



The Main Feature

Season 41 – Issue 6 - Screening 25 November 2021

The Farewell

US, China 2019
100 mins. Certificate PG

Director Lulu Wang
Screenplay Lulu Wang
Producers Dan Balgoyen and Joshua M Cohen
Cinematography Anna Franquesa Solano

Cast

Awkwafina	Billi Wang
Tzi Ma	Haiyan Wang, Billi's father
Diana Lin	Lu Jian, Billi's mother
Zhao Shu-zhen	Nai Nai, Billi's paternal grandmother
Lu Hong	Little Nai Nai, Billi's grandmother's younger sister
Jiang Yongbo	Haibin, Haiyan's older brother
Chen Han	Hao Hao, Haibin's son
Aoi Mizuhara	Aiko, Hao Hao's Japanese fiancée
Zhang Jing	Yuping, Haiyan's cousin
Li Xiang	Auntie Ling, Haibin's wife
Yang Xuejian	Mr. Li
Jim Liu	Dr. Song



The push and pull between the bonds of blood and the ties of culture are explored with a light touch and a perceptive eye for detail in this delightful, semi-autobiographical family drama from writer and director Lulu Wang. Wang said that the film was based on her grandmother's illness. "I always felt the divide in my relationship to my family versus my relationship to my classmates and to my colleagues and to the world that I inhabit. That's just the nature of being an immigrant and straddling two cultures."

The film was primarily shot in Changchun, China, over the course of 24 days in June 2018. Changchun, the capital of China's north-eastern Jilin province, has a name that translates to "long spring". According to folklore, the name was bestowed by an emperor in recognition of its temperate summer. So mild and pleasant was the city at that time of year that it felt as though spring could stretch on endlessly, without ever morphing into the sticky humidity that beset the rest of the country.

It's easy to imagine idyllic summers there and Lulu Wang recalls her own with glee. "My grandmother had a house with a garden where we would catch dragonflies in the yard. It was sort of the iconic childhood."

The Farewell – Wang's second feature film after the 2014 art-world satire *Posthumous* – is also set in Changchun, but here it's foreign and alienating, as if the city of her memories was merely imagined. Like all of China, it's modernising at breakneck speed. "Every time I go back, it's a completely different place, and all the things I once knew are gone," she says. This sense of absence permeates the film. Taken literally: absence in the form of grief, as Billi – a Chinese-born, US-raised writer who serves as Wang's onscreen proxy – returns to Changchun to see her nai nai (Mandarin for grandmother) one last time.

"In addition to saying goodbye to grandma, there's this feeling of sand slipping through your fingers, of being unable to hold on to past memories and feelings – unable to find anything concrete that represents home," Wang says. It's a trauma instantly recognisable to any diaspora – the feeling of suspension between two cultures, and the knowledge that to fully embrace one is to sacrifice the other.

"I think people have this romanticism of the homeland, and that's just not the reality for me," Wang says. "Every time I go back to China, I feel more American than ever, so it's this question of 'Well, where is home?' We're always searching for it and never fully fitting in."

Wang explained in an interview "I started making this movie because it was a way for me to explore all of these complicated feelings that I had and explore these questions that I had about, what was the ethical thing to do? And when I started making the film, I told my family about it. I said is it OK that I'm going to make this film? It might be out in the world. And I don't think any of us thought how big the film would get, you know, the reach that it would have. And in some ways, this is a very Chinese thing, at least for my family. It feels very specific to my parents, which is that they always want to underplay things because they don't want to jinx it. So when I told them I was hired by this company - we were going to write the script - and they said you've written scripts before that have not gone anywhere, so let's not get ahead of ourselves. If they're paying you, just write the script. Pay your rent. You know, good for you.

"And then it was the same thing when I started shooting the film. They said go shoot the film. Spend time with your grandmother. She'll be very happy to see you. We'll figure out a way to make sure she doesn't find out. But, you know, who knows where the film is going to ultimately end up. Let's just not worry about it. And then it was Sundance, the same thing - they said, well, it's an American festival. You know, it's still an indie film.



"Every time I brought this issue up, they just kept punting the problem down the line. And now we're at a point where, in a way, I don't feel responsible because I feel like I've given everybody ample preparation for this moment."

Initial talks with production studios only furthered Wang's sense of displacement. In the US, producers pushed for a comedy of errors, something more marketable than *The Farewell's* heady, unsolvable mix of emotions. Meanwhile, Chinese executives couldn't understand why Billi – and by extension, Wang – felt so conflicted. They wanted a heroine who was

less "westernised", who wasn't afflicted by such guilt. "Both sides were looking at it in a binary way, where it's east versus west," Wang says. "Versus, as opposed to finding the bridge between the two, or the space in between to be able to navigate both."

The Farewell feels unique because of its unwillingness to lose either half of its identity. Billi is American, as is Wang, but the film's dialogue is almost entirely in Mandarin, spoken by an all-east Asian primary cast. It panders to neither US moviegoers nor Chinese audiences, yet it became one of this year's biggest success stories.

"I certainly hoped it would be, but I had no idea if it would resonate, because it's such a specific and personal story," she says. "It's so much easier to tell a fish-out-of-water story when the person is blond and blue-eyed going to an Asian country, for example. But what is it like when you look the same as those people, and you're expected to fit in? How do you put that interiority on screen?"

Awkwafina's Billi is relatable but she's not an everywoman. Resisting clichéd characterisation, Wang fought to centre her own perspective without justifying or explaining it, even if that risked alienating audiences. "It goes back to that saying: approach everything with the audacity of a mediocre white man," she says. "I had to take on that audacity of saying, 'I don't care if you don't understand. This is my reality, and I'm going to assume you do.'" In a landscape where diasporic narratives have been sidelined for too long, *The Farewell* is a watershed for its centring of second-generation immigrants – third-culture kids for whom surface-level representation is no longer enough.

"People are always asking me about the importance of representation and identity in relation to making *The Farewell* and of course those things are really important to me – thinking about my identity and exploring my identity in the west," Wang says. "But I would love it if men – white men – were also asked the same questions as me. They should be asked these questions so they can be more conscientious about how they're representing people, how they're not representing people, and aware of their own blind spots." No single film-maker, Wang says, can shoulder the responsibility of representing an entire culture. "It can be dangerous if we're reductive about it, or if diversity is looked upon as a trend."

Iain McGlashan

Kes: Barnsley unveils statue tribute to author Barry Hines

A statue based on the main character from 1960s classic *Kes* has been unveiled in the author's home town.



Barry Hines, from Barnsley, published the story - of a boy who adopts a wild kestrel - in 1968, and it was adapted for the screen a year later. Director Ken Loach and star Dai Bradley, who played tearaway protagonist Billy Casper, both attended the unveiling of the bronze sculpture.

Bradley praised the "wonderful" statue, which was funded by public donations. The actor thanked those who had helped to raise £100,000 and said artist Graham Ibbeson had done a "remarkable job" on the life-sized piece. He believed it would "inspire generations to come", he said.

Loach said it was a "privilege" to be at the unveiling to remember Barry Hines and his "great writing". He said the statue of Billy, with *Kes* perched on his falconry glove, captured the central image of the film. "A boy, nobody thought he was worth anything, no time for him and yet he had a special quality that we see but no-one else does and that's the bird. The bird flies free but he

remains rooted to the earth with very few choices."

The idea for the tribute came from Ronnie Steele, a former pupil of Barry Hines, who set up a committee to plan the project in 2018. Sculptor Mr Ibbeson, who donated his services for free, said he had envisioned the statue as a piece that would "go in the street, amongst the community and he is very much part of that community".

Barry Hines wrote a number of novels, radio plays and TV films, alongside *A Kestrel for a Knave*. His other notable works include the 1984 drama-documentary *Threads*, which depicted a nuclear attack on Sheffield. He also taught PE at a local secondary school. He died in 2016 at the age of 76.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-59163711>



We thank Red Eye for subsidising the cost of printing these notes. Red Eye Print, Unit 2D, Lansbury Estate, 102 Lower Guildford Road, Knaphill, GU21 2EP Tel: 01483 772111

Comments and reactions to: **Bait**

No of reaction slips received = 20

Average score = 5.35

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	1	~	2	4	3	5	3	~	2	~

I am glad I don't own a 2nd house in Cornwall. I enjoyed the cakes – the carrot cake was excellent.
What a fascinating, interesting, film – but rather slow. *Not my fish and chips*
I rated everything about this film highly – subject matter, unusual and inventive look of the film, soundtrack etc
Shocking, sad, funny and stupidly beautiful *Definitively not my type of film*
Proper job. A marvel, not a Marvel. Just the sort of film WNCC should show!
I could smell the sea! *Could not follow the storyline*
Exceptional film. Glad I re-joined WNCC ***Had its moments but a bit hammy***
A worthy attempt to make an original film with a “difference” but it didn't work for me – too slow and difficult to follow

Position	Film	Average score
1	Nomadland	7.13
2	Parasite	7.07
3	Permission	6.60
4	Baby Driver	6.19
5	Bait	5.35

Forthcoming attraction: 9 December 2021 – **The Crimson Pirate**



A slam-bang, action-filled Technicolor lampoon ... any viewer with a drop of red blood in his veins and with fond memories of the Douglas Fairbanks Sr. school of derring-do should be happy to go on this last cruise of the crimson pirate. New York Times

A very good swashbuckling pirate adventure comedy-melodrama, photographed in Technicolor. Its tongue-in-cheek treatment pokes fun at pictures of this type, and for that reason it should be enjoyed, not only by the action fans, but also by others who are willing to accept it for the good-natured spoof that it is. Harrison's Reports

The jokes are as unsophisticated as the adventure, and the combination of violence and slapstick makes for quite good fun. Burt Lancaster, fighting, swinging from ropes, chased and chasing, and throwing in a little female impersonation, has the acrobatic energy of a Fairbanks and keeps the film going with considerable good humour. Monthly Film Bulletin

Come and enjoy a swash, a buckle and a mince pie Ed