



fish

A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence
(Sweden/Norway/France 2014)

DIRECTOR : Roy Andersson

RUNNING TIME : 101mins

RATING : M

Synopsis:

A new darkness of tone pervades the conclusion to Swedish auteur Roy Andersson's incredible film about the human condition – what strange humans and what disquieting conditions these really are.

Review: Peter Bradshaw

The pigeon in question is dead; it's in the first scene of this captivatingly strange and dreamlike film, sitting on a branch in a glass case, stuffed, as part of a museum display. Various pallid characters shuffle around, peering at the exhibits, and we in turn examine them from that deadpan fixed camera position that Swedish writer-director Roy Andersson prefers. These people look dead too; later, one will compare another to a zombie, but this does not really convey how diffident and withdrawn their undead behaviour is.

The pensive pigeon recurs in a poem haltingly read out by a child with special needs, and Andersson confers mystery and poignancy on the moment – but for now the sight of it behind glass, combined with the title so recently flashed up on the screen, recalls the work of David Shrigley, the conceptual artist who presented a stuffed dog holding up a sign saying "I'm Dead".

This is the third in what Andersson is now calling a trilogy about the human condition, the previous works being *You, the Living* (2007) and *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000): the films have been more than worth the wait, both singly and now in their bizarre and magnificent totality. As with its predecessors, this film is a succession of hallucinatory tableaux, each depicting a world of Beckettian loneliness and hyperreal drabness. It revolves loosely around two desolate figures trying to sell joke-shop novelties to various retail outlets, and who live in a flophouse where the lights go off in segments along the corridor, as in a horror film.

Figures and faces are seen in the middle-distance, never close-up, but with pin-sharp clarity; Andersson maintains a rigorous deep focus all along his vertiginous perspective lines, so that we can see the figures on the distant skyline, or buildings from a rear window, in the same painterly detail as a scuffed table in the foreground. Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 26th March 2017

8.15 pm Tuesday 28th March 2017

Review: (Cont.)

Each interrelated scene is a vivid, eerily complete world: perhaps like the “magic lantern” displays in the Thorne Miniature Rooms at the Chicago Art Institute, which famously inspired Orson Welles. The film’s unhappy human beings seem to have returned from the netherworld to enact a slo-mo ballet of sadness. Or perhaps we have arrived in their netherworld.

But there is something new in this film: a tonal shift. Once, Andersson’s attitude towards this tortured pageant of shabby humanity seemed to be a wan compassion, a kind of fellow feeling for their anxiety and bewilderment, albeit with sharp prickles of disdain. But now a darkness is settling: sympathy for all that weary, tragicomic exhaustion and self-pity is giving way to the first pangs of disgust. There is a truly horrible moment when what appears to be a black-tie dinner party of aged notables shuffles out on to a summer terrace to watch a mysterious gigantic copper drum being turned by horrific means – more awful still because the bemusement and laughter that have been our obvious responses to earlier scenes are no longer appropriate.

The director could be moving away from the more lenient position of the earlier two films and toward something more intractable and disquieting – closer to an imagined focal point of evil and despair that provides a context for that blasted heath of defeat across which the tiny figures have been moving. *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* does not have a moment of pure surreal flamboyance like the sacrifice scene in *Songs* or the dreamlike moving apartment in *You, the Living*. But it is a progression; the shifting and darkening of mood makes narrative sense in context.

Andersson occasionally, enigmatically, sends his movie back into the past: we see the way one bar looked in 1943 – the era of Sweden’s tense wartime neutrality – and then another, more raucous pub, with something of Aki Kaurismäki, is weirdly interrupted by a cavalry troop from centuries before. Both scenes are accompanied by a desperately sad traditional Swedish song, with the tune of *John Brown’s Body*. The surge of sadness these scenes deliver is not distanced or ironised, and does not have any clear cause-and-effect relationship with the rest of what is happening on screen, and yet it is a vital part of this movie-symphony. What an incredible filmmaker Andersson is – he has created an entirely unique epic movie-cycle that has to be seen to be believed.

Source: <https://www.the-guardian.com>. Peter Bradshaw 23/4/2015 accessed 21/10/16

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COMING UP:

April	<i>Truman</i> (Spain/ Argentina)	Sunday 30 th & Tuesday May 2 nd
May	<i>Macadam Stories</i> (France)	Sunday 28 th & Tuesday 30 th
June	<i>Labyrinth of Lies</i> (Germany)	Sunday 25 th & Tuesday 27 th

Some Thoughts On: *The Nightingale*

Can I offer some thoughts on the feature film *The Nightingale* after my guest visit with Mike and Dawn Jonas? Philippe Muyl's ninth feature is a finely rendered odyssey. A bright, spoilt granddaughter and charming sage of a grandad with his beloved caged bird companion, return to the village of the old man's birth.

So we follow youth: Renxing (Yang Xinyi) and age: Li Baotian (Ju Dou) from a world of synthetic luxury and big business back to pre-industrial Arcadia. Along the way young Renxing discovers new sights and sensibility among more grounded company and rural environment. It is to some extent a politically correct and sentimental rendition. This restraint is understandable and the French director has reworked the ageless plot into a fine script and visually exquisite cinema. With a quibble or so aside, the direction, acting, production values, fine sets and breathtaking locations were faultless. Too many adjectives but thanks and farewell, **Keith McM.**

Special thanks Keith, for the many interesting and discerning reviews you have contributed to this newsletter over the years. [Ed.]

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I loved this gentle film. There were clear signs of the larger forces that exerted pressures on the characters' lives. First, we saw the hectic pace of city life and the expectations surrounding performance, for Chongyi and Qianying in the career-growing phase of their professions and for device-connected Renxing; later, with Li injured, we saw the isolation of his home village that limited modern medical assistance (but allowed a signal for Skype!).

Yet the focus was on issues in private lives. Lightly and slowly -- and through lush and beautiful scenery -- we were taken deeper into the strains between father and son and between husband and wife; we also witnessed the shifting identity of young Renxing. This was a relief as we began with intense dislike of the spoilt Renxing and felt pity for her long suffering grandfather on the marathon, twisted and difficult journey to his home town. With the inner journey paralleling the long and difficult outer journey, she was transformed by his persistent care, his story of his love for his wife, and later the friendship of other children and the respect of adults as she learned skills beyond her ipad and iphone. At a critical moment in his marriage, we saw Chongyi leave his comfort zone to engage with his father and the two men let go of their stubbornness, offering apology.

As a binding thread throughout, there were the birds: Li's nightingale (and Renxing's late replacement) and her third song-less bird. "It takes time to teach it to sing ... perhaps days, weeks, months, years": possibly a reminder that it sometimes takes us time to do difficult things.
Neill Ustick

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Message from the President

IMPORTANT REMINDER: On April 19th there will be a FISH committee meeting at which 'renewal of membership' forms will be POSTED out to all current members. If you intend renewing your membership please do so IMMEDIATELY upon receipt of that form !!! Members have until **May 5th** to renew before people waiting to join FISH for the very first time, are given the chance to do so. Be quick to avoid disappointment!

On March 2nd, the Adult Day Care Centre here in the Wingecarribee Shire organised a Premiere screening of *Jasper Jones* to raise urgent funds for the building extensions they are planning for their premises. As the numbers of people seeking their assistance increase, available spaces become uncomfortably overcrowded. This fundraiser of theirs, (proudly financially supported by FISH), was one of many events where the funds raised will go into a pool with the aim of eventually reaching a target of \$300,000. Such a worthy group ~ please continue to support them if you can.

A request: If you are an 'early bird' who likes to get to our screenings well in advance of the starting time, please do not enter the cinema until our committee 'ticket checkers' have arrived to view your membership card. This will save our committee members the tiring task of having to enter the cinema to locate you and then carry out their verification of your attendance. Thank you.

The Nightingale was a simply charming start to the second half of this season. Many thanks to reviewers, Neill Ustick and Keith McMenemy for taking the time to send us their insightful comments on the film. Look for those reviews on page 3 of this Newsletter. Congratulations and thanks to the Empire for the wonderful run of quality films they have brought to us this year ~ and will continue to do so. Check out *Rosalie Blum* if you haven't already done so. It's a real charmer!

And so the diversity continues this month as we examine the great fluctuations and differences within the human condition with our presentation of *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*. Yes, it will be VERY different.

Yours in film, Ross Armfield.



FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

President: Ross Armfield 4883 4144 / 0427595453
Guest Enquiries: Christine Ferguson 48616381 / 0410113213 / ncferg@bigpond.com
Website: www.fish.org.au
Email: fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com
Mail: P.O. Box 1330 Bowral NSW 2576
Membership: Forms available at Empire Cinema & on Website.
Enquiries: David Cowie - Membership Secretary
fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com

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