

Women in Film: Interviews with Joanna Hogg, Jennifer Kent and Penny Lane

# CINEASTE

America's  
leading magazine  
on the art  
and politics of  
the cinema  
Vol. XLIV, No. 4  
U.S. \$8.00  
Canada \$9.00

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quintessentially New Hollywood moment, with a complex, compromised protagonist left unprotected in an ugly moment that defies tidy explanation and resolution.

The New Hollywood is often characterized as an auteurist cinema, with an emphasis on the singular voice and vision of the director. But *Klute*, like many (and perhaps most) of the great films of the era, was a collaborative effort. As Pakula readily acknowledged, his film also reflects the crucial creative imprints of two partners in particular—cinematographer Gordon Willis, and Fonda. Willis, who would of course subsequently emerge as one of Hollywood's most influential cinematographers, was a relative unknown in 1971, with a small handful of promising credits to his name (his next assignment would be *The Godfather*). Pakula had a decade of experience as a producer, but *Klute* was only his second feature as a director, and the influence of Willis on the visual style of the film is unmistakable, with its gritty New York City location work and naturally lit interiors. Pakula and Willis also combined the creative use of widescreen compositions with an emphasis on dizzying verticals—in particular elevator shafts and the soaring World Trade Center, then under construction, visible behind the massive windows of Cable's Lower Manhattan office—a motif chosen to underscore Bree's perilous state of mind. The two men would work together on four subsequent films, including *The Parallax View* (1974) and *All the President's Men* (1976), which, with *Klute*, would come to be known as Pakula's "paranoid trilogy."

As for Fonda, her essential contributions can be traced to two personal crises of her own: could she, as a feminist, play a prostitute, and could she, as an actor, do it convincingly? After consulting with confidants, it was clear that the answer to the first question was a resounding yes—this was a rich, complex role and a rare opportunity, and the film did not glamorize the trade but lingered instead on its harsh, ugly realities (compare the unflinching eye of *Klute* with the obscene sugarcoated fantasy of *Pretty Woman*). That settled, and anxious about her own performance, the actor threw herself into the role with a De Niro-like intensity, spending time with call girls and madams in furtive quarters of the city, visiting the city morgue, and living in (and contributing to the design of) Bree's apartment. Fonda also contributed several small touches of behavior, and, more than anything, took ownership of the role in the scenes with her therapist. Originally a man had been hired for the role, but Fonda insisted that Bree would only speak freely to a woman, and the part was recast. The two performers did not meet beforehand, and Fonda, other than anticipating a few key lines, improvised the rest, engaging the sessions fully in character. Pakula shot hours of footage that were whittled down to the precious few minutes seen in the finished film. It was efforts like these that allowed *Klute* to touch the realities that New Hollywood filmmakers so aspired to reach.—Jonathan Kirshner

## The Wild Pear Tree

**Produced by Zeynep Özbatur Atakan; directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan; screenplay by Akin Aksu, Ebru Ceylan, and Nuri Bilge Ceylan; cinematography by Gökhan Tiryaki; production design by Ahmet Demircan; edited by Nuri Bilge Ceylan; starring Aydın Doğu Demirkol, Murat Cemcir, Bennu Yıldırımlar, Hazar Ergüçlü, and Serkan Keskin. Region B Blu-ray, color, 188 min., Turkish dialogue with English subtitles, 2018. A New Wave Films release, [www.newwavefilms.co.uk](http://www.newwavefilms.co.uk).**

With half an hour to go in *The Wild Pear Tree*, snow begins to fall. Snow was to be expected in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's last film, the Palme d'Or-winning *Winter Sleep* (2014), where it was at once a meteorological fact, a narrative deus ex machina, and an instance of pathetic fallacy, mirroring the soul of its emotionally wintry protagonist, a man in late middle age whose surface silver fox charm and need to dominate could not conceal a fear of emotional engagement.

By contrast, the summer sun beats down on the much younger protagonist of *The Wild Pear Tree*. The vast, monochrome, rocky, and snowy wastes of the earlier film's Cappadocia are replaced by glowing fields on which a handful of people try to work, where the sound of animals, birds, and the wind through the trees can be heard. It is appropriate weather for a young man entering the uncertain summer of his life. Returning home from a city university to the small town he despises, Sinan (Aydın Doğu Demirkol) has to decide what to do with his life. He feels, as a peasant from an impoverished family, that he cannot marry. He wants to publish a book about his negative experiences, but fails to interest a publisher or local sponsor.

This leaves two limited options. In a country where education is devalued by the state and teaching jobs are scarce, Sinan can teach in the economically deprived eastern

region like his father before him, and essentially resign himself to the back of beyond. Or, like many of his fellow graduates, he can join the police force where work is readily available for hooligans willing to suppress student and leftist dissent of Erdoğan's theocratic regime (as illustrated by a chillingly jokey phone call Sinan has with a friend).

Sinan is as obnoxious, high-handed, contemptuous, and condescending as the much older Aydın in *Winter's Sleep*, but without the latter's independent means with which to nurse his misanthropy. Much of the film follows Sinan as he walks through and around the town weighing up his options, often to the strains of the Passacaglia in C Minor by Bach (via Leopold Stokowski), a form whose name derives from the Italian for "to pass" and "street."

He meets an old flame (Hazar Ergüçlü) whose surprising adoption of a headscarf signals the reduced role of women in contemporary Turkey (his sister, mother, and grandmother are never seen outside their homes, and rarely outside of confined spaces within those homes), and who is about to marry someone who *can* support a wife. He visits bars, cafés, and the bookshop where, in the film's most hilarious set piece, he harangues and harasses a local author (Serkan Keskin) who has no problem getting his books published, publicized, or read. He later engages in a long (twenty minute) "walk and talk" with a pair of engaging and contrasting imams, each arguing for or against traditional or reformist Islam and the appropriateness of imams riding motorcycles. He approaches local worthies to sponsor his book; they praise him extensively and insincerely but part with no money. Most of all he struggles with his family—his frustrated sister, disappointed mother, and vexed grandparents, each exasperated by his father, Idris (Murat Cemcir), a lovable, literate, brilliant, sensitive, engaging man, whose gambling addiction and "crazy" schemes (such as digging a well in a field where there is no water) frequently leaves his family without money, food, or electricity.



On return to his hometown, newly graduated college student Sinan (Aydın Doğu Demirkol) encounters Hatice (Hazar Ergüçlü), a former girlfriend, in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *The Wild Pear Tree*.



Sinan calls Idris “Mr. Loser”; his mother, Asuman (Bennu Yıldırım), who has more cause than most to curse the man, protests:

[Your father] had a way with words...He had such an incredible way with words he'd make you stop dead in your tracks. When everyone else was talking about money and calculating who owned what, he spoke of the smell of the earth, of lambs, and the color of the fields. That hasn't changed.

It is initially tempting to see *The Wild Pear Tree* as Sinan's film. In his evocative essay “On Making *The Wild Pear Tree*” (translated and reprinted on the *Film Comment* Website, <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/making-wild-pear-tree/>), Ceylan writes that he shifted his initial focus from the father to the son when he met Akin Aksu, whose autobiographical script forms the basis of the film (he also plays one of the imams, charmingly). It would appear that Ceylan is pulling the same trick as James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922)—on the level of narrative, he ridicules an unbearable version of his younger self who nevertheless, by walking, observing and talking, is mentally absorbing the material that will one day result in a masterpiece. The book Sinan eventually publishes, after all, is also called *The Wild Pear Tree*.

Look over Asuman's words again, however, as well as Idris's later speech to Sinan before he reveals that he has read his book:

Whose dreams come true just like that? I experienced so much. I met such incredible people. I've forgotten most of it, but even forgetting has its appeal. People should float in time a little. Good and bad memories should merge and dim and melt away. There are those who should stay, too. Carving a notch in time.

The film doesn't quote from Sinan's book, but we suspect that this self-described “quirky auto-fiction metanovel,” written from a position of prejudice, misunderstanding, and hate, is close to the play submitted by an arrogant young playwright in Noël Coward's *Present Laughter*—“a meaningless jumble of adolescent, pseudo intellectual poppycock. It bears no relation to the theatre or to life or to anything.” Sinan's mother, though proud of his achievement (“A great fat book. With lots of small print.”), never reads it, while his sister says she started but couldn't finish it; both prefer to watch TV soap operas, which employ emotional engagement and communal—rather than Sinan's narcissistic—narrative address. Such a book could hardly serve as an analogue for Ceylan's film, which shares the generosity of spirit and imaginative playfulness of Idris's outlook. If this reading is accepted, we could see the film's frequent flooding of its diegesis with fantasy, desire, dream, hallucination, allegory, and hypothe-



In *The Wild Pear Tree*, Sinan encounters and imposes himself on Süleyman, a local author (Serkan Keskin), but the young man's presumptuous behavior eventually alienates the writer.

sis as the text's strategic undermining of Sinan's monstrous and unwarranted egocentricity, rather than irruptions of his idealizing imagination transforming an unsatisfactory reality. Flooding indeed—the film opens with the sound of lapping water and an image of Sinan writing in a café, the reflection of the Dardanelles on the window seeming to submerge him.

When he dismisses Idris as Mr. Loser from a position of assumed moral authority, Sinan is guilty of the worst bad faith. He has just stolen and sold his father's beloved hunting dog—valued as the one creature in the world that does not judge Idris—and used the proceeds to vanity-publish his book, not even giving money to his mother to buy food or pay off debts. He has snatched on his father, whom he mistakenly accuses of betting in the classroom (heartbreakingly, Idris has actually been drawing up a “lost dog” poster). It is surely no coincidence, therefore, that the snow begins to fall at this point of moral turpitude in a hitherto sun-drenched film. It is not heavy snow of the kind that causes chaos in *Winter Sleep*, but soft, slow, and persistent snow. Narrative space and time, already buckled through the film by the various assaults on “reality,” completely breaks down at this point, and suddenly the meandering Sinan is performing his military service, trudging through snow in slow-paced Sokurovian mode. The film's vicious circle is then traced in its final act, which repeats the setup of the first, with the prodigal son returning home to reckon with father.

Of course, as *Winter Sleep* demonstrated, there is snow and there is snow. Critics have predictably described the film as “characteristically Chekhovian” in their reviews, without explaining what they mean, merely following Ceylan's lead in past interviews and the listing of Chekhov in this film's closing credits with several other authors and texts. *The Wild Pear Tree*, however, is indebted to several strains of modernism, from Kafka, Woolf, and O'Neill to Baudelaire, Buñuel, and French existentialism. In the case of Joyce,

the allusions amount to a structural intertext. *The Wild Pear Tree* narrates the story of an elitist and solipsist whose literary ambitions are throttled by a desiccated culture, a figure who prefers to talk than act, who snidely puts down his family, contemporaries, and place of birth; who has problems with women (indeed, is probably a virgin); and whose brilliant but feckless father has dragged the family into genteel poverty through his addictions, the brunt of which is borne by its female members. All this and more is reworked from Joyce's Bildungsroman *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), about schoolboy Stephen Dedalus coming to emotional and intellectual maturity in an Ireland oppressed by both colonialism and religion, and its sequel *Ulysses*, where Stephen is forced home from exile in Paris on the death of his mother, and encounters the ruination of his father and sisters.

The image of lightly falling snow pregnant with significance derives from “The Dead,” the last story of Joyce's first book *Dubliners* (1914), filmed in 1987 by a dying John Huston. Closing this story of a society and marriage in eclipse, Joyce writes:

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.



Joyce's snow is falling on a moribund, spiritually paralyzed society, one in which individual desire is crushed or distorted by tribal bigotry, political and religious reaction, and intellectual cowardice. World literature is rich in works where fathers and their houses stand in for the state, often crushing their sons; in its underground way, *The Wild Pear Tree* is telling us that there is something rotten in the state of Turkey, that it is a mausoleum of the human spirit, that it is choking its young.

As for the disc itself, this is a disappointingly bare-bones release from U.K. distributor New Wave Films [a Blu-ray release, featuring a Q&A with Ceylan and booklet essay by Bilge Ebiri, has just been released in the U.S. by The Cinema Guild]. One of the problems in the reception of auteurs, from Bergman to Ceylan, is the insistence on a humanist "universality" that transcends regional boundaries. Ceylan's being from Turkey is held to be of no more relevance to his work than Haneke's being from Austria or Kiarostami from Iran. But, as those closing credits reveal, Ceylan's work is deeply informed by Turkish literature and history, and by Islamic culture. There are various contexts within which his characters operate that are missed by non-Turkish audiences, and which a commentary or thoughtful documentary could elucidate. Ceylan's essay mentions several deleted scenes that would be interesting both in their own right and as a demonstration of the director/editor's choices. The quality of the image on the disc is OK, though its alterations between claustrophobic interiors and majestic landscapes are squashed on a small screen, and the film's many lateral camera movements become fuzzy or blurred.—Darragh O'Donoghue

## The Man Who Laughs

Produced by Carl Laemmle; directed by Paul Leni; screenplay by J. Grubb Alexander, from the novel by Victor Hugo; cinematography by Gilbert Warrenton; art direction by Charles D. Hall, Thomas F. O'Neill, and Joseph C. Wright; edited by Edward Cahn; starring Conrad Veidt, Mary Philbin, Olga Baclanova, Brandon Hurst, Cesare Gravina, George Siegmann, Sam De Grasse, and Josephine Crowell. Blu-ray/DVD dual edition, B&W, silent with English intertitles, 110 min., 1928. A Flicker Alley release, [www.flickeralley.com](http://www.flickeralley.com).

"Just when we figured it out, it changed," said Charlie Chaplin in 1928. The switch to sound films heralded by *The Jazz Singer* a year earlier hobbled the medium, which visually had grown more fluid and sophisticated. Fortunately, the production of *The Man Who Laughs* predated the sort of microphones-hidden-in-bushes clumsiness parodied by *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), and a film as opulent as Universal Pictures's prior

Victor Hugo adaptation, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), emerged as one of the last great silents. Flicker Alley's outstanding 4K restoration, available as a dual format Blu-ray/DVD edition, allows a movie known more for its appropriation than its merits to speak more eloquently for itself.

"Is Batman in this?" my son asked, seeing the box on my desk. No—but the artwork touts the twisted image of its mutilated protagonist, Gwynplaine, whose permanent smile inspired a thousand nightmares, most famously the character of the Joker when in 1940 DC Comics introduced him as the Caped Crusader's most infamous foe. Gwynplaine is associated with murder and mayhem. Street gangs in Scotland wielding knives and glass shards are said to have begun carving "Glasgow smiles" stretching from mouth to ear on the faces of their rivals in the Twenties and Thirties, and clips from *The Man Who Laughs* are used in Brian De Palma's 2006 adaptation of James Ellroy's novel *The Black Dahlia* to underscore the brutality of the real-life homicide at the center of the story. With *Waxworks* (1924), in Germany, and *The Cat and the Canary* (1927) for Universal, director Paul Leni found a niche for himself in horror with an expressionist bent, and production designer Charles D. Hall and makeup artist Jack Pierce would establish the studio's house style for the macabre in the talkie era. (Its editor, Edward L. Cahn, racked up a few genre credits, like 1958's *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*, in the last years of his prolific career.)

But Gwynplaine, no criminal anarchist, gets a bad rap—and so does *The Man Who Laughs*, for not being much of a horror

movie beyond its opening reel. Universal chieftain Carl Laemmle liked classic stories and expressionism, and put a million dollars into *The Man Who Laughs*, but he didn't like monsters, and considered this film, *The Hunchback*, and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) to be sagas of lost, deformed souls. ("Junior" Laemmle, his son, liked monsters, and as head of production got the ball rolling on *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* in 1931.) The movie shares Hugo's disdain for the cruel and manipulative aristocracy, but departs from its source in contriving a happy ending for the long-suffering Gwynplaine, complete with the Rin Tin Tin-like intercession of a helpful dog at a crucial, crowdpleasing moment. It's the canine that takes vengeance, not the hero, whose smile is at last matched by that of the woman he loves.

This victory is hard won, however, and Leni's mastery of the dark art of filmmaking is most evident at the outset. In seventeenth-century England, a lord who has rebelled against the corrupt King James II (Sam De Grasse) is captured and brought into the king's bedchamber by his wicked court jester, Barkilphedro (Brandon Hurst). Before being locked into the iron maiden (a truly unsettling sequence as orchestrated by Leni and cinematographer Gilbert Warrenton), the lord asks what became of his young son, and he dies knowing the awful truth—"so he may laugh forever at his fool of a father," Barkilphedro had him mutilated by Comprachicos, "gypsy traders in stolen children, practicing certain unlawful surgical arts, whereby they carve the living flesh of these children and transform them into monstrous clowns and jesters." Hugo was



Gwynplaine (Conrad Veidt) is always careful to conceal his disfigurement from his blind sweetheart, Dea (Mary Philbin), in Paul Leni's *The Man Who Laughs*. (photo courtesy of Flicker Alley)