

 WOKING'S NEW CINEMA CLUB

The Main Feature

Season 42 – Issue 15 – Screening 27 April 2023

Double Bill

Pickpocket

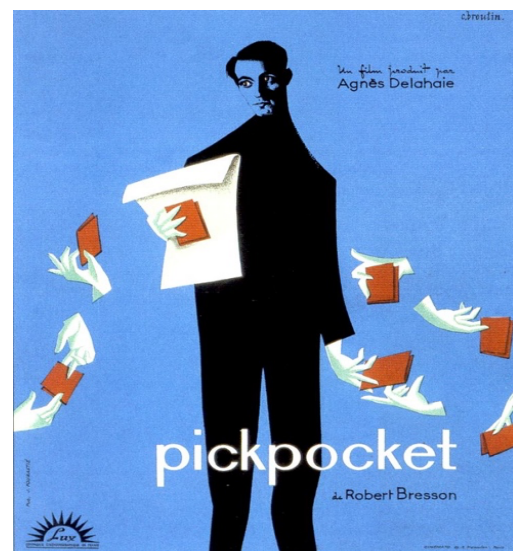
France 1959

75 mins. Certificate PG

Directed by	Robert Bresson
Screenplay by	Robert Bresson
Cinematography	Léonce-Henri Burel
Music	Jean-Baptiste Lully

Cast

Michel	Martin Lassalle
Jeanne	Marika Green
Jacques	Pierre Leymarie
Inspector	Jean Pelegri
First accomplice	Kassagi
Second accomplice	Pierre Étaix
Mother	Dolly Scal



Robert Bresson made relatively few films - one comic short in 1934 and 13 features between 1943 and 1981, but according to critics and other directors they carry a weight and influence belied by the mere 20 hours of screen time. Bresson influenced other directors not only through his films but also with his 1975 book *Notes on Cinematography*. Jean-Luc Godard said of him 'He is the French cinema, as Dostoevsky is the Russian novel and Mozart is German music.'

His obituary in the *Guardian* (Bresson died in 1999 aged 91) said his popular image was that of an austere, pessimistic critic, a Jansenist (denying free will, maintaining that human nature is corrupt and that Christ died for the elect and not for all humanity) at odds with the modern world. Living on the top floors of an elegant 17th-century building on the Ile St Louis in Paris, he was accused of an ivory tower existence outside the mainstream of cinema, refusing the slightest compromise.

The obituary goes on to say that Bresson was grave not dour. He was unwilling to compromise only because he was secure in the belief - or knowledge - that his interior view of cinema had no application if modified. He demanded 'not beautiful images, but necessary images'. The resulting body of work is rigorous, demanding and concentrated. He was the least bombastic of directors and the one for whom the word auteur is most apt.

What does this mean for his films? A BFI article 'What does 'Bressonian' really mean?' asserts 'With the very broadest of brushstrokes Bresson's films have narratives which unfold with brisk economy, a lack of psychology, and many ellipses, often telling stories of downtrodden loners fighting imprisonment (both literal and metaphorical) in a corrupt world, who eventually achieve redemption and grace. He has a filmmaking style that foregrounds rhythm through short shots and a selective use of sound, which



combine to create new meanings via their juxtaposition. There's a deep saturation in religious significance and a highlighting of surfaces in order to show us the mystery that lies behind them. And there's striking use of non-professional actors, or 'models', which involved using repetition to automate their action, in order to bypass thought and reveal something of their true nature.'

When speaking of his 'models' Bresson said of them 'What interests me is not what they show but what they hide.' Pierre Leymaire, who plays Jacques said of his working with Bresson 'I had to rehearse up to thirty-six times a very short sentence. It was like

brain washing, you no longer knew what you were saying. The actors were not allowed to see the rushes. They ought not to see themselves. For that reason he never used them again in a later film: Bresson did not want to film people who had seen themselves filmed because they had a tendency to correct themselves, to change their natural selves.' Martin Lassalle, who plays Michel, said 'I went up the staircase forty times. He did not explain why we had to re-do the scene. To weaken the model's ego? He wanted to provoke interior tension which showed in the eyes and in the hands. I felt I was playing with danger, with something erotic.'

Pickpocket is the story of Michel, uncomplainingly jobless in late 1950s Paris, who starts stealing from strangers, for reasons unclear even to himself. He spouts vague theories about exceptional individuals being above the law – but is he lost in another world, as Jeanne (Marika Green), a young woman he half-heartedly befriends, tells him?

Intentionally not a thriller but certainly not without suspense, Bresson's film is profoundly ambivalent about Michel's ethics and sexuality (he seems aroused by his thefts). And the audience is just waiting for him to be caught.



The expressionless Michel is scarcely off the screen and he also provides the narration. The film shows his isolation in a tiny, scruffy room filled with dusty books and little else at the top of a building reached by a miserable staircase. It shows his apparently addictive behaviour, his paranoia and self-deception, his neglect or rejection of those who love or care for him, and his bizarre relationship with a policeman who suspects him. Rotten Tomatoes summarised the film: 'Narratively spare and told with clockwork precision, *Pickpocket* is a carefully observed character study that packs an emotional wallop.'

Michael Hipkins

red eye
LOOKING AFTER YOU

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

Club website: www.wncc.org.uk

Shadows in Paradise (Varjoja Paratiisissa)

Finland 1986
71 mins. Certificate 12

Directed by	Aki Kaurismäki
Screenplay by	Aki Kaurismäki
Cinematography	Timo Salminen
Music	John Barry

Cast

Nikander	Matti Pellonpää
Ilona Rajamäki	Kati Outinen
Melartin	Sakari Kuosmanen
Co-worker	Esko Nikkari
Ilona's girlfriend	Kylli Köngäs
Shop Steward	Pekka Laiho



Described by some as the world's most famous Finnish filmmaker, Aki Kaurismäki has some similarities with the director of the other film in tonight's double bill, Robert Bresson. Kaurismäki is known for his extremely minimalistic style. He has been called an auteur since he writes, directs, produces and usually edits the films himself, and thus introduces his personal "drollery and deadpan" style. The camera is usually still. Events are shown in a plain manner and characters are usually left alone facing the consequences. However, despite their tragedies and setbacks, the characters don't give up and eventually survive. But in contrast with Bresson, Kaurismäki is happy to use actors more than once. Matti Pellonpää appeared in 18 of his films before his early death in 1995 at the age of 44, and similarly Kati Outinen has taken the female lead in a number of his films.

Much of his work is centred on Helsinki, including *Shadows in Paradise*, which is the first of the Proletariat Trilogy alongside *Ariel* (1988) and *The Match Factory Girl* (1990). A man of the left (he was among the 42 cultural figures who signed a letter endorsing the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership in the 2019 British general election), perhaps Kaurismäki's best-known film in the UK is *Le Havre* (2011) which tells the story of a shoeshiner who tries to save an immigrant child in the French port city.

Shadows in Paradise describes the story of lonely garbageman Nikkander (Matti Pellonpää) who finds himself directionless after losing his friend and co-worker to a sudden heart attack. Unlikely redemption comes in the form of plain supermarket cashier Ilona (Kati Outinen), with whom he begins a tentative love affair. According to the BFI, in boiling down what is essentially a romantic comedy to a series of spare and beautiful gestures, Kaurismäki conjures an unexpected delight that finds hope blossoming even amid grey surroundings.



Incidentally, the website howmanycigarettes.com notes that this is a real 'smoker's movie' since it features 51 cigarettes, equivalent to 0.689 cigarettes/minute.

Michael Hipkins

Comments and reactions to: **Midnight Cowboy**

No of reaction slips received = 23

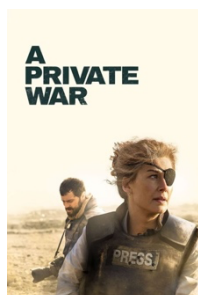
Average score = 6.22

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

This is a classic movie, if at times bleak and haunting *I did leave at the interval!*
Has the film gone off in the past 50 years? Or is it me?
Excellent acting but not the film for me *Not really my type of film but very well acted*
The story holds up well but some of the style is seriously dated. Great soundtrack, though
Brilliant acting by Dustin Hoffman *Touching and moving but depressing and sad also.*
Having been homeless a long time ago – watch this film and think ***First class***
Seedy and sad. Some parts have worn well – the party scene was hilariously dated, and very silly
Good choice, good acting - entertaining ***A bit X-rated but quite touching***
Good performances but a bit dated now. Great music too *What a dreadful film!*
An interesting look at life in '60s New York. ***Great choice – a real classic***
A blast from the past! I enjoyed watching the film 50 years ago. It was worth seeing again

Position	Film	Average score
1	Belfast	7.96
2	The Duke	7.75
3	Seven Chances	7.61
4	Elvis	7.59
5	Mandela and de Klerk	7.47
6	After Love	7.36
7	The Perfect Candidate	7.16
8	The Band Wagon	6.91
9	Flee	6.79
10	Day for Night	6.57
11	Midnight Cowboy	6.22
12=	The Mole Agent	6.00
12=	Son of Saul	6.00
14	Guardians of the Galaxy	5.53
15	L'Eclisse	3.00

Forthcoming attraction: 11 May 2023 – **A Private War**



A Private War gives powerful voice to the plight of the innocent victims of conflict, such as the Syrian refugees who serve as extras in key scenes, and whose stories are recounted with chilling, heart-breaking authenticity. But director Matthew Heineman is also focused on war correspondent Marie Colvin's inner struggles, raising age-old questions of risk-addiction while finding something deeper and more altruistic in his subject's motives.
Guardian