination mark on his arm, his only audible concern is that Bob should have gone to another doctor, when Bob finds Alex (a personnel officer) in an obvious state of post-coital fluster with the elderly client whom she has both pitied and identified with, he makes no allusion to the incident before bedding down with her for the night. The tolerance that she painfully imposes on herself for his affair with Daniel is quite spontaneous with him; and instead of a welcome display of jealousy, she finds only another reminder of the generation – and experience – gap which separates them.

It is also an indication of the film's maturity, and of Penelope Gilliatt's finely tuned screenplay, that, though primarily concerned with exploring its characters' feelings, it respects their adulthood enough to recognise the professional and social commitments, generally more irksome than agreeable, that will prevent the loss of their lover affecting them like either Tristan or Isolde. When Bob storms out of a truly dreadful soirée at Daniel's house, where a jealous wife is trying to get back at her husband by stripping off for the other guests, one is made to feel more conscious of his callowness than of his discrimination. Even the self-consciously liberal family, friends of both Alex and Daniel, with their mother's milk in the refrigerator, their dog called Kenyatta, their communal bathing and their token African permanently in residence, are presented without malice – an awkward fact of life in a world where only the unfeeling young never make fools of themselves.

Even the script's main flaw, a tendency to schematism – with the meticulously tidy bachelor listening to classical music in his Georgian house, while the untidy divorcée scatters cigarette ash over her disordered studio – is redeemed by its constant virtue of never spelling anything out. While in keeping with the theme of dawning middle-age and quiet desperation, photographer Billy Williams mutes his colours to achieve a mellow, autumnal mood. At one point in the film, Daniel takes a prescription to the all-night chemist's in Piccadilly, and the inevitable line of heroin-addicts moves no less inevitably into frame. It's a measure of the film's success that instead of the touristic/ voyeuristic feeling induced by similar scenes in *Midnight Cowboy*, one is left sharing the doctor's not quite useless compassion for the sadness of the world.

**Jan Dawson, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1971**

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## SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY

*Director:* John Schlesinger  
*Production Companies:* Vectia Films, Vic Films (London)  
*Producer:* Joseph Janni  
*Associate Producer:* Edward Joseph  
*Production Manager:* Hugh Harlow  
*Location Manager:* Lee Bolon \*  
*Assistant Director:* Simon Relph  
*Assistant Director:* Michael Green \*  
*Continuity:* Ann Skinner  
*Casting:* Miriam Brickman  
*Screenplay:* Penelope Gilliatt  
*Screenplay:* David Sherwin \*  
*Director of Photography:* Billy Williams  
*Camera Operator:* David Harcourt  
*Editor:* Richard Marden  
*Assistant Editor:* Mary Kessel  
*Designer:* Luciana Arrighi  
*Art Director:* Norman Dorme  
*Set Decorator:* Harry Cordwell  
*Sculpture/Models:* Loncraigne + Broxton  
*Chargehand Prop:* George Ball  
*Costume Designer:* Jocelyn Rickards  
*Make-up:* Freddie Williamson  
*Hairdresser:* Betty Glasow  
*Special Music:* Ron Geesin  
*Director of Music:* Douglas Gamley  
*Sound Recording:* Simon Kaye, Gerry Humphreys  
*Sound Editor:* David Campling  
*Publicity:* Edna Tromans \*

### Cast

Peter Finch (*Dr Daniel Hirsh*)  
Glenda Jackson (*Alex Greville*)  
Murray Head (*Bob Elkin*)  
Peggy Ashcroft (*Mrs Greville*)  
Tony Britton (*George Harding*)  
Maurice Denham (*Mr Greville*)  
Bessie Love (*answering service lady*)  
Vivian Pickles (*Alva Hodson*)  
Frank Windsor (*Bill Hodson*)

Thomas Baptiste (*Professor Johns*)  
Richard Pearson (*middle-aged patient*)  
June Brown (*woman patient*)  
Hannah Norbert (*Daniel's mother*)  
Harold Goldblatt (*Daniel's father*)  
Marie Burke (*Aunt Astrid*)  
Caroline Blakiston (*rowing woman at Daniel's party*)  
Peter Halliday (*rowing woman's husband*)  
Douglas Lambert (*man at Daniel's party*)  
Jon Finch (*Scotsman*)  
Kimi Tallmadge (*Lucy Hodson*)  
Russell Lewis (*Timothy Hodson*)  
Emma Schlesinger (*Tess Hodson*)  
Karl Ferber (*Hodson son*)  
Patrick Thornberry (*John-Stuart Hodson*)  
Robert Rietty (*Daniel's brother*)  
Liane Aukin (*Daniel's sister-in-law*)  
Robin Presky (*Daniel's nephew*)  
Edward Evans (*husband at hospital*)  
Gabrielle Daye (*wife at hospital*)  
George Belbin (*next-door neighbour*)  
Richard Loncraigne, Royce Mills (*Bob's partners*)  
Monica Vassiliou (*travel agent*)  
John Rae (*airline doctor*)  
Ellis Dale (*chemist*)  
Joe Wadham (*lorry driver*)  
Henry Danziger (*cantor*)  
Ann Firbank, Derek Gilbert, William Job, John Warner, Nikki Arrighi, Francis Ghent, Donald Sumpter, Rohan McCulloch, Barbara Markham, Robert Wilde (*party guests*)  
Esta Charkham, Hilary Hardiman, Simon Joseph, Gideon Kolb, Martin Lawrence, Mercia Mansfield, Reuben Elvy, Jouey Douben (*barmitzvah guests*)  
Cindy Burrows (*Alex as a child*)\*  
Daniel Day-Lewis (*schoolboy kicking a car*)\*

UK 1971©  
110 mins

\* Uncredited

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## GLENDA JACKSON

### Women in Love

Sat 2 Jul 17:40; Wed 13 Jul 20:30; Fri 15 Jul 20:30

### Horror of Darkness + Let's Murder Vivaldi

Sun 3 Jul 15:20

### Mary, Queen of Scots

Sun 3 Jul 18:15; Wed 20 Jul 20:30

### Glenda Jackson in Conversation

Tue 5 Jul 18:15

### Sunday Bloody Sunday

Tue 5 Jul 20:40; Sun 24 Jul 18:30

### Hedda

Fri 8 Jul 18:00; Sat 16 Jul 16:30

### A Touch of Class

Sat 9 Jul 15:15; Sat 23 Jul 20:45

### The Romantic Englishwoman

Sun 10 Jul 18:10; Mon 18 Jul 20:40

### Stevie

Thu 14 Jul 20:30; Sat 23 Jul 12:00

### Hopscotch

Fri 15 Jul 18:00; Tue 26 Jul 20:40

### House Calls

Sat 16 Jul 18:45; Fri 22 Jul 20:30

### The Maids

Sat 16 Jul 20:50; Sun 24 Jul 15:50

### The Rainbow

Tue 19 Jul 20:40; Sun 31 Jul 13:00

### Giro City + Glenda Jackson & Politics (clip compilation)

Thu 21 Jul 17:50

### Turtle Diary

Thu 21 Jul 20:50; Fri 29 Jul 20:30

### Strange Interlude

Sat 23 Jul 15:30

### The House of Bernarda Alba

Mon 25 Jul 17:50

### Elizabeth Is Missing

Fri 29 Jul 18:15

### Elizabeth R (the complete series)

Eps 1-3 Sat 30 Jul 14:20; Eps 4-6 Sun 31 Jul 14:30

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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