



The Main Feature

Season 43 – Issue 2 – Screening 28 September 2023

Mrs Harris Goes to Paris

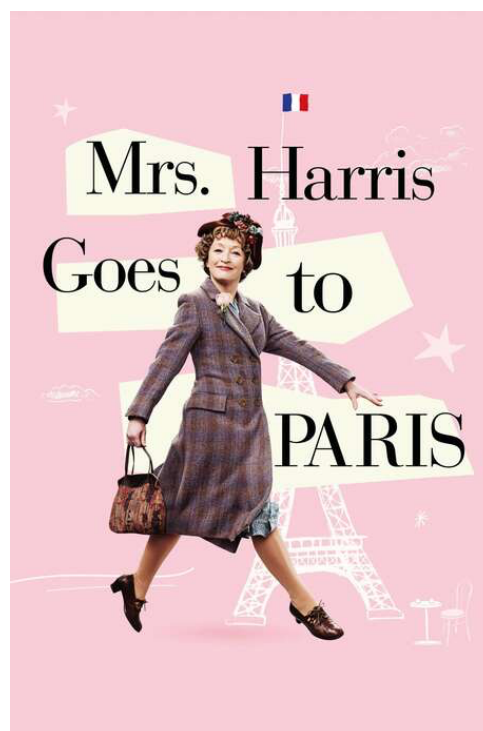
UK 2022

115 mins. Certificate PG

Director	Anthony Fabian
Writer	Carroll Cartright, Anthony Fabian, Keith Thompson, Olivia Hetreed
Cinematography	Felix Wiedemann
Costume design	Jenny Beavan

Cast

Ada Harris	Lesley Manville
Claudine Colbert	Isabelle Huppert
Marquis de Chassagne	Lambert Wilson
Natasha	Alba Baptista
André Fauvel	Lucas Bravo
Violet Butterfield	Ellen Thomas
Pamela Penrose	Rose Williams



Paul Gallico (1897 – 1976) was an author perhaps best known in Britain for his novella *The Snow Goose* set against the background of the Dunkirk evacuation. In his *New York Times* obituary, Molly Ivens noted 'to say that Mr Gallico was prolific hardly begins to describe his output.' He wrote 41 books and numerous short stories, 20 theatrical movies, 12 TV movies, and had a TV series based on his Hiram Holliday short stories.

Gallico was born in New York City. His father was an Italian concert pianist, composer and music teacher; his mother came from Austria. They had emigrated to America in 1895. Paul Gallico served in the US Army for the last 18 months of the First World War. He first achieved notice in the 1920s as a sports writer, sports columnist and then as sports editor of the *New York Daily News*.

In the late 1930s, Gallico abandoned sports writing in favour of fiction with many of his works initially appearing in the *Saturday Evening Post* including *The Snow Goose* in 1941. He also moved to Salcombe in Devon and later lived in other parts of the UK, Mexico, Monaco and

France. His output reflects his love of cats (*Thomasina, The Cat Who Thinks She is God*) and his command of a wide range of genres including adventures (*The Poseidon Adventure*).



His first novel about the lovable charwoman Mrs Harris (*Flowers for Mrs Harris*) appeared in 1958, followed by *Mrs Harris Goes to New York* (1960), *Mrs Harris MP* (1965) and *Mrs Harris Goes to Moscow* (1974). The character was said by *The New York Times* to be 'perhaps Mr Gallico's most beloved creation'.

In 1950s London, Ada Harris (Lesley Manville) doggedly goes from house to house, quietly tidying up after lives far more exciting and glamorous than hers. But when she sees a Dior dress in one of her regular client's bedrooms, she falls in love and sets her mind on travelling to Paris to get one herself.

The House of Dior was established in 1946. At his first fashion show in 1947 Christian Dior introduced what became known as the New Look. Featuring rounded shoulders, a cinched waist and a very full skirt, it celebrated ultra-femininity and opulence in women's fashion. After years of military and civilian uniforms, sartorial restrictions and shortages, Dior offered not merely a new look, but a new outlook. The New Look arrived uncompromised and complete, not as a tentative suggestion or stage in evolution.

When she gets to Paris, Ada enters a world of clashes of social class and culture and finds herself pitted against Claudine Colbert (Isabelle Huppert), the antagonistic Director of Dior. She meets the charming and aristocratic Marquis de Chassagne (Lambert Wilson) as well as a young Dior accountant André Fauvel (Lucas Bravo) who has taken a shine to Natasha (Alba Baptista), one of the models.

The critics were mainly kind to the film. The Guardian particularly liked Lesley Manville's performance: 'Even though the simplicity of the text essentially demands us to side with and root for Mrs Harris at all times, Manville makes what could have been an easy working-class archetype feel like a genuine person, securing our upmost investment as she edges closer to securing her dream dress. There's something brilliantly simple about what Mrs Harris wants and how she intends to get it, without the need to turn her or the film into something more unnecessarily complex and overstuffed. She doesn't want to social climb or to fall in love, she just wants that dress.' Metro said: 'What's so lovely is that *Mrs Harris Goes to Paris* is a celebration of beauty and the importance of cherishing those special things in life that may seem silly to others but make us feel most like ourselves. A movie that simply sparks joy.'



Unsurprisingly, the film was nominated for costume design at the Oscars, BAFTAs and the Golden Globe, but did not take the award at any of them.

The story has been brought to the screen before: a 1992 made-for-TV presentation starring Angela Lansbury as Mrs 'Arris (without the H because the only Cockney seen by US viewers was Dick Van Dyke?) and co-starring Diana Rigg and Omar Sharif. And it has been on stage as the musical *Flowers for Mrs Harris*, produced by the Sheffield Theatres in 2016, and reprised in 2018 at the Chichester Festival Theatre with Clare Burt in the title role.

Interested in French fashion? The V&A has an exhibition on 'Coco' Chanel until February 2024.

Michael Hipkins



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Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 4 October 2023

Paul Gallico on screen

It is a tribute to Gallico's versatility as a writer that there have been nine film adaptations of his works over 64 years, ranging from sports stories, to pets, a tear-jerker and two disaster movies. Here's a selection.

***The Pride of the Yankees* (1942)**

Derived from Gallico's early career as a sports correspondent and editor, this sports drama stars Gary Cooper as the legendary New York Yankees first baseman, Lou Gehrig, who died aged 37 before the film was released. It is less a sports biography than an homage to a heroic and widely loved sports figure whose tragic and premature death touched the entire US.

***Assignment - Paris* (1952)**

Paris-based New York Herald Tribune reporter Jimmy Race (Dana Andrews) is sent by his boss Nicholas Strang (George Sanders, between *All About Eve* and *Roman Holiday*) behind the Iron Curtain in Budapest to investigate a meeting involving the Hungarian ambassador. While on assignment, Race is framed for espionage.

***Lili* (1953)**

Leslie Caron is a touchingly naïve French girl whose emotional relationship with a carnival puppeteer is conducted through the medium of four puppets. The screenplay was based on a short story and treatment titled *The Seven Souls of Clement O'Reilly* written by Gallico, which in turn was based upon *The Man Who Hated People*, his short story that appeared in the

October 28, 1950 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

***The Three Lives of Thomasina* (1963)**

Gallico was a cat lover, and his novel *Thomasina: The Cat Who Thought She Was God* was adapted by Disney as a fantasy feature starring Patrick McGoohan, Susan Hampshire, and child actors Karen Dotrice and Matthew Garber (both of *Mary Poppins* fame) in a story about a cat and her influence on a family. Described by one fan as the *Lassie Come Home* of cat movies. That doesn't sell it to me.

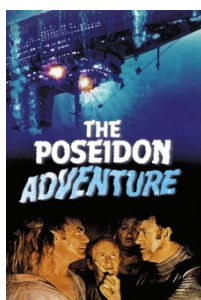
***The Snow Goose* (1971)**



A made-for-TV film which follows the relationship between Fritha (Jenny Agutter), an orphaned young girl, and Philip Rhayader (Richard Harris), a disabled lighthouse keeper in the fishing village of Great Marsh in Essex. The two meet as Rhayader helps Fritha care for an injured snow goose she has found, despite his solitary lifestyle. As the goose heals, Fritha and the goose leave Rhayader. He joins the rescue of the British Expeditionary Force, but is killed in the effort. Winner of the Golden Globe for Best Television Film; and Agutter won an Emmy for Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role in a Drama.

***The Poseidon Adventure* (1972)**

An American survival disaster film directed by Ronald Neame, based on Gallico's novel of the same name. Its ensemble cast includes five Oscar winners: Gene Hackman, Ernest Borgnine, Jack Albertson, Shelly Winters and Red Buttons.



The fictional SS Poseidon is on her final voyage from New York City to Athens, before it is scrapped. On New Year's Day, it is overturned by a tsunami. Passengers and crew are trapped inside, and a preacher attempts to lead a small group of survivors to

safety. It won two Oscars, a Golden Globe and a BAFTA.

Matilda (1978)

A small-time talent agent (Elliott Gould) discovers an amazing boxing kangaroo and plans to use him as his stepping-stone into the big time by having him compete with a human pugilist. Meanwhile a crusading sportswriter tries to combat the underworld gamblers who want a piece of the action. Based on Gallico's novel of the same name.

Beyond the Poseidon Adventure (1979)

Gallico's novel *The Poseidon Adventure* had ended with the ship's sinking. The original film changed much of the novel's plot and ended with the ship still afloat. After the huge success of the film, Gallico was asked to write a novel that would be a sequel not to his first novel, but to the film. It would feature a new group of people entering the still capsized ship. In response, Gallico started writing *Beyond the Poseidon Adventure*, but he died on July 15, 1976, before completing the book which was published on January 1, 1978. The film, starring Michael Caine and Shirley Field, again ended up bearing little resemblance to his book. Of this box office flop, Radio Times said 'It's ironic that this sequel to the blockbuster that initiated the disaster movie cycle should effectively finish off the genre and the career of its king, Irwin Allen'. In mitigation, it did feature that stalwart of Westerns, the wonderfully named Slim Pickens.

Michael Hipkins

Comments and reactions to: **The Banshees of Inisherin**

No of reaction slips received = 18

Average score = 7.06

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

Great start to the season

Quite disturbing but so glad I watched it. Brilliant acting

Intriguing and exquisitely acted. A strong start to the new season

Great scenery

Much easier to follow with the subtitles. Thank you for that.

A bit too unpleasant

Parochial Irish with quite good acting

Sad story well done

A very unusual film but worth watching.

A metaphor for the Irish civil war?

Well photographed, great acting, presumably an allegory on the futility of war, but too bleak.

Slow and not very cheerful. Rather downbeat

Very well-made and atmospheric

Beautifully filmed, well-acted, but those fingers wrecked the story line

Position	Film	Average score
1	The Banshees of Inisherin	7.06

Forthcoming attraction: 12 October 2023 – **Three Colours: Blue**



The first of Krzysztof Kieślowski's Three Colours trilogy, initially released in 1993. *Three Colours Blue* has Juliette Binoche as the wife of a prominent European composer who, when a hideous car crash kills both her husband and her child, goes into a mourning which denies everything about her old life. 'Blue remains an intense and moving tribute to the woman at its centre who, in coming back from tragedy, almost refuses, but ultimately accepts, the only real love that's on offer'. Guardian