



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 78=

Sátántangó

A monumental cinematic achievement, *Sátántangó* bears testimony to the purity of the director's artistic vision and the perfection of his craft. On a canvas that is both dark and deep, Béla Tarr paints with light, movement and the palpable passage of time to create a portrait of Hungary at a crucial historical inflection point. *Sátántangó* is as transfixing a film as any that has ever been.

Saibal Chatterjee, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

Tarr's epic adaptation of a novel by regular collaborator László Krasznahorkai chronicles – in flitting back and forth to offer a range of perspectives – the various conspiracies consequent upon the collapse of a collective farm; self-serving greed, betrayal, deceit, suspicion and conflict soon prevail. Uncompromising in its narrative audacity and slow pace, the film – shot in highly atmospheric monochrome – is haunting, hypnotic and strangely beautiful.

Geoff Andrew, bfi.org.uk

By the time I first saw *Sátántangó* – in 2000, six years after it was made – Béla Tarr's film was already something of a legend, and hard to find in the UK. Watching it on a roughly copied VHS was the closest one could get to a film that already felt like a fabled relic from some strange, distant past. Even now, when it has been readily available for years, this 440-minute drama feels like a recovered trace of some parallel cinema history, with its black-and-white images etched in harsh shades of charcoal and chalk, and its extremely spare use of dialogue, language often reduced to an incantatory background chorus.

Sátántangó changed the way many of us think about film, and about screen time: it was a revelatory manifestation of what has since come to be known as 'slow cinema' (although slowness and extended duration do not automatically go hand in hand). Now restored and rereleased, *Sátántangó* is, in theory, ideal lockdown watching – or rather, this is the perfect opportunity, for some of us at least, to find the necessary seven hours plus. Really, though, it needs to be watched with an audience, in a cinema; failing that, find someone who'll take a long sofa voyage with you, or stream it in synch with friends. Durational cinema requires a communal experience, a sense of living together through the same heightened awareness of space and time: hence the bonds of secret kinship between people who have attended certain Lav Diaz screenings or a weekend marathon of Jacques Rivette's *Out 1* (1971). Watching *Sátántangó* together is not a matter of winning our spurs for endurance (although Diaz jokingly calls his tenacious viewers 'warriors'), more of being celebrants – of emerging transformed by a very singular ceremony. *Sátántangó* especially needs to be seen communally because it's a film about community. It shows how tenuously a community holds together, how easily it can fall apart, or be dismantled.

Based on the 1985 novel by László Krasznahorkai, who collaborated on the film with Tarr and editor Agnes Hranitzky, *Sátántangó* is about the survivors of a failed collective farm. They briefly rally from their dissolution and

drunkenness to buy into a dream of wealth and comfort sold them by would-be saviour Irimiás, whose forecast return is enveloped by a near-mythical aura. It's irresistible to see the film now as a presage of Viktor Orbán's authoritarian takeover of Hungary, although Tarr told me in 2001 that, when making the film, he and his collaborators 'never thought about any political connection'; in fact, while Irimiás embodies the pernicious appeal of charismatic populism, the true Orbán figure in Tarr's work might be the ruthless opportunist Mrs Eszter in *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), played by Hanna Schygulla.

As the title suggests, *Sátántangó* is as much dance as narrative. It is structured, as is the novel – of which it is a surprisingly faithful adaptation – like a tango, six steps forward, six steps back. The dance draws us into the slow musical progression of the narrative, immersing us in the choreography both of Gábor Medvigy's camera, with its exceptionally long travelling shots, and of its characters. We follow them in their long wanderings (a doctor's desperate trudge in search of drink; the approach of Irimiás and sidekick Petrina as they march down windblown roads towards us, never seeming to get closer) or in their delirious swayings at the village bar (one of cinema's greatest drunk scenes).

Some durational fictions – such as Mariano Llinás's recent 13-hour *La flor* – use extended time to elaborate a multiplicity of possible narratives, while Rivette's *Out 1* is about characters in search of a drama, which only gradually gels around their interactions. By contrast, *Sátántangó* is purposeful and precise from the outset, with its overlapping episodes viewed and repeated from different angles. That absolute rigour, with its attendant sense of tragic inexorability, is what keeps us mesmerised by the meticulous, controlled (you almost feel like saying: predestined) movement of the camera, the actors, the landscape around them. Other long films incorporate, often cultivate, gaps, stasis, dead time; that's not the case here. *Sátántangó* is a work of slowness, at times stillness, yet the music never stops; it's a film in which every moment counts, a dance in which every step signifies.

Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 2020

SATANTANGO (SÁTÁNTANGÓ)

Director: Béla Tarr

Production Companies: MIT, Von Vietinghoff Filmproduktion, Vega Film, Magyar Televízió, Télévision Suisse Romande

Producers: György Fehér, Joachim von Vietinghoff, Ruth Waldburger

Screenplay: László Krasznahorkai, Béla Tarr

Based on the Novel by: László Krasznahorkai

Director of Photography: Gábor Medvigy

Editor: Ágnes Hranitzky

Costumess: Gyula Pauer, János Breckl

Sound: György Kovács

Narrator: Mihály Ráday

Cast

Mihály Víg (*Irimiás*)

Dr Putyi Horváth (*Petrina*)

Erika Bók (*Estike*)

Peter Berling (*doctor*)

Miklós B. Székely (*Futaki*)

László felugossy (*Schmidt*)

Éva Almási Albert (*Mrs Schmidt*)

Alfréd Járay (*Halics*)

Erzsébet Gaál (*Mrs Halics*)

János Derzsi (*Kráner*)

Irén Szajki (*Mrs Kráner*)

Barna Mihók (*Kelemen*)

István Juhász (*Kerekes*)

Zoltán Kamondi (*innkeeper*)

Péter Dobai (*captain*)

András Bodnár (*Horgos Sanyi*)

Ferenc Kállai (*Hungarian dubbed voice of Peter Berling*)

Ica Bojár

Gyula Pauer

Ernö Mihályi

Mihály Kormos

András Fekete

Andor Simai

Katalin Krizsánné Kovács

Hungary/ Germany/Switzerland 1994

439 mins + intervals

SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

The General Sun 1 Jan 12:10; Sun 29 Jan 15:10

The Leopard (Il gattopardo)

Sun 1 Jan 14:10; Thu 5 Jan 18:40; Fri 20 Jan 14:00

Sunset Boulevard Sun 1 Jan 15:50; Fri 27 Jan 14:30; Mon 30 Jan 17:50

Metropolis Sun 1 Jan 17:55 (+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI Curator); Sun 15 Jan 14:40; Mon 30 Jan 16:30 BFI IMAX

L'avventura (The Adventure) Sun 1 Jan 18:05; Sun 22 Jan 15:20; Mon 30 Jan 20:15

Touki-Bouki Mon 2 Jan 13:40; Tue 31 Jan 17:40

The Red Shoes Mon 2 Jan 13:50; Tue 24 Jan 18:05

Once Upon a Time in the West (C'era una volta il West) Mon 2 Jan 15:20; Sat 7 Jan 17:15; Sun 15 Jan 16:15 BFI IMAX

Get Out Mon 2 Jan 18:40; Fri 6 Jan 17:50

Pierrot le Fou Tue 3 Jan 18:10; Wed 4 Jan 20:30; Thu 19 Jan 20:30

My Neighbour Totoro (Tonari no Totoro)

Tue 3 Jan 18:20; Sun 22 Jan 10:00 BFI IMAX; Sat 28 Jan 13:40

A Man Escaped (Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé) Tue 3 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 20:30

Black Girl (La Noire de...)

Tue 3 Jan 20:30; Thu 12 Jan 18:15 (+ intro)

Ugetsu Monogatari

Tue 3 Jan 20:50; Tue 17 Jan 20:30

Madame de... Wed 4 Jan 14:30; Fri 20 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, Cultural Programme Manager)

Yi Yi (A One and a Two...) Wed 4 Jan 18:40; Sun 22 Jan 14:00 (+ intro by Hyun Jin Cho, Film Programmer, BFI Festivals)

The Shining Fri 6 Jan 20:10; Tue 10 Jan 20:10; Sat 21 Jan 20:30 BFI IMAX

Spirited Away (Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi)

Sat 7 Jan 12:10; Sun 22 Jan 12:30 BFI IMAX

Tropical Malady (Sud pralad)

Sat 7 Jan 13:50; Mon 9 Jan 20:40

Histoire(s) du cinema Sat 7 Jan 16:30

Blue Velvet Sat 7 Jan 20:30; Fri 20 Jan 20:35; Tue 24 Jan 21:00 BFI IMAX

Sátántangó Sun 8 Jan 11:15; Sat 21 Jan 13:30

Celine and Julie Go Boating (Céline et Julie vont en bateau) Sun 8 Jan 14:45; Sat 21 Jan 17:00

Journey to Italy (Viaggio in Italia) Sun 8 Jan 18:20; Mon 23 Jan 14:30; Fri 27 Jan 20:50

Parasite (Gisaengchung)

Mon 9 Jan 17:50; Wed 18 Jan 17:30 BFI IMAX

The Gleaners and I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse) + La Jetée Wed 11 Jan 20:30; Mon 23 Jan 18:10

A Matter of Life and Death

Thu 12 Jan 20:40; Sun 22 Jan 11:30

Chungking Express (Chung Him sam lam)

Thu 12 Jan 20:45; Tue 17 Jan 20:50; Sat 21 Jan 14:15

Modern Times Fri 13 Jan 17:45; Sun 22 Jan 13:10

A Brighter Summer Day (Guling jie shaonian sha ren shijian) Mon 16 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 16:00

Imitation of Life Wed 18 Jan 20:30; Wed 25 Jan 14:30; Sun 29 Jan 12:30

The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena) Thu 19 Jan 18:00; Sat 28 Jan 13:50

Sansho the Bailiff (Sansho Dayu)

Fri 20 Jan 17:45; Thu 26 Jan 17:50

Andrei Rublev Thu 26 Jan 18:40; Sun 29 Jan 17:20

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