



WILL HEAVEN FALL UPON US? A BÉLA TARR RETROSPECTIVE

The Man from London

The Man from London (A Londoni férfi)

Directed by: Béla Tarr

Co-director: Ágnes Hranitzky

©: T.T. Filmműhely, 13 Production, Cinéma Soleil, Von Vietinghoff Filmproduktion, Black Forest Films
Presented by: T.T. Filmműhely, 13 Production, Cinéma Soleil, Von Vietinghoff Filmproduktion, Black Forest Films

World Sales: Fortissimo Film Sales

Supported by: Magyar Mozgókép Közalapítvány, Oktatási és Kulturális Minisztérium, CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie, Arte France Cinéma, ZDF-Arte, Canal+, Eurimages Conseil de l'Europe, CinéCinéma, Nemzeti Kulturális Alap, MBB - Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Magyar Mozgókép Kft, Collectivité Territoriale de Corse, Duna Televízió, Szerencsejáték Co., Fondation MonteCinemaVerità, ERSTE Bank

Executive Producers: Juliusz Kossakowski, Wouter Barendrecht, Michael J. Werner, T. Janos Hevesi, Lajos Szakácsi

Producer (T.T. Filmműhely): Gábor Téni

Producer (13 Production): Paul Saadoun

Producer (Cinéma Soleil): Miriam Zachar

Producer (Von Vietinghoff Filmproduktion): Joachim von Vietinghoff

Producer (Black Forest Films): Christoph Hahnheiser

Line Producers: Gábor Téni, Pierre Pancrazi, Jean-Claude Marchant

Associate Producer: Béla Tarr

For Arte France Cinéma: Michel Reilhac

For ZDF/ARTE: Meinolf Zurhorst

Production Manager (MMK): Endre Sik

Production Co-ordinator: Eszter Buslig

Maloin Shoot Technician: László Mong

Production Team: Pierre Dieulafait, Farouk Selkim,

Kata Czigler, José Garbuccia, Eszter Kerekes,

Gabriella Cserhádi, François Demoro,

David Demoro, Béla Kálmán

Assistant Directors: Jeroen Frantzen, Yann-Eryl Mer

Script Supervisors: Dóri Endrényi, Orsi Vercz

Screenplay: László Krasznahorkai, Béla Tarr

From the novel L'Homme de Londres by:

Georges Simenon

Director of Photography: Fred Kelemen

Camera Operator (B): István Szaladják

Steadicam Operator: Marcus Pohlus

Focus Puller: István Decsi

Gaffer: Miklós Hajdú

Editor: Ágnes Hranitzky

Art Directors: László Rajk, Ágnes Hranitzky,

Jean-Pascal Chalard

Set Dressers: Sándor Katona, Béla Zsolt Tóth

Construction Manager: Péter Brill

Costumes: János Breckl

Titles: Judit Szép

Laboratory: Magyar Filmlaboratórium Kft.

Music: Mihály Víg

Music Collaborator: Ágnes Kamondy

Sound Design: Gábor Erdélyi

Sound Recording: György Kovács

For [Originally Listed as Producer]: Humbert Balsan

Cast:

Miroslav Krobot (Maloin)

Tilda Swinton (Camélia Maloin)

Erika Bók (Henriette)

János Derzsi (Brown)

Ági Szirtes (Mrs Brown)

István Lénárt (Inspector Morrison)

Gyula Pauer (Tapster)

Mihály Kormos

Kati Lázár

The extinction of the aesthetically and intellectually rigorous European art film has been predicted for so long (in the early 1980s, a *Sight and Sound* columnist called for the creation of a Society for the Protection of the Art Movie) that the mere fact of Hungarian auteur Béla Tarr continuing to direct films without making the smallest concession to popular fashion is a cause for celebration.

Tarr's mature style was first fully unveiled in his fifth feature, *Damnation* (*Kárhozat*, 1988) which combined harshly-lit black-and-white cinematography, lugubrious characterisation and pacing (shots lasting several minutes longer than narratively necessary), and the 'Tarr trudge' charting every step of a person's lengthy, silent walk. *Damnation* was followed by his masterpiece *Sátántangó* (1994), whose seven-hour-plus running time ensured minimal theatrical distribution. *Werckmeister Harmonies* (*Werckmeister harmóniák*, 2000) was a more conventional length, but in all other respects this allegory saw Tarr reaching for a cosmic view of a fundamentally disordered universe.

The Man from London (A Londoni férfi) was finally completed in 2007 after numerous hitches, including the suicide of original producer Humbert Balsan. Disconcertingly, the credits suggest a conscious attempt by Tarr to broaden his audience. László Krasznahorkai remains his co-screenwriter, but the source material is a slim 1933 novel by popular Belgian writer Georges Simenon (filmed as *L'Homme de Londres* by Henri Decoin in 1943 and as *Temptation Harbour* by Lance Comfort in 1947). The cast includes Tilda Swinton, the setting is coastal France and the synopsis suggests a murder mystery, with all the generic pleasures that implies. In fact, Tarr has expunged every element that doesn't fit his worldview. The result is as typically uncompromising as his other work.

Tarr has created some of the most striking opening sequences in modern cinema (cows roaming a deserted hamlet in *Sátántangó*, drunken barflies becoming a working model of the solar system in *Werckmeister Harmonies*) and *The Man from London* is no exception. A foghorn that seems to sound across the harbour where much of the action takes place is actually the first note of Mihály Víg's score, its rising theme accompanying depth markings on the hull of a ferry, as if defining its musical intervals. The eye is also occasionally deceived, as a single porthole echoes the eye of *Werckmeister's* whale, the shadows passing over the ferry's hull and the upward camera movement suggesting a gigantic sea creature emerging from the depths. We then hear a transaction taking place between two men, but can't see their faces. The details of the deal are equally skimpy; we find out only much later that the men's names are Brown and Teddy.

Everything is seen from the restricted viewpoint of signalman Maloin (Miroslav Krobot) who sits in an elevated glass cage with a panoramic view of the harbour. Shadows add a consistent visual rhythm, generated by out-of-focus window-frames passing the camera. The distance makes it hard to interpret what's happening: Maloin can only see what appears to be a case of import fraud (a suitcase is tossed over the far side of the ferry, unseen by the waiting customs officials) followed by a quayside struggle that ends with Teddy falling into the sea and Brown hiding out in the local café. Maloin retrieves the suitcase and discovers that it's full of damp British banknotes, which he dries on the signalbox's woodfired heater. Tarr is exceptionally attuned throughout to the physicality of both the surrounding space and the objects within it.

This nocturnal sequence, comprising five shots and lasting nearly a fifth of the running time, seems to set up *The Man from London* as the kind of mystery-

Éva Almási Albert
Ági Kamondy
László felugossy
Philippe Guerrini
Jacques Pilippi
Járai Alfréd
Hungarian voice cast
Oszkár Gáti (*Maloin*/Miroslav Krobot) Andrea
Spolarics (*Camelia*/Tilda Swinton)
Péter Haumann (*Philippe Guerrini*)
Róbert Garai (*Jacques Pilippi*)
Hungary-France-Germany 2007
139 mins
35mm

WILL HEAVEN FALL UPON US? A BÉLA TARR RETROSPECTIVE

The Man from London A Londoni férfi

Sun 18 Aug 18:00; Wed 21 Aug 20:15

Damnation Kárhozat

Thu 22 Aug 20:40

The Outsider Szabadgyalog

Fri 23 Aug 20:35

The Turin Horse A torinói ló

Sat 24 Aug 19:50; Sat 31 Aug 17:20

Sátántangó

Sat 24 Aug 23:00 BFI IMAX

Autumn Almanac (aka Almanac of Fall)

Őszi almanac

Sun 25 Aug 15:45

With thanks to

Charlotte Saluard and Jamie Mendonça at Curzon
Film

CURZON

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including
priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI
Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**,
the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine.
Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK
only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you
can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on
demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British
and independent titles, films are available to watch
in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free
to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

cum-robbery thriller alluded to by the credits, but neither Maloin nor Tarr have much interest in the ensuing investigation. This is underscored by the willingness of the police inspector Morrison (István Lénárt), to offer financial inducements to clear things up quickly. We also never find out what happened between Maloin and Brown in what would be a climactic confrontation in a more conventional film.

The film instead focuses on Maloin and the crushing pressure that the money applies to his conscience. His social circle revolves around the gloomy café proprietor with whom he plays silent games of chess, his semi-estranged wife Camélia (Swinton) and his daughter Henriette (Erika Bók, the cat-murdering waif in *Sátántangó*). Maloin won't discuss his changed circumstances, and his attempts at lifting Henriette out of the misery to which she is resigned (like most Tarr characters) involve him theatrically dragging her away from her job as a delicatessen assistant. In the film's only overtly comic scene he kits out Henriette in a fur stole; the garrulous fur salesman seem to have escaped from *The Fast Show*, so out of step are they with the prevailing mood. But without being able to explain their new wealth, his relationship with Camélia deteriorates further

Tarr adapted *Macbeth* for Hungarian television in 1982, so he will certainly know Duncan's maxim 'There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face.' However, he seems determined to disprove this in *The Man from London*, subjecting most characters to a typically lengthy camera-stare. Strangely, these shots never become boring, largely due to the chance they offer of examining an extraordinary collection of faces in perfectly-lit close-up: Maloin's world-weary jowls, Morrison's rumpled skull-head and Henriette's unnervingly inscrutable smile.

At festivals, the film generally played in Hungarian, though Tarr has since reworked the soundtrack into French and English. Both dubs include less-than-felicitous lip-sync (Krobot and Swinton in both versions). The Hungarian feels more authentic, partly for linguistic continuity with Tarr's previous work, but mostly because Lénárt has the lion's share of the onscreen monologues. However, the Anglo-French version makes more situational sense and renders Maloin deaf as well as blind to events. Although present during many crucial conversations, it's unlikely he understands them, and the French precis he's given by the café proprietor and Morrison is so selective as to be useless. The English dub also adds a note of class conflict, with Morrison's patrician tones (Edward Fox) set against Brown's glottal stops.

There are fewer 'Tarr trudges' than usual, though a suggestive shot sees Maloin walking along the quayside framed against a church in the background, the almost imperceptible camera movement implying that it's never getting any closer; this religious overtone intimating that everything that happens to him derives solely from his own actions, with no external assistance. Despite Maloin's God's-eye view of the harbour, and control over great machines, he remains trapped in his own self-circumscribed world, unable to cope with any far-reaching changes.

Stretches of *The Man from London* may hint that Tarr is caught in a similar creative impasse (the film is closer to the territory of *Damnation* than its immediate predecessors), but the peculiar pleasures of his cinema are still to the fore. Chief among them is the silvery black-and-white cinematography by fellow director (and former Tarr student) Fred Kelemen, whose virtuosity in lighting, movement, and composition is breathtaking, recalling the great noir specialist John Alton while remaining absolutely true to Tarr's vision.

Michael Brooke, *Sight and Sound*, January 2009