



ROOTS, RITUALS AND PHANTASMAGORIA

Don't Look Now

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Directed by: Nicolas Roeg
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Production Companies: Casey Productions, Eldorado Films srl (Rome)
Executive Producer: Anthony B. Unger
Produced by: Peter Katz
Associate Producer: Federico Mueller
Production Executive: Steve Previn
Production Accountant: Terence O'Connor
Unit Manager: Franco Coduti
Assistant Director: Francesco Cinieri
Continuity: Rita Agostini
Casting: Miriam Brickman, Ugo Mariotti
Screenplay by: Alan Scott, Chris Bryant
From a story by: Daphne du Maurier
Director of Photography: Anthony Richmond
Camera Operator: Luciano Tonti
Assistant Cameraman: Simon Ransley
Key Grip: Spartaco Pizzi
Gaffer: Luciano Marrocchi
Editor: Graeme Clifford
Assistant Editors: Tony Lawson, Peter Holt
Art Director: Giovanni Soccol
Set Dresser: Francesco Chinanesse
Miss Christie's Wardrobe: Marit Lieberson, Andrea Galer
Wardrobe Mistress: Annamaria Fea
Make-up: Giancarlo Del Brocco
Hair Stylist: Barry Richardson
Hairdresser: Maria Luisa Garbini
Music by: Pino Donnagio
Arranged and Conducted by: Giampiero Boneschi
Sound Recordist: Peter Davies
Dubbing Mixer: Bob Jones
Sound Editor: Rodney Holland
Stunt Co-ordinator: Richard Grayden
Publicity: Hubert Doyle
Re-recorded at: Shepperton Studios
Cast:
Julie Christie (Laura Baxter)
Donald Sutherland (John Baxter)
Hilary Mason (Heather)
Massimo Serato (Bishop Barbarrigo)
Clelia Matania (Wendy)
Renato Scarpa (Inspector Longhi)
Giorgio Trestini (workman)
Leopoldo Trieste (hotel manager)
David Tree (Anthony Babbage)
Ann Rye (Mandy Babbage)
Nicholas Salter (Johnny Baxter)
Sharon Williams (Christine Baxter)
Bruno Cattaneo (Detective Sabbione)
Adelina Poerio (dwarf)
UK/Italy 1973©
110 mins
Digital 4K

Nicolas Roeg on 'Don't Look Now'

To what extent was Don't Look Now your own choice? A publicity handout says it was Peter Katz, the producer, who thought Daphne du Maurier's story would make a good film.

Yes, he sent me a script; I was reading scripts and it came out of the blue. I was looking for a story that was a yarn, that would complete in some way, or continue in some way, a line of thought. You remember the scene at the beginning of the film when Julie Christie mentions the little girl's question, 'If the world's round, why is frozen water flat?' and Donald Sutherland says, 'Nothing's what it seems'? That isn't in the dialogue of Daphne du Maurier's story – we changed most of the dialogue anyway, because in the film they are different characters – but it is the key to the whole premise, and is exactly the feeling I have about life anyway. And without stressing that premise, I wanted to keep it within a story form that *Performance* and *Walkabout* hadn't taken. They were yarns too, of course, but they were different *movements*. One was a film of emotion and ideas; and the other I wanted to make – I hate to use the word because it always conjures up another connotation – a documentary using a story form. Now I wanted to make another film developing a similar idea and not to lose sight of the yarn. To stick to the yarn.

After I read that script, I read her story. I've never met her, but I'm a great admirer of Daphne du Maurier, she's an extraordinary writer. It's not a fluke that such interesting movies are made from her novels ... *The Birds!* She wasn't involved in the film at all, but I'm told she did ask for photographs of Julie and Donald to see what John and Laura looked like.

Had the change in the characters already been made in that first script? Was John Baxter a church restorer, for instance?

That was after I came into it. I wanted them to have a background that attracted me anyway. I liked the idea of an international marriage, people from two different cultures and backgrounds. I imagined him as somebody who might have been a Rhodes scholar and had perhaps met her brother at Oxford, so their families had been linked that way. I wanted to have them be almost golden people, so that it became rather like the incident at Chappaquiddick. Like the Kennedy family. They were unprepared in life. Most people are, aren't they?

Julie and Donald got it absolutely right from the beginning. In fact the whole cast was beautiful to work with. Clelia Matania is amazing; she's a Neapolitan, and yet she can speak English like that. Renato Scarpa, who plays the police inspector, could speak hardly a word of English, but we didn't dub him either; I found the difficulty of communication he had with Donald, the man he knew was going to be a victim, very exciting.

So the feeling one gets that the police inspector is not really taking in what John Baxter says is real as well as plot-motivated?

Exactly. I wanted John Baxter to feel that he's a detective, another kind of detective, and that here he encounters one who isn't interested in fingerprints or the forensic side of police work. I had a line I took out because it seemed a little too pointed. When Julie and Donald go past the scene of a murder, after they have left the hospital, they are in a motor boat taxi and the detective on the bank has a fingerprint man with him. I wanted to lay a line in there with Julie saying, 'Oh, that fingerprint rubbish is really more to scare people than anything else.' (The fear of the thought that the police can say, 'we've got your fingerprints ...')

When were you filming in Venice?

January and February last year [1973], and December 1972 in England, on location at the home of David Tree, who plays the schoolmaster. I'd been looking for a house this man would live in, a restorer. And then we found David Tree's house, and he was so perfect for the schoolmaster that we begged him to play it. The house is half wood and half brick; it was right in line with the idea that this couple hadn't finally made up their minds about how they wanted to live, hadn't decided on Georgian, Tudor or modern. They were halfway all the time.

Were you thinking of the home simply as the sort of place they would live in, rather than from the 'Nothing's what it seems' point of view? When you see it the second time, in the funeral flashback, it's almost like a different house.

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Wed 4 Sep 20:15 + intro by musician and Starve Acre composer Matthew Herbert; Sat 21 Sep 17:45

Against the Crowd: Murrain + intro by novelist Andrew Michael Hurley + Omnibus: Whistle and I'll Come to You

Sat 7 Sep 18:20

Play for Today: Robin Redbreast

Mon 9 Sep 18:30

Don't Look Now

Tue 10 Sep 20:45; Thu 26 Sep 20:50; Sun 29 Sep 18:10

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Fri 13 Sep 18:15

Eraserhead

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It just fitted that way. Oddly, things like that happened with the movie. Omens. I didn't want to shoot those scenes on two locations – pond and house – and I'd been looking for weeks for a house. Finally we had to settle it, and the guy I'd had out scouting said, well, there's this house, there's this one, and that one's no good. Wait a minute, I said, looking at the Polaroid he'd put aside as no use, this is incredible; and we got in the car and drove off.

In Venice, it's all location. We filmed in the Europa Hotel, and the Baxters' suite was in the Bauer Grünwald ... just to be able to pull the camera back, because the Europa rooms were very small. The little man who plays the hotel manager was a critic; he reviewed a Fellini movie, and then Fellini used him in a film. And he wrote most of his own dialogue. I'd said to him, 'I'd really like you to be a hotel manager who doesn't like the guests.'

Immediately he said, 'I love it, I love it! Please let me work on this man.'

One of the fascinating things in the film is your use of detail and the way the detail builds up – motifs like the breaking glass, the colour red. How does this generate in your mind? Where does it start from?

I like working for a long, long time on a script. Consequently, the first draft is usually the one that is set up as a movie. I like to work with the writers until I've actually got the scenes so that I can work on them with the artists. So that kind of detail I have in the script, because I want the prop men totally aware of what they've got to get; it's written down and that's it. The whole film was shot in eight weeks, and you get into a state of tremendous confusion if you suddenly have to send out for something. I prefer to do that kind of thing in advance, and then one can really have a game with the film.

But is the broken glass followed through in the script, for instance? Is the build-up of the motif conscious from the outset?

That particular thing was absolutely conscious. It stemmed from a story, a personal story. A friend of mine might have been able to save ... to prevent a dreadful incident ... he said ... if he'd been able to break some glass at the time. Apart from any symbolic quality, glass sets up a sensation of fear, of something dangerous and brittle. This is built into everyone. Almost everyone has a fear of shattered glass. Mirrors and glass, glass especially, so fragile ... so firm at one moment and so dangerous the next, it's frightening.

The red, the flowers and so on, was also planned in the script. Obviously there are things that link up as you work, and you think, 'My God, that's odd!' It's curious too – I'm sure other filmmakers must have noticed this – how you think of an idea, you work on it for six months, and suddenly there are eight other films all with the same idea. 'Oh, God,' you think, 'I thought I was keeping it a secret!' I'm sure it's because of the link between all of us somewhere; we're being tipped off in the same way in making our films.

How about the actual cutting of the film, is that all planned at the script stage too? For instance, the intercutting in the love scene ...

No, that was in the shooting – two-thirds in the shooting and then developed in the cutting. After the bathroom scene in the script, I hadn't anything; just 'they made love ... and went out to dinner.' But we got to a point in the film where I desperately wanted the feeling that at that moment of making love she might have become pregnant again. I had that in mind; and the way they behave afterwards in getting dressed ... I wanted to make clear that it's not just some billing and cooing. I really hope it works on this level, and that's why I'm upset by an article in the *Daily Mail* this morning which tries to make a sensation out of the love scene. It isn't a sexual scene, a sensual scene; I wanted to get a reality to it of two human beings.

In general, then, you like to have the script as detailed as possible, but it loses or gains bits during shooting; and any changes are substitutions for something that is in the script to start with?

Yes, I really think I'd feel cheated, or else I'd begin doubting my reason for making the film, if I thought halfway through that I'd changed my mind about what this person was, or what these characters were doing. If I said, 'I tell you what, he's not really like that at all, he wouldn't think that way,' then maybe I shouldn't be making this film, I should be making another film about this man. I like to keep the intention of the scene; I like to know the people. That's what interests me about a writer like Daphne du Maurier: one feels she has thought about a story, maybe put it out of her mind and then come back to it and developed it – before she starts writing, and not halfway through, waiting to see what these people are going to do next.

Nicolas Roeg interviewed by Tom Milne and Penelope Houston, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1973/74