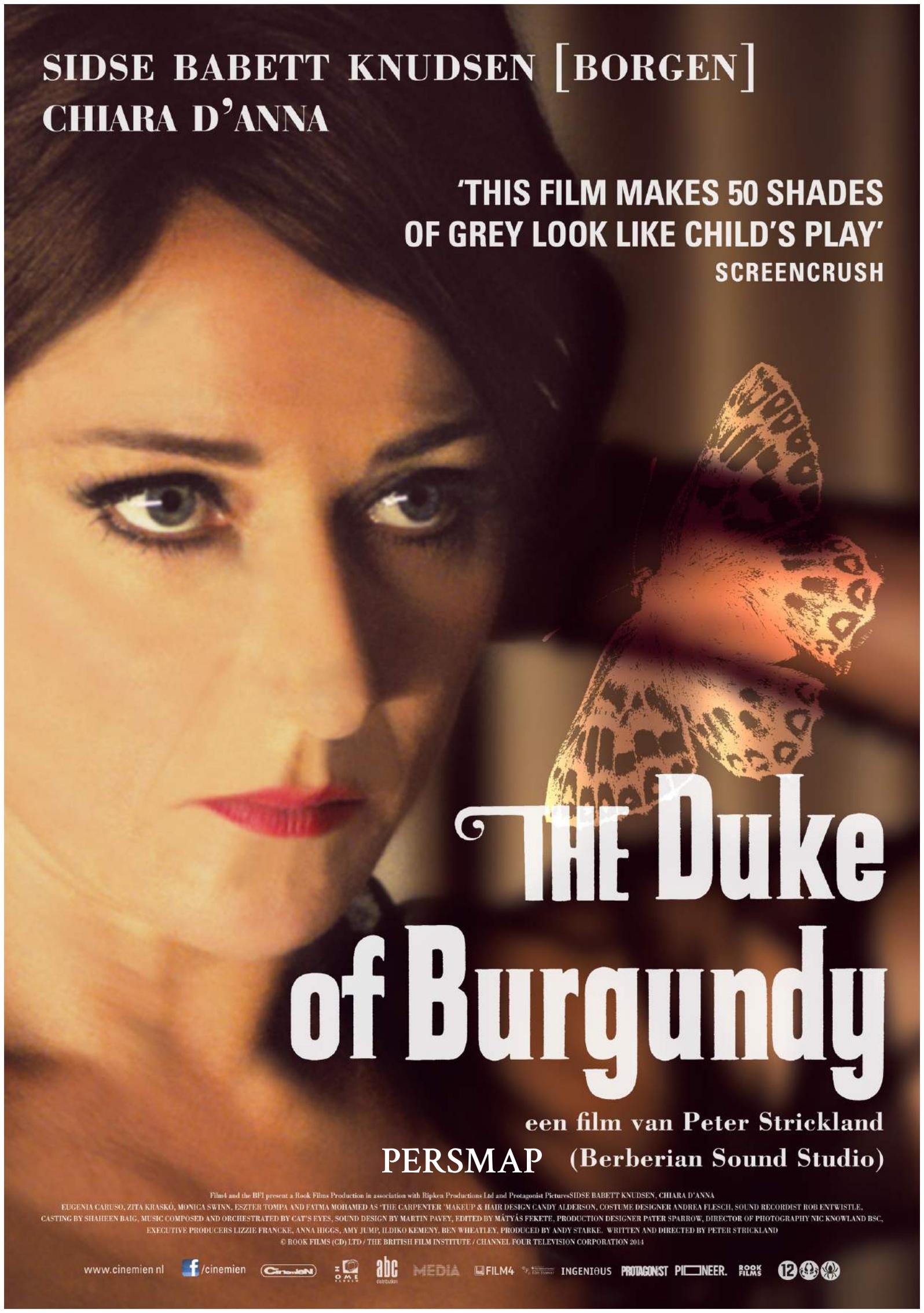


SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN [BORGEN]
CHIARA D'ANNA

'THIS FILM MAKES 50 SHADES
OF GREY LOOK LIKE CHILD'S PLAY'
SCREENCRUSH



THE Duke of Burgundy

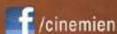
een film van Peter Strickland
PERSMAP (Berberian Sound Studio)

Film4 and the BFI present a Rook Films Production in association with Ripken Productions Ltd and Protagonist Pictures SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN, CHIARA D'ANNA

EUGENIA CARUSO, ZITA KRASKÓ, MONICA SWINN, ESZTER TOMPA AND FATMA MOHAMED AS 'THE CARPENTER' MAKEUP & HAIR DESIGN CANDY ALDERSON, COSTUME DESIGNER ANDREA FLESCII, SOUND RECORDIST ROB ENTWISTLE,
CASTING BY SHAHEEN BAIG, MUSIC COMPOSED AND ORCHESTRATED BY CAT'S EYES, SOUND DESIGN BY MARTIN PAVEY, EDITED BY MÁTYÁS FEKETE, PRODUCTION DESIGNER PATER SPARROW, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY NIC KNOWLAND BSC,
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS LIZZIE FRANCKE, ANNA HIGGS, AMY JUMP, ILDIKÓ KEMENY, BEN WHEATLEY, PRODUCED BY ANDY STARKE. WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY PETER STRICKLAND

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SYNOPSIS

In een statig maar vervallen landhuis op het Engelse platteland spelen de gereserveerde wetenschapper Cynthia (gespeeld door Sidse Babbett Knudsen, bekend van de Deense tv-serie Borgen) en haar vriendin Evelyn (Chiara D'Anna) steeds weer hun spel van dominantie en onderwerping. Cynthia is de vrouw des huizes en Evelyn speelt de rol van het onschuldige dienstmeisje dat zich met haar grote groene ogen en porseleinen gezicht onderwerpt aan de vernederingen van haar dominante meesteres. Maar de grenzen tussen spel en werkelijkheid beginnen te vervagen wanneer Cynthia laat blijken niet voortdurend te willen voldoen aan Evelyn's honger naar straf.

Het is maar de vraag wie de touwtjes in handen heeft in dit gecompliceerde liefdesverhaal van de Britse regisseur Peter Strickland (The Berberian Sound Studio, 2012) dat zich afspeelt in een weelderige vrouwenwereld.

Groot Brittannië | 2014 | 104 minuten
VANAF 16 JULI 2015 IN DE BIOSCOOP



THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY

SYNOPSIS



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Duke of Burgundy takes place in an unnamed European city in an unspecified time. At the heart of this script is a story about all relationships and how one is expected to conform to an image the other person has of them. Whether it's merely the pressure of being the decision-maker in daily life or having to act out roles in the bedroom, we can relate to both the pressure of living up to someone else's image of us and conversely, our needs for our loved ones to conform to our own expectations, no matter how innocent they may be. The Duke of Burgundy takes this to an extreme level within the context of a sado-masochistic relationship, as we see how the submissive Evelyn essentially dominates her older lover, Cynthia. From this, the different layers of Cynthia's identity gradually unfold throughout the film; we constantly reassess her role within the relationship as she shifts from heartless ice queen to consenting lover to controlled victim.

The nature of performance is also a huge part of the film, in which two people agree to take on roles and re-enact the same scenarios again and again. Even movements are stipulated by the use of marker tape on the floor. Despite repeating the same lines, Cynthia's performance as a cruel and dominant woman changes each time we see it and more is revealed about the dynamic within the relationship. The same words and scenarios are adhered to, but the more we know about the characters, the more we perceive each time a role is re-enacted. By the end of the film, instead of sounding cold and in control, Cynthia's voice quivers leaving her sounding vulnerable and on the point of breakdown.

The starting point for the script was to see how the disreputable genre of '70s erotic cinema could be resuscitated. Jess Franco's films in particular struck me as being incredibly rich in atmosphere, intensity and sexual fever and I certainly wanted to use some of his films as a starting point for a torrid love story. The loose plan was not only to use his films as a model, but also his manner of working – to do something very quickly and cheaply with not many actors or locations. At the same time, it was important to avoid copying, hence the avoidance of nudity or any clichés normally associated with sado-masochism. Many parts of the film are explicit, yet never in the conventional sense. The most essential aspect of the film is its dreamy, post-orgasmic flow. One feels as if the film itself is a spell of sorts that

PETER STRICKLAND

Evelyn is under. Being under that spell is what she's addicted to and it's that insatiable need for that sexual high that leads to the relationship self-destructing. Much of the film is from Evelyn's point-of-view, in which Cynthia is objectified to the point of everything becoming a fetish. One would initially think this is a slightly headier version of any number of '70s softcore flicks, but then reality comes crashing in when the audience realise that Cynthia is not the classic dominant fantasy figure, but just a woman who likes a cuddle in her baggy pyjamas; nothing is more infuriating than that for her submissive lover.

The convergence of genre and the mundane realities of ritual-play are meant to be quietly humorous. Usually in films dealing with fantasy topics, one is only seeing the embodiment of a fantasy as it runs perfectly – the dominant woman or man is always inherently so and the submissive is caught between compliance and resistance. In *The Duke of Burgundy*, the meek-looking submissive is calling all the shots to a sometimes comical degree and the dominant can hardly work out how to put on a particularly elaborate item of underwear. The interest lies in setting out a sexual fantasy but letting that collide with the pragmatics of real life, despite the fairy tale setting of the film.

THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY

© Peter Strickland 2014

UK born writer/director Peter Strickland's first feature film *Katalin Varga* was funded and produced independently over a four-year period. The micro-budget rural revenge drama went on to win numerous awards including a Silver Bear in Berlin and The European Film Academy's Discovery of the Year award in 2009.

Strickland followed *Katalin Varga* with *Berberian Sound Studio* in 2012, which was produced by Illuminations and Warp X and funded by Film4, UK Film Council, Match Factory and Screen Yorkshire. The film was distributed internationally and won several awards, including four at the 2012 British Independent Film Awards including Best Director and Best Actor. The film was named British Film of the Year at the 2012 London Critics' Circle Film Awards.

Strickland has just finished his third feature, *The Duke of Burgundy*. Prior to *Katalin Varga*, Strickland made a number of short films including *Bubblegum*, (which starred Warhol superstar, Holly Woodlawn) and *A Metaphysical Education*. He also founded The Sonic Catering Band in 1996, which has released several records and performed live throughout Europe. Since 1999, he has released over twenty records through his Peripheral Conserve label. The label's output varies from field recordings to sound poetry, Krautrock and modern classical in very limited vinyl editions.



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INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Peter Strickland knows how to create self-contained miniaturist dreamscapes (real or not) in which submissive types can luxuriate in masochistic misery. As the oppressed, manipulated sound recordist Gilderoy (Toby Jones) is to the world of fetishized analog equipment in Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio*, so the little maid Evelyn (Chiara D'Anna) is to the world of fetishized dead butterflies, uncleaned boots, and unwashed panties (in myriad colors) in *The Duke of Burgundy*. Unlike Gilderoy, she is not under the thrall of xenophobic Italian giallo moviemakers, but a stern, posh mistress, Cynthia (Sidse Babett Knudsen), who, when she misbehaves, takes her into a backroom (and offscreen) rains something on her that isn't Cabernet Sauvignon.

Which is Strickland's way of setting up an S&M dynamic that isn't what it seems—and the demands and pressures of which cause a universally relatable rift in boss and drudge's codependent relationship. Likely to be the year's most significant antidote to the airbrushed (by Hallmark) perversity promised by *Fifty Shades of Gray*, Strickland's third feature is another instant classic written and directed by the Budapest-based English filmmaker.

Is *The Duke of Burgundy's* relationship to Seventies European erotica—the films of Jess Franco especially—the same as *Berberian Sound Studio's* relationship to giallos? There's clearly something more personal going on—Evelyn being a director surrogate who creates these perfectible rituals with role-playing, scripts, costumes, décor, and performance demands?

Absolutely, yeah. That was one of the great joys of doing it. The beauty of sadomasochism is that it provides this theatrical arena, not only to explore power dynamics in any relationship, but also power dynamics between directors and actors. I liked the parallel between Evelyn's script and my script, the marking tape she puts on the floor, and Cynthia's fear of getting her performance wrong—not just through forgetting a line but if the nuance is not there, if her conviction is not enough. There was a scene, which was cut out for other reasons, where Evelyn said: "What's your problem? Most people would be happy to be spoiled and have their feet rubbed?" But what she doesn't see is the psychological pressure she puts on Cynthia to perform and be something she's not by dressing up and so on. What if she's no good at tying knots?

I've noticed in *Berberian* and this film how interested I am in artifice: the process of writing and using dialogue, the process of acting. I try to find ways to not make it cold and film

school-y, to weld these things into the narrative so there's an emotional reason for the self-reflexive elements. Cynthia and Evelyn don't change much in those scenes where the dialogue is repeated and you know what they're going to say each time, but it gives me great satisfaction knowing how the changes allow you to understand the shifting dynamics between them. Why it give me great satisfaction, I have no idea.

It's disconcerting witnessing Cynthia's increasing discomfort in the dominant role.

For me there was something touching about someone delivering that commanding dialogue with such weakness and vulnerability. I love that dichotomy. It's the paradox of controlling how much you are controlled by someone else. I'm not criticizing Evelyn, but the back rubs and foot rubs she's made to give Cynthia are all given on Evelyn's terms. When Cynthia needs a back rub for medical reasons, OK, Evelyn does it, but she's looking at her watch. When Evelyn is truly punished, it's pretty unpleasant for her.

Yes, the sexual thrill is absent. These rituals are only exciting to her



when she's controlling the artifice. One wonders if she's really a masochist.

Someone else asked me that. There are so many different layers of masochism. There are arguably elements of masochism and sadism in all of us. A film such as Fassbinder's *Martha* shows a very different kind of masochism. Margit Carstensen's character is completely terrorized by her husband, played by Carl Boehm. He goes away for the weekend and forces her to revise all these chapters on engineering so he can have a conversation with her, which is hilarious but as disturbing as hell. It's masochism that's not so much sexual as emotional.

I'm not a psychologist and I haven't seen it covered much in film, but I assume Evelyn's brand of masochism, where she's the one calling the shots, does exist. I wanted something that started off like a lot of those Franco films did, where a fantasy is embodied. I'm not trying to put those films down because they have some remarkable moments, but what I wanted to do was puncture the fantasy and show the dominant woman in her pajamas. She's not someone who goes to bed in her stilettos. You see her miss her cues and you see her out of character. It's something you would never see in the average sexploitation film. Franco was inventive, but some of the more traditional sexploitation directors would have to obey the producer's commands to get the audience off. I'm hoping this film does the opposite. I'm not saying it's anti-erotic and I don't want to say "How dare you get off on this film!" but I'm trying to unpeel different layers, hopefully without passing any kind of judgment.

BDSM has become mainstreamed to some extent. Something like *Fifty Shades of Grey* shows the acceptance of it in a cosmeticized form...

[Sighs] Yeah, anything consensual's fine. If it's spoken about, it's good, no matter what one thinks of the films or books that are

getting it out there.

When Evelyn's script is burned at the end of the film, however, I did get the sense that you're suggesting that overindulging fetishises within an intimate relationship can be alienating without the safety net of love and affection.

It was more that one of them was not into it. Had they both been into it, it would have been like a Richard Curtis film for me. There would have been too much harmony. Cynthia would have had no interest in tying Evelyn up, or whatever, had it not been requested. Had they both been into it, there would have been no need to burn the script. But it wouldn't have been an interesting film for me to make, because my interest is in discord and having the characters misbehave. Evelyn doesn't misbehave because she's a masochist—she just misbehaves. I wanted to imply that everyone plays these games—therefore it's not this unusual thing that needs some kind of judgment cast on it.

It's tricky. You always want to push this kind of subject—you don't want to be politically correct—but at the same time, you want to give the characters some dignity; you don't want to laugh at them. There is scope, with any activity, of things going wrong. I'm not making a realistic film, but I'm making something that's exploring the pragmatics of enacting role-play, such as missing a cue or being bitten by a mosquito when you're tied up in a trunk at night.

I do think that people might think, what is this director saying? It's important to note that you can see Cynthia's character is not getting indulged when she wants to go for an ice cream or do something else regular like that. She's ignored. She gets a lot of vicarious joy in doing what she does for Evelyn, knowing she's desired when she's paranoid about getting older—it gives anyone satisfaction to know they can physically arouse someone—but it has limited mileage. Clearly the dynamic is slightly lopsided. At the end [where Cynthia has dressed up again and is awaiting Evelyn's arrival at their house], we don't know if it's a flashback to the beginning of the film or if they've reverted to their old habits—maybe Cynthia won't answer the door and will escape out the back.

Did you read Freud on feminine masochism?

No. My research was fairly artificial.

What prompted you to make a film about sadomasochism in the first place?

I had some experience working with Cinema of Transgression filmmakers like Nick Zedd. I worked on a Bruce LaBruce film called *Skin Flick*, which was in that zone. It was never my intention back then to do something like that, but things bubble up again. Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* bubbled up. The actual spark was Andy Starke, the producer, saying, "I want to remake *The Exorcist*," which got me thinking about some of the tropes in a Franco film. I'm not trying to be elevated—it just organically ended up somewhere else.

In terms of the characters, I tried to use my "what if?" head. If you lock someone in a trunk, the first question in your mind is, can they breathe? But that's the last thing you want to hear if you want to be locked in a trunk. You want the person who's locked you in to be stern. Writing it was about playing ping-pong in my head as I tried to live out these characters. Two people could be used to most regular sexual act—but what if one of them goes along with it even though they find it a bit distasteful? I can't give an answer to this, but what do you do? Do you keep sexually engaging with someone who is compromising himself or herself by doing something they don't really like doing to please you? But if they don't do it, are you compromising yourself by repressing profound desires you have to live out? These are all ideas I'm hoping the audience will argue about among themselves.

Ultimately, I see this as a kind of domestic drama, something very quotidian, a story about everyday bickering. It doesn't matter what the activities surrounding it are. Really, this film is exploring the idea of consent veering into compromise veering into coercion, and seeing how that works for people who have different needs. It doesn't have to be sexual. It could be anything—different career needs, for example.

I was struck by the film's morbid Victorian atmosphere: the pinned butterflies with their splayed wings, the shots of fallen leaves in the autumn, the skeleton in the trunk that Cynthia imagines or dreams about. I wondered if you were equating Cynthia's masochism with the death instinct.

It didn't occur to me. The skeleton came quite late. Initially, the film was going to be set in the spring. Partly because of the money coming together a bit later than we thought it would, we shifted toward the autumn. That worked in my favor because it gave me an autumnal sense of "this cycle is over"—not so much a death instinct—with the insects emigrating to warmer climes. I wouldn't call it a metaphor but there's a strong connection between the idea of the mole cricket lying dormant [in winter, as discussed in an entomology lecture] and Evelyn is in her little "tomb." In fact, there's an Italian film called *The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave*. The autumnal feeling enhanced the idea that this love affair is perhaps reaching its natural end, or going into dormancy. Or maybe Evelyn's desires will go into dormancy while Cynthia goes for her ice creams.

Why did you make Cynthia a lepidopterist?

Again, there's no metaphor there. I think there's something about butterflies—Surrealists use them, they just have a certain texture, the texture of the underwear. There's an atmosphere there that I really like. I wasn't so concerned about the idea of metamorphosis or why the butterflies are pinned. It just worked—it's hard to say why. For the scene in which Evelyn is going through this extreme anxiety, the strongest image I could find was moths invading the screen. OK, part of it was a reference to Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight*, but I didn't want to just shoehorn it in as if to say: "Look at what I'm into." It simply had a power to it. Sometimes it's hard to say why images have this power. Certainly, though, I think the film could have survived without butterflies.

Several times, at emotionally heightened moments, the film drifts off into abstraction. That happens, for example, when the camera dollies between Cynthia's parted legs toward her vagina. It's literally a penetrative shot. It feels like you were imposing masculinity, consciously or unconsciously, on the femme world of the film, as naming it *The Duke of Burgundy* [a species of European butterfly] also does. Did you have to think about restraining your male perspective? Yeah, it was very difficult, because it would've been incredibly arrogant



to pretend I could adopt a female gaze. All I could do was be aware of the pitfalls of having a male gaze in this context, and to not make the camera so directional or mechanical, with a few exceptions, such as the one you mentioned. So it was more about softening my maleness. In hindsight, I can see, yeah, it has that feel of penetration, though when I wrote it and when we shot it, it didn't feel that way. For me, it was more about the power of that intimate part of the body for the person who desires it and how you get sucked into it. Evelyn, we see, clearly enjoys going down on Cynthia, but the shot occurs at that point in the film when it is denied to Evelyn. I was interested in the idea of traveling into a forbidden zone—though I don't want to get too silly about it. As for "*The Duke of Burgundy*" as a title, I think it was a purposeful reference to masculinity, though I'm not saying I am "the Duke." To be honest, I'm amazed I haven't had more criticism for making a film about two women; I'm sure I'll get some. It would have been more logical to make a film about two men. I do that have in mind for a project, and it'll be very interesting to see how quickly I can get that funded, though being a man myself it might actually be weird having a man dominant over a man because it'd involve a



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

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very specific, physical kind of power—if a woman directed that story, fine. I'm not saying that other men wouldn't tackle it, but I'd feel a bit strange doing it. There was an advantage in making a film about two women.

Cynthia and Evelyn occupy a very hermetic female enclave, sealed off from any particular time, apparently sealed off from men. Because Cynthia uses a typewriter working, one assumes that it's not the present.

It could be set in the future...

And it could be anywhere in Europe. It's a kind of dream world isolated from the problems of work and survival.

Yeah. They did have jobs in the first draft—Cynthia was a hairdresser—but somehow that made the class system creep into it. I guess that doesn't mean much, because class always creeps into everything. I thought, why don't we make it like a fable, like a fairy tale? It's preposterous: how the hell can they afford that place if they don't have jobs? The entomology is just a hobby—they might be on welfare! By eliminating that social aspect, by eliminating the homosexuality of it all—because there's no counterpoint, no issue of acceptance or rejection—hopefully you focus on the dynamic of the relationship. That was my intention. I also didn't want to explore the background of why Evelyn is the way she is. I don't want to psychoanalyze someone. It's more about how you navigate around these different desires.

In the future, do you think you might go further in stripping away social context?

At the moment I'm doing the opposite. I wouldn't dream of calling it social realism and I'm not trying to go in the Ken Loach or Mike Leigh or Dardennes Brother direction, but I'm writing something for my friends—the actors from my first film, Katalin Varga—that's set now, in the real world, just to try it. Basically, it's about Romanians working in the U.K. But I don't want to turn it into a message film or anything like that. I just want to just have fun with it. At the moment, there's no plan of going further in that oneiric direction. But who knows? I might go back to it in the future.

By Graham Fuller on January 16, 2015 - www.filmcomment.com

SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN - CYNTHIA



Sidse Babett Knudsen is considered one of the best Danish actresses of her generation – working across theatre, television, and film. From 1987 to 1992 Sidse Babett trained in acting at the Theater De L’Ombre in Paris. Upon returning to Denmark, she played various roles at the leading theatres in Copenhagen: *Dr. Dante*, *Betty Nansen* and *The Royal Danish Theatre* to mention a few. Sidse Babett made her screen debut in the 1997 improvisational comedy *Let’s Get Lost*, by Danish director Jonas Elmer, for which she received both the Robert and Bodil awards for Best Actress. She played the lead Julie – the film’s script was only an outline, requiring the actors to improvise their roles and dialogue. Film critic Kim Skotte of Politiken wrote that Sidse had hit a new tone with a “special ability to capture the modern woman’s uncertainty and strength.” Sidse played the lead character in Susanne Bier’s 1999 romantic comedy *The One and Only*. The film became one of the decade’s biggest box-office hits in Denmark. It marked a new direction in modern Danish romantic comedies with credit given to Sidse’s acting style. She again earned both the Robert Award and the Bodil Award for Best Actress. In 2006 Sidse Babett received nominations for her lead in Susanne Bier’s *After the Wedding*. The film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, – and Sidse won an award, among others, for Best Actress at the Rouen Nordic Film Festival. Sidse Babett has had great success, in Denmark and abroad, for the lead as Prime Minister Birgitte Nyborg in the critically acclaimed Television Drama-series *Borgen*, for which she also received the Golden Nymph Award for “Outstanding Actress” in Monte Carlo 2011 and a Bafta in 2012. The series consisted of 3 seasons and all have been running successfully in numerous countries.

CHIARA D’ANNA - EVELYN



Although Italian actress Chiara D’Anna has only two credits to her film resumé, both under the direction of Peter Strickland with *Berberian Sound Studio* and now *The Duke Of Burgundy*, she brings with her a wealth of stage and teaching experience. After gaining a Master of Science degree in Geology, D’Anna relocated to London to pursue a career in the arts, specialising in physical theatre and Commedia dell’Arte. She has taught performance-related subjects at such renowned establishments as Goldsmiths University, Central School of Speech and Drama and the Young Vic Theatre. She currently runs her own theatre company, Panta Rei Theatre Collective (meaning “everything flows”) and is an expert in devised theatre as well as being a core member and movement coach at London’s Elastic Theatre, a company that mixes a wide variety of artistic disciplines.

CAST AND CREW



CAST

CYNTHIA
Sidse Babett Knudsen

EVELYN
Chiara D'Anna

THE CARPENTER
Fatma Mohamed

DR. LURIDA
Kate Bartsch

LORNA
Monica Swinn

DR. SCHULLER
Zita Kraszkó

DR. VIRIDANA
Eszter Tompa

DR. FRAXINI
Eugenia Caruso

DR. IN AUDIENCE
Gretchen Meddaugh

CREW

WRITTEN &
DIRECTED BY
Peter Strickland

DIRECTOR OF
PHOTOGRAPHY
Nick Knowland BSC

EDITOR
Matyas Fekete

EXECUTIVE
PRODUCER
Andy Starke

MAKE UP
Candy Alderson

COSTUME DESIGN
Andrea Flesch



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