



ACTING HARD: WORKING CLASS MASCULINITY IN BRITISH CINEMA

Face

Skin

Director: Vincent O'Connell
UK 1995
11 mins

Face

Director: Antonia Bird
©: BBC, Distant Horizon
Production Companies: BBC, Distant Horizon, Daigoro Face Productions, BBC Films, British Screen
Executive Producer: Anant Singh
Producers: David M. Thompson, Elinor Day
Co-producer: Paul Tivers
Associate Producer: Helena Spring
Unit Production Managers: Paul Frift, Barry Newell
Production Co-ordinator: Marianne Wilman
Location Managers: Wayne McCoy, Phil Clark, Martin Robinson
1st Assistant Director: Vebe Borge
2nd Assistant Directors: Beni Turkson, Richard Walker
Script Supervisor: Julie Robinson
Casting: Karen Lindsay Stewart, Sharon Howard Field
Screenplay: Ronan Bennett
Director of Photography: Fred Tammes
Camera Operator: Julian Barber
Steadicam: Roger Tooley
Special Effects: Dave Beavis, Graham Longhurst, Graham Hills
Editor: St. John O'Rorke
Production Designer: Chris Townsend
Art Director: Eddy Andres
Set Decorator: Carolyn Scott
Costume Designer: Jill Taylor
Wardrobe Mistress: Jane Hamnett
Make-up: Anastasia Shirley
Hairdresser: Barbara Southcott
Titles/Opticals: Cine Image
Music: Andy Roberts, Paul Conboy, Adrian Corker
Music Supervisor: Andy Roberts
Music Editor: Dave McGrath
A.P.E. Score Mixer: Jono Podmore
Music Adviser: Dave Fryatt
Sound Mixer: Jim Greenhorn
Dubbing Mixer: Tim Alban
Sound Editor: Roger Mitchell
Dialogue Editor: Keith Tunney
ADR Recordist: Pete Smith
Foley Artists: Jack Stew, Paula Boram, Ruth Sullivan, Felicity Cottrell
Foley Editor: Bernard O'Reilly
Stunt Co-ordinator: Gareth Milne
Armourers: Robert Partridge, Gregg Pearson
Cast:
Robert Carlyle (Ray)
Ray Winstone (Dave)
Steven Waddington (Stevie)
Philip Davis (Julian)
Damon Albarn (Jason)
Lena Headey (Connie)
Peter Vaughan (Sonny)
Sue Johnston (Alice, Ray's mother)
Steve Sweeney (Weasel)
Gery Conlon (Vince)
Leon Black (Robbie)
David Boateng (Lionel)
Eddie Nestor (Pearse)
Christine Tremarco (Sarah)
Andrew Tiernan (Chris)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Face never pulls its punches about the social forces behind self-serving attitudes. Yet it also never allows its strongly left-wing attitude to distract from a powerful story, a canny balance characteristic of Antonia Bird. Her first feature, the 1993 BBC film *Safe* (which also starred Carlyle), tackled the plight of two homeless youths without resorting to sentiment or being patronising; *Priest* explored the Catholic Church's attitudes towards homosexuality and pastoral celibacy without making its gay protagonist a saint. Bird has also directed plays by Trevor Griffiths, Hanif Kureishi and Jim Cartwright, and perhaps this explains her skill with actors and sharp ear for the rhythms of British street-speak. But her sensitive use of locations and fine sense of editing rhythm belong entirely to a feel for the camera honed since her time as a director on *EastEnders*, back in the days when it was more overtly political. The training this gave her in managing a large cast has also paid off in *Face*: its gang is like a pack of wolves, running together until they start to tear strips of hide off one another.

Face's excellent ensemble playing is just one thing among many that puts it a cut above the routine heist-gone-wrong film. Still, Robert Carlyle's performance should be singled out. In a career with hardly a foot put wrong, and with *The Full Monty* (1997) affirming what *Hamish Macbeth* and *Trainspotting* (1995) showed about how good a comic lead he can be, *Face* proves just how charismatic he is as a heavyweight-drama lead. As the nation's supposedly glorious past recedes, talents such as Bird's and Carlyle's provide hope that the British film industry has a strong present and even a future beckoning.

Antonia Bird on 'Face'

You've worked in the US recently; what was it about Face that brought you back to London?

I've been trying to work with screenwriter Ronan Bennett for a couple of years now. This script came up and was sent to me about a year ago, but I wasn't available. Then it was postponed, and fitted into a gap, because I'm actually preparing to do a movie in America. Bobby Carlyle and I wanted to do it together, and he also had a gap, so it was fortuitous timing.

I think Ronan and I share very similar politics. *Face* is set in the East End – Bethnal Green specifically – where I've lived for the last 20 years. And it's about the people that I know and care about in the East End. It's about the choices that you have if you come from a working-class background in inner-city London and you're bright. There really are only two choices. There's no work, so either you go into crime or you give in.

Did knowing London well help you choose locations?

Ronan and I both know the East End really well; he cycles, I drive and walk. I wanted to show the East End and London in a way that it hadn't been shown in a long time, but we got into a real budgetary nightmare. During shooting, I was finishing filming at 11 at night and then going out to look for locations at midnight, and it was only my knowledge of the area that allowed that to happen quickly. For example, the confession scene was supposed to take place on top of a derelict tower block in Bow. We were going to shoot it at

Hazel Douglas (*Linda*)
Arthur Whybrow (*Bill*)
Kevin Walsh (*John*)
Elaine Lordan (*Sally*)
Paul Green (*newsreader*)
Natalie Morse (*Michelle*)
Kim T aylforth (*blondie*)
Giles Ward (*blondie's partner*)
Peter Lovstrom (*station constable*)
Kit Jackson (*uniformed officer*)
Peter Ferdinando (*policeman*)
Frank Boyce (*detective*)
Robert Elms (*radio disc jockey*)
Shireen Anwar, Jan Denman, Kay Harrison,
Della McCrae, Suresh Maru, Dick Powell,
Bill Spenser (*counting room hostages*)
UK/South Africa 1997©
110 mins
35mm

A BFI National Archive Print

Introduced by season curator Nia Childs (Thu 7 Sep)

ACTING HARD: WORKING CLASS MASCULINITY IN BRITISH CINEMA

Scum

Sat 2 Sep 17:50; Fri 8 Sep 18:20

Bullet Boy

Wed 6 Sep 20:50; Sat 9 Sep 20:55

Face

Thu 7 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by season curator Nia
Childs); Mon 18 Sep 20:45

Beautiful Thing

Sun 10 Sep 18:30; Fri 22 Sep 20:40

Dead Man's Shoes + Q&A with Shane Meadows and Paddy Considine

Tue 12 Sep 18:10

Sweet Sixteen

Wed 13 Sep 18:00; Mon 25 Sep 20:40

Blue Story

Thu 14 Sep 18:15; Sat 23 Sep 20:40

My Beautiful Laundrette

Wed 20 Sep 18:10; Thu 28 Sep 20:30

Muscle + Q&A with director Gerard Johnson, actors Craig Fairbrass, Cavan Clerkin and Polly Maberly

Fri 22 Sep 18:00

Sexy Beast

Sat 23 Sep 18:20; Mon 2 Oct 20:30

Mona Lisa

Sun 24 Sep 18:20; Fri 29 Sep 20:30

Govan Ghost Story

Mon 25 Sep 18:30

The Football Factory + intro by Danny Dyer

Mon 25 Sep 20:45

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twilight, and the view stretches over to Westminster. The moment the audience realises what this particular character has done, we'd planned to have Westminster right next to his head. Two days before we were supposed to film it we lost that location. We decided at the last minute to use a railway bridge from one side of Brick Lane to the other, where I had filmed before. Only the other day someone came up to me and said, 'That's just such a brilliant location for that scene!' It was just luck.

There seems more emphasis on character than is often found in a heist movie.

I'm basing the characters on people I know round where I live. You could have a drink with a lot of the guys I know, and you'd never guess they were involved with crime. You'd just think, 'Oh, he's a nice guy, he's got a nice family, he's a painter and decorator,' or whatever. It's a very good thriller, and what's unusual about it is that the characters are real people as well. It's not just cops and robbers running around London shooting guns at each other.

It's rare to find a female director working in this genre.

There aren't very many women directors, so by the law of averages we don't do very many thrillers. I think something like seven per cent of all movies are directed by women, and maybe one of those every five years is a thriller. I think there's an attitude that women don't do blood and guts and action, which of course is nonsense. What's interesting is that I perhaps see blood and guts and action in a more emotional way; the violence for me is hugely emotional and I get affected by it personally, which feeds into the work: you see the characters' lives being horribly affected by the violent events going on around them. I certainly set out to make something anti-violent, with very exciting moments. My message is that violence is not clever. I think there's been a lot of designer violence in movies in the last few years, which I personally hate. I think reality is what we should be looking at. I am drawn to films which engage me politically, so above all else, Ken Loach is my favourite filmmaker. But it's no accident that my other favourite is Martin Scorsese, who never glorifies violence. He shows the truth and the pain and the life-destruction. What it does to people. And that's what I'm trying to do, in a much more modern context.

Tell me about casting the movie.

This is the third movie Bobby Carlyle and I have done together. Perhaps 'soul mates' is a bit strong, but we work very well together psychologically and he was top of my wish-list. I've worked with Phil Davis a huge number of times before; he's fantastic. Ray Winstone I've never worked with, but I've admired his work from way way back, when he was almost a kid, in *Scum*, and in stuff since then.

I insist on a rehearsal period before I shoot, to build up stronger relationships between the actors. They were great; they were my boys, my gang. It was extraordinary how they would rally round me when things went wrong, mainly because they bonded so well during that rehearsal period and became real pals. So when things went wrong we already had that support network. They're still doing it now; they say things like 'Don't let 'em talk to you like that, Antonia, I'll sort them, I'll break their legs, I will. You done a fucking good job, girl!'

Bob McCabe, *Sight and Sound*, October 1997