



Deep End

I never realised that the organised world of cinema thought it had lost *Deep End* – you have to be grateful for small mercies, because I'd have been even more upset if I'd heard that rumour when it was current. After all, if a thing as substantial but phantom as a film is lost it's not the same as searching for an engagement ring diamond in a pile of dirty snow. Not that I believe her scummy boyfriend ever gave Susan (Jane Asher) a real diamond. Chances are it was fake, bought for five quid at a dayglo hut on Tottenham Court Road. But it's the thought that counts, I suppose – so long as the thought doesn't kill you.

Now the film is back, restored and more or less safe. But can it be as dangerous as it felt in 1970?

Suppose they had lost *Deep End*, would any kid today credit that the film had existed just from hearing its description. How does one tell this unlikely story? You see, when Susan cuffs Mike (John Moulder-Brown), because he's let the air out of the tyres she was planning to drive on, the blow knocks the stone from the setting of her engagement ring. And it falls somewhere in the snow. So it's demented, yet it makes insane sense, that the two of them collect every bit of likely snow in plastic bags and take it back to the closed public baths where they work, form a camp in the drained pool, and use a long extension cord and an electric kettle to melt the snow in an attempt to isolate the 'diamond'. That's daft, isn't it? But it's what children might do. Susan knows she needs to retrieve her diamond to stop that sour fiancé turning livid, while Mike is stupid with desire for Susan. That's the real issue: it's a film about a kid going mad with hope – and I wonder whether that happens any more?

So the film is called *Deep End* because much of it is set at a suburban swimming bath (they used a place in Leytonstone, all echoes and jaded tile, chlorine and semen, though a lot of the film was shot in Bavaria). But the true 'deep end' – as in going off the – is a 'not-a-snowball's-chance-in-hell' crush. Mike is supposed to be 15 or so, just out of school but still a boy. He has no qualifications except an 'O' level in Longing. He's a virgin, you know it, and you're as sure that Susan isn't, although she can't be more than a few years older. He's like someone you'd meet in a Wedekind play and she's from Peckham or Camberwell – dead attractive for maybe six more months, but cold, snarky and wearing stupid white boots because she saw them on *Ready Steady Go!*, and a dress cut up to her bum. He rips up her stuffed toy because she calls his Mum a 'cow'. She's mean because she assumes she's superior, but Asher has the eye-shadow of experience, so there's nothing Mike can do except fall disastrously in love with her curt grace.

I am talking about Jerzy Skolimowski's 1970 film *Deep End*, which he wrote with Jerzy Gruza and Boleslaw Sulik, and for which Asher got a BAFTA nomination as supporting actress – she lost to Margaret Leighton in *The Go-Between* (can you credit they shared an era, let alone the same year?). I realise that in a serious film magazine such as this – especially one that ran an excellent survey of Skolimowski (by David Thompson) in the April issue – the sensible and responsible thing to do is to relate this to the

director's oeuvre in a ... useful way? So I could propose that *Deep End* shows a rare and astringent blend of realism and surrealism, just as it has the sleight of hand able to shuffle Leytonstone and Munich. (That feels better, doesn't it?) I could go on at some length about it being a movie of diverse fluids – red paint, milkshake, swimming pool water, snow, blood and bodily fluids too. I could even add, politely, that since you never really know what Skolimowski is going to do next it's actually hard to locate his oeuvre.

What it comes down to is that I love this film so much I'm still shaken by the thought that it might have been lost – and even by the possibility that if young people today aren't going to go wild for it then it might as well have stayed lost. Now, you shouldn't admit such things in a serious film magazine, should you? Though I'm bound to wonder, would more 'lost' films be good for us all? The discreet charm of films you can't see is not to be overlooked.

If it was a lost film, I would remember the way Mike finds a lifesize cardboard poster of a nearly-nude girl in Soho, steals it, and then goes swimming with it in the pool. There's no proof that the girl in the cardboard cut-out is Susan or Jane Asher (except that it's positively the same dame at the mundane level of photography); she is his Eve. And the film offers no explanation for this because it doesn't need to – you can take it one of two ways: Susan is a sly fox who gets around, and/or Mike sees her everywhere. She is the incarnation of desire. He is so smitten with her he can't recognise her as a caustic tart who's no good to him. As if we ever seek what's best for us. That's why it is his poetic ambition if he finds the diamond – I say *if* – to lie naked on the floor of the dry pool with the stone resting on his tongue so that she is going to have to come and get it, and come and get it.

I know the credits say Skolimowski made the film – and I would accept this even if he wasn't there on the tube in one scene reading a Polish newspaper – but would you really be inclined to argue if the credits said Jean Vigo or Luis Buñuel or Michael Powell had done it? Powell would have been thrilled by Asher's tawny hair – it might have brought him out of exile – and you could easily rhapsodise over the hue of her hair and its affinity with blood, especially if you were not clinging to the tatters of critical or scholarly dignity.

If you have any doubts about *Deep End*, I'm not the one to answer them. Haven't we always known it's possible for a film to stay 'lost' or unnoticed when everyone is apparently looking at it? But if you have any reason to give yourself an adventure, just play it in a double bill with *L'Atalante*. The one is black and white, the other is colour, but both films are about the same underwater attempt to attain desire, and both come from an age in which we were accustomed to see creatures swimming in the screen's liquid as if we were at an aquarium.

David Thomson, *Sight and Sound*, June 2011

DEEP END

Directed by: Jerzy Skolimowski
©: Maran-Film, Kettledrum Productions
Presented by: Maran-Film, Kettledrum Productions
Executive Producer: Judd Bernard
Produced by: Helmut Jedele
Associate Producer: Lutz Hengst
Production Manager: Michael Bittins
Assistant Director: Wolfgang Glattes
Written by: Jerzy Skolimowski, J. Gruza, B. Sulik
Director of Photography: Charly Steinberger
Edited by: Barrie Vince
Art Directors: Anthony Pratt, Max Ott Jr
Costumes: Ursula Sensburg
Make-up: Elke Müller
Music by: Cat Stevens, The Can
Sound: Carsten Ulrich, Christian Schubert

Cast

Jane Asher (*Susan*)
John Moulder-Brown (*Mike*)
Karl-Michael Vogler (*teacher*)
Chris Sandford (*fiancée*)
Diana Dors (*lady client*)
Louise Martini (*nightclub 'model'*)
Erica Beer (*baths cashier*)
Anita Lochner (*Kathy*)
Annemarie Kuster (*nightclub receptionist*)
Cheryl Hall, Christina Paul (*hot dog girls*)
Dieter Eppler (*Stoker*)
Karl Ludwig Lindt (*baths manager*)
Eduard Linkers (*cinema manager*)
Will Danin (*policeman*)
Gerald Rowland (*Mike's friend*)
Bert Kwouk (*hot dog stand man*)
Ursula Mellin (*lady client*)
Erika Wackernagel (*Mike's mother*)
Peter Martin Urtel (*Mike's father/2nd policeman*)
Jerzy Skolimowski (*man on tube*)*

Germany/UK 1970
91 mins

* Uncredited

OUTSIDERS AND EXILES: THE FILMS OF JERZY SKOLIMOWSKI

Jerzy Skolimowski in Conversation Tue 28 March 18:30
The Shout Tue 28 March 20:45 (+ intro by Jerzy Skolimowski);
Wed 5 Apr 20:55; Fri 28 Apr 18:30
Walkover (Walkower) Wed 29 Mar 18:20 (+ Q&A with Jerzy
Skolimowski); Sat 8 Apr 18:10
Moonlighting Wed 29 Mar 20:45 (+ intro by Jerzy Skolimowski);
Sun 9 Apr 13:00; Sat 15 Apr 18:20
Hands Up! (Rece do góry) Fri 31 Mar 20:45; Mon 10 Apr 15:40
Barrier (Bariera) Sat 1 Apr 18:20; Tue 4 Apr 20:50 (+ intro by season
curator Michael Brooke)
EO Sat 1 Apr 20:50; Wed 5 Apr 18:20; Fri 21 Apr 20:50;
Sat 22 Apr 18:20; Thu 27 Apr 20:45

Dialogue 20-40-60 (Dialóg 20-40-60) Sun 2 Apr 12:30; Sat 15 Apr 20:45
Deep End Sun 2 Apr 15:40; Mon 10 Apr 18:30; Wed 19 Apr 20:55
Le Départ Sun 2 Apr 18:30; Mon 17 Apr 20:40
Identification Marks: None (Rysopis) Mon 3 Apr 21:00; Sun 9 Apr 18:40
Outsider and Exile Tue 4 Apr 18:15
The Lightship Sat 8 Apr 12:15; Fri 14 Apr 20:40
11 Minutes (11 minut) Sun 16 Apr 12:30; Sat 29 Apr 20:30
Four Nights with Anna (Cztery noce z Anna)
Sun 23 Apr 12:40; Fri 28 Apr 20:50
Essential Killing Sun 23 Apr 18:40; Sat 29 Apr 14:40

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be available on a 2-disc BFI Blu-ray from 24 April

Walkover and *Barrier* will be released on Blu-ray
by Second Run later this year

Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

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