



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# Love Is the Devil

### Love Is the Devil

#### Study for a Portrait of Francis Bacon

Director: John Maybury

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BBC Films and The British Film Institute present in association with The Arts Council of England/Première Heure/Uplink a British Film Institute production in association with Partners in Crime with the assistance of STATE Screenplay developed by BFI Production and BBC Films with the support of The European Script Fund – an initiative of The Media Programme of the European Union

Initial Development by: Partners in Crime

Supported by: The National Lottery through the Arts Council of England

Executive Producers: Frances-Anne Solomon, Ben Gibson

Première Heure Executive Producer: Patrice Haddad

Uplink Executive Producer: Takashi Asai

Producer: Chiara Menage

Co-producers: James Cohen, Don Jordan

Line Producer: Yvonne Ibazebo

BBC Production Executive: Christopher Cameron

BFI Production Executive: Christopher Collins

Production Co-ordinator: Bella Randall

Production Accountant: Trevor Stanley

Location Manager: Bill Payn

Post-production Supervisor: Emma Salter

1st Assistant Director: Deborah Saban

2nd Assistant Director: Olivia Lloyd

3rd Assistant Director: Jojo Tulloh

Script Supervisor: Laura Goulding

Casting: Mary Selway, Emma Buckley

Script Editor: Miriam Segal

Written by: John Maybury

Co-writers: James Cohen, Don Jordan

Director of Photography: John Mathieson

Focus Puller: Keith McNamara

Clapper Loader: Thomas McFarling

Gaffer: Richard Barber

Grip: Rupert Lloyd-Parry

Video Technician: Ron Osman

Stills Photography: Jaap Buitendijk

Visual Effects: The Film Factory at VTR Visual

Effects Supervisor: Simon Giles

Title Background/Additional Effects:

Rushes Post Production

Wire Effects: Kevin Welch

Special Effects: Bob Smoke

Graphic Artist: Matthew Maxwell

Editor: Daniel Goddard

Assistant Editors: James Lingard, Emily Grant,

Anna Turville, Gavin Buckley

On-line Editor: Gavin Burridge

Production Designer: Alan MacDonald

Art Director: Christina Moore

Set Dresser: Philippa Hart

Scenic Artist: Thomasina Smith

Storyboard Artist: Temple Clark

Props Master: Alex Ward

Costume Designer: Annie Symons

Wardrobe Supervisor: Miles Johnson

Hair/Make-up Designer: Jacquetta Levon

Make-up Artist: Alex King

Hairdresser: Donald McInnes

Titles/Opticals: General Screen Enterprises

Laboratory: Rank Film Laboratories

Music Composer/Performer: Ryuichi Sakamoto

Music Editors: Daniel Goddard, Jeremy Price

Mixed by: Goh Hotoda

Sound Design: Paul Davies

When *Love Is the Devil* was released in 1998, it was John Maybury's first incursion into the mainstream after a long career stretching back to his teens when he worked on Derek Jarman's celebrated film *Jubilee* (1978) in the British film avant-garde (though Maybury preferred the term 'underground cinema'). In the early 1980s and working on no budgets Maybury – together with artist and filmmaker Cerith Wyn Evans – spearheaded the last coherent British avant-garde film movement, dubbed the New Romantics (much to the chagrin of the filmmakers themselves). With their use of the amateur Super 8 film gauge, they developed an intensely imagistic aesthetic often combining symbolist motifs with sexual (primarily gay) excess and an inter-textuality in which pop, classical and world music, dance, text and fashion freely intermingled. In this way, the New Romantics broke with the modernist formalism that had dominated the avant-garde since the late 1960s.

Godard, Cocteau, Warhol and Kenneth Anger among others were obvious reference points for Maybury, who in his dynamic and hypnotic short film *Tortures that Laugh* (1983), shot on black and white 16mm, depicted a dark claustrophobic world in which personal isolation was endemic (a view that seems to have informed all of his work since including *Love Is the Devil* and the more recent *The Jacket*, 2005). In a long video piece *Circus Logic I-IV* (1983) he collaged found imagery taken from films, television, newspapers and magazines, and at times the voice of William S. Burroughs, to explore popular culture and its stifling effects on personal and sexual freedom. Maybury's worldview seems one of social and psychological fragmentation and superficiality, which made his work quite distinctive within the movement, and still informs his filmmaking.

By the mid 1980s Maybury was an adept and keen experimenter with the new technologies of video and early computerisation. He also became more involved in pop videos, working with Boy George, Neneh Cherry and Sinéad O'Connor and contributing to Jarman's films and videos, notably The Smith's 'The Queen Is Dead'. Ironically, his most successful pop video – for O'Connor's hit 'Nothing Compares 2 U' (1990) – used only a very simple Warholian long take, focussing on O'Connor's moving performance. It scooped MTV and Grammy awards and became a classic of the genre.

Even at this early stage in his career Maybury showed a willingness and ability to shape his work to the material at hand and not to be ruled by any single aesthetic or technological practice. In the years that followed, particularly in the early 1990s, he was an early enthusiast for the burgeoning video/digital-effects world, using such techniques in his hour-long films *Premonition of Absurd Perversion in Sexual Personae Part 1* (1992) and *Remembrance of Things Fast* (1993). In both these films a frantic approach dominated by special effects often overwhelmed any theme, though the case here was often that of the medium being the message: media proliferation and its disjunctive chaotic invasion of society seemed to reflect the mental breakdown of characters, who in *Remembrance* speak directly to camera. In retrospect it is clear how much importance Maybury gave to performance. For example in 1992 he made *Man to Man*, based on the one-woman play of the same name by Manfred Karge with Tilda Swinton in the single role, of a German woman who disguises herself as a man during and after World War II.

But in most ways *Love Is the Devil* marked a fundamental break. First, Maybury had a decent budget. Second, the fragmented excess of preceding films gave way to a cool, detached control with priority given to the performances, notably those of Derek Jacobi as Francis Bacon and Daniel Craig as his lover George Dyer. A BBC co-funded film, it was loosely based on Daniel Farson's biography

Sound Recordist: Ken Lee  
Dubbing Mixer: Tim Alban  
Stunt Co-ordinators: Rod Woodruff, Glen Marks  
Special Consultant: Daniel Farson  
Cast:

Derek Jacobi (*Francis Bacon*)  
Daniel Craig (*George Dyer*)  
Anne Lambton (*Isabel Rawsthorne*)  
Karl Johnson (*John Deakin*)  
Annabel Brooks (*Henrietta Moraes*)  
Adrian Scarborough (*Daniel Farson*)  
Tilda Swinton (*Muriel Belcher*)  
Richard Newbold (*Blonde Billy*)  
Ariel De Ravenel (*French official*)  
Tallulah (*Ian Board*)  
Andy Linden (*Ken Bidwell*)  
David Kennedy (*Joe Furneal*)  
Gary Hume (*Volker Dix*)  
Damian Dibben, Antony Cotton  
(*Brighton rent boys*)  
Anthony Ryding (*London rent boy*)  
Christian Martin (*bell-hop*)  
Ray Olley (*boxing referee*)  
Wesley Morgan, Nigel Travis (*boxers*)  
Eddie Kerr (*tailor*)  
George Clarke, David Windle (*wrestlers*)  
William Hoyland (*police sergeant*)  
Mark Umbers (*PC Denham*)  
Hamish Bowles (*David Hockney*)  
Jibby Beane, Gentuca Bini, James Birch,  
Tim Burke, Liz Clarke, Jemima Cotter,  
Fiona Dealey, John Dunbar, Victoria Fernandez,  
Natalie Gibson, Caroline Hardy, Charlie Hayward,  
Miles Johnson, Kate St. Johnston, Ulla Larson,  
Alistair Mathieson, Chiara Menage, James Mitchell,  
Gregor Muir, Lorcan O'Neill, Jon Spiteri,  
Francesco Vezzoli, Thalia Valeta, Marjorie Walker,  
Gillian Young (*Parisian art world*)  
UK/France/Japan 1998©  
91 mins

The screening on Wednesday 30 August will be introduced.

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of Bacon. The estate did not allow any reproduction of Bacon's paintings in the film, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise for Maybury, who was able to focus on what interested him about Bacon, namely his relationship with George Dyer, a petty East London thief. It is a remarkably confident first feature film in its handling of the narrative and in its excellent performances.

The film begins 'at the end' with Dyer's suicide by an overdose in a Paris hotel as Bacon attends the opening night of his major 1971 retrospective at the Grand Palais. What follows is the story of two men locked into a relationship from which neither can escape. Seeing the film again, not only has it not dated, but it can be seen as a film that offers much more than the usual artist biog. It achieves a quite stunning psychological depth in its portrait of a tragic love affair. Despite some awkwardness in the script it is clear to see why Steven Soderbergh admired the film and how it became Maybury's calling card to Hollywood.

A complex film, dealing with sex, art, class, love and neurosis, *Love Is the Devil* works in many ways on dualities and ironic reversals. Bacon's sexual masochism – with Dyer dishing out the sadism with belted fist – is reversed in their social relationship in which it is Bacon's confidence, sophistication and wit that cruelly dominates the uneducated working class thief, enthralled by his famous lover. While Bacon can relish working-class culture – shown in a visit to an East London boxing match – Dyer is lost in Bacon's camp bohemian Soho world of writers and artists. In matters of love, it is Dyer who falls victim to a crushing dependency on Bacon as he mentally disintegrates and becomes addicted to drugs and drink, while Bacon grows weary of him. Bacon also recognises his own inability to love, revealing a deep isolation and coldness to his character that is relieved only by his paintings, which alone bear witness to his deeper emotional states, and that seem to reflect Dyer's inner turmoil and nightmares. It is this paradox that drives the film and places its achievement as a depiction of the artistic attitude and process alongside Jarman's *Caravaggio*.

Maybury's long-standing interest in the overlapping aspects of British culture found a fascinating outlet in *Love Is the Devil*. Visits to the different worlds of the British Museum, the boxing match, the Colony Room Club are all absorbed into Bacon's world where aesthetics and sex rule, whereas for Dyer there is only confusion. If Bacon can produce art from this fragmentary experience, then Dyer can only drown in its contradictions. For both men, in the end, love is an unattainable state, forever out of reach. While Bacon can artistically thrive on this, Dyer's mental life implodes, leading to his suicide. Maybury makes this point with great visual economy in a memorable shot of Bacon working in his studio at night with a drunken Dyer crumpled on the littered floor behind him.

Maybury had always been fascinated by subcultures and he seems to relish the scenes at the Colony Room, run by Tilda Swinton's Muriel Belcher, whose obscene wit and ruthless purging of unwanted guests was notorious. Played with gusto, equalled by Karl Johnson's seedy and more laid-back *Vogue* photographer John Deakin, they are the film's Greek chorus, gathered around Bacon, and revelling in his fame and outrageous wit and charm. For Dyer, it is an alien world in which he is tolerated and patronised. Finally, Dyer can exist neither in his old world of the London working-class criminal nor in this new one revolving around his lover. But Maybury draws out a very sympathetic performance from Jacobi as Bacon, who in many ways is the villain of the film, and Craig's Dyer achieves a wonderful balance of a tough man struggling with his inner demons. A remarkable film.

Michael O'Pray, *Love Is the Devil* DVD/Blu-ray booklet essay (BFI, 2008/2015)