



MEMBER MONDAYS

The Verdict

The Verdict

Directed by: Sidney Lumet

©: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Produced by: Zanuck/Brown Productions

Released by:

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Executive Producer: Burt Harris

Produced by: Richard D. Zanuck, David Brown

Assistant to Mr Lumet: Lilith Jacobs

Production Auditor:

Kathleen McGill Production Services

Production Office Co-ordinator: Eileen Eichenstein

Unit Production Manager: Joseph M. Caracciolo

Unit Manager: Jennifer M. Ogden

Locations: Chris Stoia, Alexandra Decker

Production Assistants: Sally Brim, Todd Winters

1st Assistant Director: Burt Harris

2nd Assistant Director: Robert E. Warren

DGA Trainee: Ken Ornstein

Script Supervisor: Kay Chapin

Casting: Joy Todd, Inc.

Boston Casting: Casting Company

Screenplay by: David Mamet

Based upon the novel by: Barry Reed

Director of Photography: Andrzej Bartkowiak

Camera Operator: William Steiner

Assistant Cameramen: Hank Muller, Gary Muller

2nd Assistant Cameraman: Bob Paone

Key Grip: Bobby Ward

Dolly Grip: Eddie Quinn

Construction Grip: Joe Williams Sr

Gaffer: Dusty Wallace

Stillman: Louis Goldman

Editor: Peter Frank

Assistant Editor: Andrew Mondschein

Apprentice Editor: David Gelfand

Production Designer: Edward Pisoni

Art Director: John Kasarda

Set Decorator: George DeTitta

Set Dresser: David Weinman

Scenic Artists: Edward Garzero, William Sohmer

Prop Master: Joseph Caracciolo

Props: John McDonnell

Construction Foreman: Carlos Quiles Sr

Costume Designer: Anna Hill Johnstone

Wardrobe: Marilyn Putnam, Bill Loger

Makeup Artists: Joe Granzano, Monty Westmore

Hair Stylist: Bob Grimaldi

Titles by: R/Greenberg Associates

Lenses and Panaflex Camera by: Panavision

Colour by: Technicolor

Prints by: DeLuxe

Music by: Johnny Mandel

Music Engineer: Joel Moss

Sound Mixer: James Sabat

Boom Men: Louis Sabat, Frank Graziadei

Re-recording Mixer: Lee Dichter

Sound Editors: Lou Cerborino, Maurice Schell

Transport Captain: James Fanning

Cast:

Paul Newman (*Francis P. 'Frank' Galvin*)

Charlotte Rampling (*Laura Fischer*)

Jack Warden (*Mickey Morrissey*)

James Mason (*Ed Conannon*)

Milo O'Shea (*Judge Hoyle*)

Lindsay Crouse (*Kaitlin Costello Price*)

Edward Binns (*Bishop Brophy*)

Julie Bovasso (*Maureen Rooney*)

Roxanne Hart (*Sally Doneghy*)

James Handy (*Kevin Doneghy*)

Wesley Addy (*Dr Robert Towler*)

Joe Seneca (*Dr Thompson*)

Lewis Stadlen (*Dr Gruber*)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

Some 25 Years on from *12 Angry Men* Sidney Lumet returned to the drama of the court room and provided Paul Newman with his most vulnerable role. Newman is the alcoholic lawyer seeking to salvage his career and self-respect by taking a medical malpractice case to trial rather than settling. *The Verdict* is a courtroom drama that plays like a sports film, but Lumet and screenwriter David Mamet invariably recognise the human side of corruption and criminality as well as redemption.

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A contemporary review

For a film with such clear-cut ethical concerns, with the need to bring both medicine and the law to book for their respective malpractices, *The Verdict* is remarkably suffused with the motifs and atmosphere of the religious. This does have a local justification in that the setting is a Catholic archdiocese of Boston, and one of the parties to the legal dispute, St Catherine's Hospital, where a young woman is rendered comatose by the anaesthetic she is given during labour, is run by the church. But this is not *True Confessions*, the interpenetration of the sacred and the profane is not a theme, and the film draws little irony from the bishop's hard-headed calculations about an out-of-court settlement. A sacerdotal mood is unmistakable, however, from the film's title (which is not as matter-of-fact as it sounds, but synonymous with 'the judgment') to its very first shot, a slow zoom into Paul Newman's burnt-out ambulance chaser playing pinball in a bar,

With its first cut, the film then jumps to a Bressonian play of hands as Frank Galvin peels a bill from a wad of notes, paying off the director of a funeral home before entering to proffer his services to the mourners. Clearly, the religious dimension belongs most to Galvin, as he gradually realises that he can win redemption by taking a case that is brought to him as a favour, a medical malpractice suit that can be settled to everyone's advantage, and fighting it as a cause. That way too, one can soon see, lie hefty chunks of declamatory drama and self-important crusading, taking in themes of universal injustice and personal integrity, the afflictions of the bloody but unbowed liberal spirit, as pompously as Lumet has ever done, from *The Pawnbroker* to *Network*. Even when characters aren't on the stand, the declamatory note is sustained ('I can't invest in failure any more, Frank', declares the heroine, when Galvin is about to give up before the trial has begun), which at times leaves the uncanny impression that playwright Mamet, writer of Rafelson's coolly elliptical *Postman Always Rings Twice*, has been possessed by the spirit of Clifford Odets or Paddy Chayefsky.

More than just pretentiousness, or a certain kind of old-fashioned tub-thumping, is involved here. The film proves its case, that justice can still triumph if people will only overcome their cynicism or apathy, with the kind of dramatic rhetoric – a *deus ex machina* secret witness who can win or lose the case for Galvin; the jury's verdict, which ignores the judge's ruling about inadmissible evidence and makes them just a wish-fulfilment extension of the audience (or vice versa) – that doesn't add up to any kind of argument from

Kent Broadhurst (*Joseph Alito*)
Colin Stinton (*Billy*)
Burt Harris (*Jimmy, the bartender*)
Scott Rhyne (*young priest*)
Susan Benenson (*Deborah Ann Kaye*)
Evelyn Moore (*Dr Gruber's nurse*)
Juanita Fleming (*Dr Gruber's maid*)
Jack Collard (*bailliff*)
Ralph Douglas (*clerk*)
Gregor Roy (*jury foreman*)
John Blood (*funeral director*)
Dick McGoldrick (*manager, 2nd funeral parlour*)
Edward Mason (*widow's son*)
Patty O'Brien (*Irish nurse 1*)
Maggie Task (*Irish nurse 2*)
Joseph Bergman (*Friedman*)
Herbert Rubens (*Abrams*)
J.P. Foley (*John, cigar stand*)
Leib Lensky (*wheelchair patient*)
Clay Dear (*courthouse lawyer*)
J.J. Clark (*courthouse guard*)
Greg Doucette, Tony LaFortezza
(*Sheraton bar waiters*)
Marvin Beck, Herb Peterson
(*Sheraton bar patrons*)
Bruce Willis (*courtroom observer*)*
USA 1982©
129 mins
Digital

* Uncredited

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social cases and existing institutions. Those institutions, according to Galvin's summation speech, are what make people cynical about real justice – to which the film proposes, like *Network*, that little people everywhere simply stand up and demand that right be done. ('Little people' have already crept perniciously back in an earlier declaration by redemption-bound Galvin: 'the weak ... have got to have somebody to fight for them'.)

But what, in turn, redeems this *Network* streak are qualities which Lumet, as a primetime buttonholer and energiser of actors at the expense of his visuals, is not supposed to have. From that opening shot, the religious dimension is incorporated less as a matter of symbolism than of visual design, with figures in a dark foreground played against backgrounds of unambiguous brightness (Andrzej Bartkowiak's photography can suggest a scene streaming with the light of divine revelation, or again the special illumination of stained glass). Galvin's opposite number, Ed Concannon – the self-assured organisation man versus the lonely doubter – is introduced jokily as 'the prince of darkness', but the appellation sticks (in seraphically smiling, bow-tied James Mason, Satan with a touch of perfidious Albion), and underlines the split in Bartkowiak's lighting with a hint of Manicheism – or something else from Odets, perhaps, about integrity vs. success. Visually, in fact, *The Verdict* is not-quite-expressionist, or expressionist without filmic portfolio (since Lumet's urgent, TV-realist approach seems to bypass the cinema altogether, and has usually been decried as no style at all). But one or two characteristically portentous, low-angle shots of Galvin tearing up – or quietly suffering in – his office are as architecturally self-conscious as *Citizen Kane*, emphasising his strangely monk-like, low-ceilinged, vaulted chamber.

Style, in fact, intersects with the most ordinary on-location realism in the elliptical but sharply crystallised way Lumet builds up his picture of Boston (recalling a similar effect in *Prince of the City*, where scene-setting economy became thematic abstraction). Lumet's realism comes with its own stylisation built in, to the extent that it is so closely identified with shooting in New York, repository of the 'real', as opposed to the artificiality of Hollywood (another streak of Manicheism). As far as possible in *The Verdict*, apparently, Lumet dovetailed his actual locations in Boston with stand-in 'locations' in his native city. Allied to this is a fragmentary realism of character, less striking here than in *Prince of the City* because of the didactic demands of the main roles, but exemplified in one subsidiary character, the doctor who is hurriedly called in for expert testimony when Galvin's star witness disappears. Galvin's shock at finding that his substitute is both black and elderly is covered in a flustered attempt to put a good liberal face on it, which is then filtered through the discoveries that this man's 'expert' opinion can easily be impugned, that he has his own dignity and authority and desire to see right done, and that in the end he will prove technically inadequate on the stand. These shifts of perception, at least, count for more than an attempt to reproduce the ambiguous ending of *Prince of the City*, with a question mark left hanging over the relationship of Galvin and Laura – a romance that has always been the film's most redundant element.

Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1983