



The Main Feature

Season 41 – Issue 16 – Screening 12 May 2022

My Dog Tulip

USA, 2009

83 mins Certificate 12A

Directors Paul Fierlinger, Sandra Fierlinger
Screenplay Paul Fierlinger, Sandra Fierlinger from the book 'My Dog Tulip' by J R Ackerley
Music John Abvarese

Voice credits

Christopher Plummer	J R Ackerley
Lynn Redgrave	Nancy and Greengrocer's wife
Isabella Rossellini	Mrs Canvenini
Peter Gerety	Mr Plum and Pugilist
Brian Murray	Captain Pugh and Mr Blandish



Joe Randolph (J R) Ackerley (1896 – 1967) was a man of letters. He was literary editor of *The Listener*, responsible for the eight pages per issue 'allocated to art, poetry, books and literature'. He persuaded many of the leading writers of the time to become regular contributors: E.M. Forster, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Clive Bell, Wyndham Lewis, Kenneth Clark, Maynard Keynes, Geoffrey Grigson, C. Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice, W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. He held the job for almost a quarter of a century, and was described by Anthony Howard as 'by common consent the greatest literary editor of his time – perhaps of all time'. He also wrote a play and a number of memoirs.

And he had a hinterland. First, a complex family history. His father, Roger Ackerley, was a successful fruit merchant known as the 'Banana King' of London. His mother was Janetta Aylward (known as Netta), an actress whom Roger met in Paris; the two returned to London together. They had an intermittent relationship, and three years later, in 1895, she gave birth to a son, Peter; then Joe a year later; and Nancy in 1899. Roger set up a household with Netta in 1903, after which the children saw him more regularly. As J R Ackerley noted in his memoir *My Father and Myself* (1968) 'I was born in 1896 and my parents were married in 1919'.

Second, during his time at school in Lancashire, J R Ackerley discovered he was attracted to other boys. His striking good looks earned him the nickname Girlie, but he described himself as 'a chaste, puritanical, priggish, rather narcissistic little boy, more repelled than attracted to sex,

which seemed to me a furtive, guilty, soiling thing, exciting, yes, but nothing whatever to do with those feelings which I had not yet experienced but about which I was already writing a lot of dreadful sentimental verse, called romance and love.'



Third, following his father's death in October 1929, J R Ackerley found a sealed note addressed to him, which concluded: 'I am not going to make any excuses, old man. I have done my duty towards everybody as far as my nature would allow and I hope people generally will be kind to my memory. All my men pals know of my second family and of their mother, so you won't find it difficult to get on their track.' J R Ackerley thus discovered that his father had had a second family for more than 20 years. Roger

used to visit his daughters three or four times a year when he was supposedly travelling on business, and sometimes when out to walk his first family's dog. His mistress, Muriel Perry, served as a nurse during the First World War and was busy with her career; she seldom saw their three daughters: Sally and Elizabeth, twins born in 1909, and Diana, born in 1912; all were cared for by a Miss Coutts. The birth of the youngest was never registered; but they were all given their mother's surname. J R Ackerley described the lives of his half-sisters in his 1968 memoir: 'They had no parental care, no family life, no friends.' For years the girls thought that their father was 'Uncle Bodger', who occasionally brought them gifts and money. J R Ackerley looked after his father's second family without telling his mother, who died in 1946.

According to J R Ackerley's official website he was 'energetically' homosexual, and 'like many men of his class and generation, principally attracted to working-class men, a procession of waiters, actors, sailors, guardsmen, delivery boys, petty criminals and policemen amongst whom he hoped to find what he called 'the Ideal Friend'.'

'This hopeless quest came to an end during the Second World War, when he acquired a neurotic and highly possessive Alsatian bitch called Queenie (from a married, long-term lover who was serving nine months for burglary) who would rapidly come to be the centre of his emotional life. His book *My Dog Tulip* (1956) is a love-letter to Queenie (renamed Tulip on the advice of his friends), which describes her life - notably her sexual and excretory needs - in unabashed detail. Several of his admirers were appalled, but while Edith Sitwell dismissed the book as 'meaningless filth about a dog', others, including Forster, Christopher Isherwood, Rosamund Lehmann and Julian Huxley, recognised that, like everything else Ackerley produced, the book was both seriously intended and beautifully written.'

It is this book which was transformed into a compelling and unsentimental animation for adults. It is hand-drawn by husband-and-wife directorial team Paul and Sandra Fierlinger. It involves four graphic concepts: finished-looking colour drawings that portray Ackerley's day-to-day life; simpler drawings in the elongated style of a New Yorker cartoon that evoke Ackerley's fantasies; black-and-white line illustrations of his distant memories; and fanciful yellow-pad scribbles. Ackerley is voiced by Christopher Plummer; Isabella Rossellini is the sympathetic vet; and Lynne Redgrave is Ackerley's sister Nancy.

Michael Hipkins



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As we come to the close of our forty-first season, regular note contributor *Eugene Smith* proposes a 41-question quiz. The first twenty questions are here; the remaining twenty-one will appear next time. No prizes, except the satisfaction of knowing the answers, which will appear on the club website and then in the first programme notes for next season.

Oscar, Oscar

1. The season started with the two most recent Best Film Winners (*Parasite* and *Nomadland*), following a recent tradition with the winners from 2016 (*Moonlight*) and 2018 (*Green Book*) also shown in the last 2 seasons. 2017's winner is missing – what was it?
2. Name the other film for which *Nomadland*'s Frances McDormand won the Best Actress Oscar (shown by the Club in 2019)?
3. Which US President commented: "The winner is a movie from S Korea. What the hell is that all about? [...] Can we get *Gone with the Wind* back, please?"
4. And which "divine" US actress/singer tweeted in response "I'm more upset that a parasite won the White House."

Location, Location...

Where were the following films set?

5. *Bait*
6. *Baby Driver*



7. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*
8. *Breakfast at Tiffany's*

Everyone's a Critic

One of the joys of the Club is making comments on the films (and reading other members' views). Match the comment to the film

9. "Not my fish and chips"

10. "Good of its kind – but no more please"
11. "The Mad Hatter's Tea Party"
12. "A Fairy Tale for adults"
13. "Upstairs, Downstairs on acid"

- A Bait
- B Breakfast at Tiffanys
- C Baby Driver
- D The Personal History of David Copperfield
- E Parasite

Rest in Peace

Name the recently departed directors of...

14. *The Last Picture Show*
15. *Betty Blue*

Name

16. The actress who played JoJo's mother in *JoJo Rabbit*
17. Holly Golightly's cat



18. The Sino-American actress/rapper/comedian who bridged the generations in *The Farewell*
19. The sport played in *Permission*

Links

20. Where...links the diner waitress in *Baby Driver* and the ageing Director from *Pain and Glory*?

Comments and reactions to: **Another Round**

No of reaction slips received = 18

Average score = 7.17

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

A very male film; and a poor guide to how to handle a mid-life crisis

Well developed story line. Convincing acting

I need to go home and have a drink!

Very entertaining

Pitch-perfect cocktail of a story, performance and emotion. Excellent choice!

An interesting change from Scandi noir. It's not just the herrings that get pickled.

Position	Film	Average score
1	Official Secrets	8.15
2	Breakfast at Tiffany's	7.20
3	Another Round	7.17
4	Nomadland	7.13
5	Parasite	7.07
6	The Farewell	6.85
7	The Personal History of David Copperfield	6.67
8	Permission	6.60
9	Pain and Glory	6.59
10	The Crimson Pirate	6.42
11	Portrait of a Lady on Fire	6.22
12	Baby Driver	6.19
13	Limbo	6.18
14	JoJo Rabbit	6.04
15	Bait	5.35

Forthcoming attraction: 26 May 2022 – **Larceny Inc**



When ex-convict Pressure Maxwell (Edward G. Robinson) is denied the loan he was seeking in order to start his own business, he resolves to rob the bank instead. With the help of his pals Jug Martin (Broderick Crawford) and Weepy Davis (Edward Brophy), he engineers a car accident to raise enough money to buy the luggage store next to the bank. The group then begins burrowing through the basement into the bank, but their plans are disrupted by the unanticipated success of their business. Rotten Tomatoes

You can't say that Edward G. Robinson doesn't try hard to go straight. In his past three or four pictures, he has played more or less 'legitimate' roles...[but] in Larceny, Inc. he is found on the shady side of the street. And considering the traffic is very hectic and amusing over there, it is a passing pleasure to see him back with the mob.... Mr. Robinson, as usual, is a beautifully hard-boiled yegg. The principal joy is to watch him. His 'Pressure' cooks with gas." New York Times, 1942