



fish

The Second Mother
(Brazil 2016)

DIRECTOR : Anna Muylaert
RUNNING TIME : 110 mins
RATING : M

Synopsis:

Having left her daughter Jessica (Camila Mardila) to be raised by relatives in Pernambuco, a small town in the north of Brazil, Val (Regina Casz) works as a loving nanny for a well-to-do family in Sao Paolo. Comfortably employed, Val feels a constant sense of guilt about Jessica. Everyone and everything in the elegant house has its proper place. When Jessica comes to the city to complete her university entrance exams, they reunite for the first time in 13 years but Jessica's personality and candour upsets the unspoken yet strict balance of power in the household, with Val caught between the living room and the kitchen. She will have to make a choice.

Review: Andrew L. Urban

Perhaps the most poignant moment in the film is also the fulcrum of what filmmaker Anna Muylaert is exploring: it's a scene where Val (Regina Casz) is consoling and caressing Fabinho on his failure to pass the university exam. She has nursed him since childhood, being his nanny and second mother all these years, right beside his birth mother, Dona Barbara (Karine Teles), Val's employer. When Barbara tries to do the same, her son awkwardly walks away.

In this dramatic parallel, while Fabinhno's mother was physically with her son growing up, it was Val who was closer to him. Val, on the other hand, was physically distant from her daughter for a dozen years, earning the money to send back for her keep. Neither leads to satisfactory outcomes for the emotional well-being of mother and child. That explains why the original title reflects a line of a child's dialogue: when will she be back?

The sort of social barriers and compartmentalisations that are in place in Brazil (and other places) between the rich and the poor, the families and their servants, is unfamiliar territory for proactively egalitarian Australia. The distance to be kept between housekeeper/nanny and the family is much smaller in our cultures than some others.

Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 17th September 2017

8.15 pm Tuesday 29th September 2017

Review Cont.

And this goes to what Muylaert explores with a calm but forensic focus. How can parents bring up children without affection and intimacy? The result is displayed symbolically and metaphorically in Fabinho's failure to pass the exam, while Jessica scores 68.

Regina Casz, one of Brazil's most acclaimed actresses with a career spanning 40 years, carries the film on her shoulders (and her heart), in a performance that rightly has won many awards and nominations. The film itself also attracted much critical and audience praise, from its home town to Seattle and Sundance.

What I find noteworthy about this film is that you don't fully realise its power until the ending. It subtly unfolds the emotional environment, elaborates on the characters and slowly builds to its satisfying, moving resolution without fanfare or cinematic hype. It's left to the audience to make their own private fanfare.

Source: www.urbancinefile.com.au

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Late Thoughts On: *Things to Come*

A not so still life.

The Sarkozy government's ultimately successful changes to the minimum retirement age, part of what the French presumed was a cornerstone of their social contract, serves as an allegory for disruption and impermanence in this excellent character study. It is in this context that we meet the protagonist as she navigates her way to her Philosophy class. Nathalie's encounter with the protesting students provides us with a sharp insight into an aspect of her character that will serve her in the crises to come. She argues that no matter their anger and dismay at the changes, her students must be permitted to carry on with their lives. It is this core ethic that will sustain Nathalie through the course of the film and beyond.

On a personal level, the contract of marriage is broken for Nathalie when her husband Heinz declares an end to their marriage of twenty-five years. Her plaintive response, "I thought you would love me forever", is filled with a sad irony. As a philosophy teacher she and her students have interrogated the very nature of truth and reality – much of it contestable. This is yet another life lesson that Nathalie must learn, just as, in her earlier years, she was forced to confront the reality of Stalinism in her visit to the Soviet Union. Our lives are fluid through time, but Nathalie serves as a wonderful example of endurance that is filled with love, strength and humanity.

Nothing, other than life and death is assured and between these two bookends, we negotiate a precarious path of love and loss, joy and pain, movement and stillness and everything in between. The film ends with the camera retreating out of Nathalie's shifting world and freezing ironically in a frame that resembles a still life. Our imaginations, our paintings of things to come for Nathalie and ultimately ourselves, carry her and our story forward. **Paul Williams**

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Some Thoughts On: *Toni Erdmann*

In the Moment

The beauty of film is its ability to capture the moment. Of course we have to be there to catch that moment, whether as filmmaker, taker or observer. It is a medium to be shared – to be heard and seen. That’s what I loved about the finale of the *Toni Erdmann*; the conceit of the moment not captured, as Winfried (aka Toni) goes off to get his camera in order to record the moment that Ines, his daughter, revealed to him, and us, her catharsis. She has answered the question put to her early in the film by Winfried, “Are you human?”

Up until that point, Ines has been caught up in a web of ambition, frustration and an underlying sadness that has clouded her ability to understand who she really wants to be. Winfried’s clownish but ultimately purposeful attempts at breaking through his daughter’s hardened shell, serve a broader theme that goes beyond the film just being a study of a father and daughter. Director Ade clearly wants to satirise the corporate world of performance reviews, glass ceilings and ‘downsizing’. The most memorable scene for me in the film was the point of view shot through Winfried’s eyes as he gazed down from an apartment to see the world below. On the left is the grey modernist concrete, bereft of humans. On the right is a domestic scene of a mother and her children at work and play in their back yard – the palate was rich and vibrant with life. It served as a rhetorical reminder as to what is at stake if, as Winfried feared for his daughter, we do not hang on to our humanity.

At the conclusion, my thoughts strayed to another film, *Blade Runner*, and one of the truly great scenes in film making for me when Roy Batty reflects on his life in his dying breath; “All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain...” But, for a part of our lives, we can capture moments and share them, at least while we can. **Paul Williams**

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COMING UP:

October	<i>The Fencer</i> (Finland/Estonia)	Sunday 15 th & Tuesday 17 th
November	<i>The Last Hammer Blow</i> (France)	Sunday 19 th & Tuesday 21 st
December	<i>Kumiko the Treasure Hunter</i> (USA)	Sunday 10 th & Tuesday 12 th
February '18	<i>Jimmy's Hall</i> (UK)	Sunday 11 th & Tuesday 13 th

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Message from the President

Our new season is well and truly underway with two very different films to start us off. This newsletter contains a review of each of them by member Paul Williams. Thank you for your interesting insights Paul and for taking the time to share them with the membership as a whole. I really enjoyed the quirky, and at times hilarious, *Toni Erdmann*. Some people may have been a tad confronted by the kinky antics of Ines with her colleague from the office, but I thought her almost selfish, impersonal approach to 'lovemaking', just confirmed her father's view that she wasn't very human in this cold, hard-nosed business world of outsourcing, downsizing and consultancy based retrenchments. At least the film gave me some ideas for party themes in the future, when the birthday, (office bonding), celebration bared its soul!! By the way, did anyone else think Ines looked remarkably similar to our ABC's Leigh Sales? Maybe it's just me.

A reminder that our AGM takes place before our next Sunday screening on the 17th September. All members are welcome, but we do ask all those attending to be seated by 9.30am so that we can complete our agenda and have the cinema ready for our normal 10.00 commencement time.

Our guest co-ordinator, Caro Kennewell, has asked me to remind all members that when making arrangements to bring a guest to one of our films, please do so at least a few days before the desired screening, preferably, a week before. We realise that things can pop up at short notice, but earlier is so much more convenient than later. Thank you.

So, away we go again. This time to Brazil for our next film ~ the wonderfully reviewed *The Second Mother*, a completely different kettle of FISH to our first two offerings. I'm sure this will be a very special and involving work. I hope you enjoy it.

Yours in film,

Ross Armfield.



FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

President: Ross Armfield 4883 4144 / 0427595453

Guest Enquiries: Caro Kennewell 4869 5946
carogeoff@oracletelecom.net.au

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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