



OF TIME AND LIGHT: THE FILMS OF VÍCTOR ERICE

The Art of Seeing: The Lifelong Passion of Víctor Erice

Wed 27 Mar 18:00

The Spirit of the Beehive

El espíritu de la colmena
Mon 25 Mar 20:45; Thu 28 Mar 14:40; Sat 13 Apr 17:40; Thu 25 Apr 20:50

El sur

The South
Tue 26 Mar 18:10; Sun 14 Apr 20:45; Sat 20 Apr 18:30; Tue 30 Apr 20:40

The Quince Tree Sun

El sol de membrillo
Thu 28 Mar 18:00; Wed 17 Apr 20:25

Erice-Kiarostami: Correspondences

Sun 31 Mar 12:30; Tue 9 Apr 20:30

Victor Erice Shorts

Sun 7 Apr 16:00; Mon 22 Apr 20:40

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OF TIME AND LIGHT: THE FILMS OF VÍCTOR ERICE

The Art of Seeing: The Lifelong Passion of Víctor Erice

Good evening, and thank you for coming along to this talk on the films of Víctor Erice; I hope you find it enjoyable and illuminating. It should last around 90 minutes; around half of that will be devoted to clips. In the programme notes I've written for talks in the past, I usually make a point of explaining that I am no expert on the filmmaker in question, merely an enthusiast. This time, I'll put it differently. While I would certainly hesitate to describe myself as an 'expert' on anything – there are too many things of interest for me to devote myself to specialist areas of study – it's fair to say I may know a little more about Erice and his work than most film writers and programmers. How so? I've seen all his films (some of which have been very rarely screened) except for his student work; I've watched most of them quite a few times; and I've had the rare pleasure and privilege of getting to know their creator a little. Not well – he is, I feel, a fairly private person – but we've spent quite a few hours together over the years, admittedly at infrequent intervals, mainly discussing our shared interest in the cinema.

A confession: when I first saw his widely acclaimed feature debut, *The Spirit of the Beehive*, as a student in the mid-70s, I didn't rate it that highly. To be honest, I don't think I was sufficiently patient or cinematically sophisticated to appreciate the subtlety and delicacy of a film where so much of importance was left unsaid. I fared better when I caught the *The South* during its opening run at the Academy Cinema in the early 1980s; I adored its visual beauty, above all else, and its air of mystery – but again, if I'm frank, I still didn't really grasp its resonance on various levels. I only came to realise why Erice was such a special filmmaker at the press screening of *The Quince Tree Sun* when it premiered at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival. Before the screening, rumours had been flying around about this long-awaited third feature from the allegedly reclusive Spaniard (he's actually Spanish-Basque, but I didn't know that then): apparently it was about some guy painting a tree in his garden, and therefore, at more than two hours, probably supremely boring. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The film was riveting, imaginative, thought-provoking on many levels and, I felt, some kind of masterpiece. The Cannes jury thought highly of it too, awarding it the Special Jury Prize, while the international critics gave it the FIPRESCI Prize. And at the end of the decade, *The Quince Tree Sun* was widely cited as one of the most important and impressive film of the 1990s.

Thereafter, silence... at least until *Close Your Eyes*, Erice's fourth feature-length film, appeared last year. Or so many of the critics reviewing that film seemed to believe. In fact, Erice has made several other films; they just haven't been features. But a film's quality has nothing to do with its running time, let alone its success, and *Lifeline*, *La Morte Rouge* and *Broken Windows* – all brief, and all, for one reason or another, little seen – are very rewarding works; indeed, both *Lifeline* and *La Morte Rouge* are extraordinarily fine. (I even

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Trial

Mon 25 Mar 12:20; Mon 8 Apr 12:20; Thu 18 Apr 17:25

The Gospel According to Matthew Il Vangelo secondo Matteo

Tue 26 Mar 20:20; Fri 29 Mar 17:50

Nosferatu

Wed 27 Mar 18:15 (+ intro by Arike Oke, Executive Director of Knowledge, Learning & Collections); Sat 6 Apr 13:15; Fri 12 Apr 21:00

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Thu 28 Mar 18:10; Sun 7 Apr 12:50; Tue 23 Apr 12:00

Little Women

Sat 30 Mar 13:15; Tue 9 Apr 12:20; Sat 27 Apr 20:30

The Last Temptation of Christ

Sat 30 Mar 19:50; Sun 14 Apr 17:30

The Leopard

 Il gattopardo

Sun 31 Mar 17:00; Tue 16 Apr 13:30; Sun 28 Apr 19:30

The Grapes of Wrath

Mon 1 Apr 20:10; Sat 20 Apr 15:45

Pather Panchali

Tue 2 Apr 20:30; Mon 22 Apr 18:00; Tue 30 Apr 12:10

The Heiress

Wed 3 Apr 18:05 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions); Sat 6 Apr 20:30; Mon 15 Apr 20:45

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Thu 4 Apr 20:30; Wed 10 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

The Last of the Mohicans

Fri 5 Apr 18:10; Sun 21 Apr 20:20

Women in Love

Thu 11 Apr 20:20; Sat 20 Apr 13:00; Fri 26 Apr 14:40

Beau Travail

Sat 13 Apr 13:20; Fri 19 Apr 20:45; Wed 24 Apr 18:10 (+ intro)

Great Expectations

Wed 17 Apr 17:45 (+ intro by Jade Evans, AHRC REACH PhD student with QMUL and BFI); Thu 25 Apr 12:00

Ordet

 The Word

Sat 27 Apr 13:15; Mon 29 Apr 14:40

RE-RELEASES

After Hours

From Fri 29 Mar

Rome, Open City

 Roma città aperta

From Fri 17 May

included the latter among my top-ten list for the *Sight and Sound* Greatest Films polls in 2012 and 2022.) What's more, there have been several other features written by Erice over the years; sadly – for him and for us – they never got made, for reasons beyond his control. (Let's not forget, too, that *The South*, undoubtedly a work of great brilliance, was never completed as Erice planned, since the producer pulled funding during the shoot, with the result that the latter part of the story – actually set in the South, unlike the first part – was never filmed.)

So it's not as if Erice's been doing nothing all these years. It's just that he's had more than his fair share of bad luck in getting projects made – and that he is unwilling to compromise himself. Why would he spend months, maybe years, making something that didn't mean something to him personally? At least when we see a film with Erice's name on it, we know he did it for reasons other than fame and fortune. And it shows. We'll be looking at some of the things that make Erice's films so distinctive during this evening's talk.

There is a great deal to say about Erice's work, and I shall certainly not have time to deal with everything I'd like to cover in a 90-minute talk. But if you do feel like finding out a little more about his recent work, the forthcoming issue of *Sight and Sound* will include a feature I've written about *Close Your Eyes* (built around an interview with Erice); and if you're intrigued about *Stone and Sky*, the two-screen installation he created for the Bilbao Museum of Fine Arts in 2019, the only piece of writing about it in English that I'm aware of can be found (for free, naturally) at geoffandrew.com. Finally, for anyone interested in the music played before the talk, it is from the album *Asturiana*, by Kim Kashkashian and Robert Levin)

Geoff Andrew

Geoff Andrew is Programmer-at-large for BFI Southbank. Formerly Head of Film Programme for BFI Southbank, he was also film editor of *Time Out* magazine for many years, and is a regular contributor to *Sight and Sound*. His numerous books on the cinema including studies of Nicholas Ray and the American 'indie' filmmakers of the 1980s and '90s, and BFI Classics monographs on Kieslowski's *Three Colours Trilogy* and Kiarostami's *10*. He is the editor of *Sight and Sound* anthologies devoted to Jean-Luc Godard, Martin Scorsese, Spike Lee and the New Hollywood of the '60s and '70s. He has contributed to many anthologies and DVD extras, lectured widely on the cinema, and served on film festival juries in Cannes, Venice, Istanbul, Turin, Krakow, Morelia, Sarajevo and elsewhere. In 2009 the French government made him a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. He writes on film, music and the other arts at geoffandrew.com