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## THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY – synopsis nl + fr

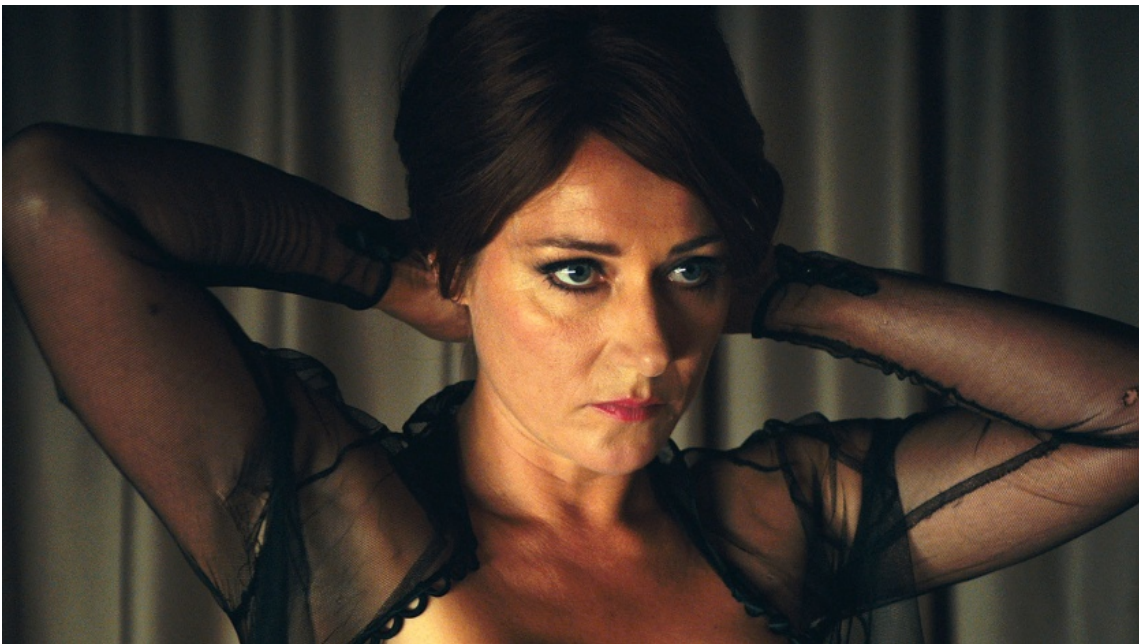
Iedere ochtend fietst huishoudster Evelyn welgemoed naar het statige landhuis van Cynthia (Sidse Babett Knudsen, bekend van de Deense televisieserie **Borgen**). Daar wordt ze niet bepaald vriendelijk onthaald. Bits snauwt Cynthia haar opdrachten toe; wanneer iets haar niet zint, volgt straf. De twee blijken verwikkeld in een langdurige sm-relatie.

De weelderige aankleding (met donkerrood als overheersende tint), het zwoele camerawerk en de romantische soundtrack maken van **The Duke of Burgundy** een sensueel drama, ook al speelt de meeste erotiek zich buiten beeld af. Strickland concentreert zich op de volstrekt geloofwaardige liefde tussen de twee vrouwen, die hun eigen tijdloze (en manloze) universum weten te creëren - een plek waar het heel normaal is om je in een kist te laten opsluiten.

**106min – UK – Engels**

Une lépidoptériste (spécialiste des papillons) et une femme de ménage entretiennent une relation sadomasochiste houleuse. Jour après jour le couple entretient un rite qui finit toujours par la punition d'Evelyn, mais Cynthia rêve d'une relation plus conventionnelle. L'obsession d' Evelyn pousse rapidement leur relation au bord de la rupture. Le réalisateur Peter Strickland crée une atmosphère comico-absurde, tout en cristallisant avec justesse l'équilibre dans un couple. Un pur moment de plaisir.

**106min – UK – anglais**



## THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY – cast

CYNTHIA .....	SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN
EVELYN .....	CHIARA D'ANNA
THE CARPENTER .....	FATMA MOHAMED
DR. LURIDA .....	KATA BARTSCH
LORNA.....	MONICA SWINN
DR. SCHULLER.....	ZITA KRASZKÓ
DR. VIRIDANA .....	ESZTER TOMPA
DR. FRAXINI .....	EUGENIA CARUSO
DR. IN AUDIENCE .....	GRETCHEN MEDDAUGH

## THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY – crew

regie / réalisation .....	PETER STRICKLAND
uitvoerend producent / producteur exécutif.....	ANDY STARKE
cinematografie / cinématographie.....	NIC KNOWLAND BSC
montage.....	MATYAS FEKETE
make up .....	CANDY ALDERSON
kostuums / costumes .....	ANDREA FLESCHE





## THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY – long synopsis

### LOGLINE

Cynthia and Evelyn love each other. Day after day the couple act out a simple ritual that ends in Evelyn's punishment, but Cynthia yearns for a more conventional relationship. Evelyn's obsession quickly becomes an addiction that pushes their relationship to breaking point. *The Duke of Burgundy* is a dark melodrama from Peter Strickland, the multi-award winning writer and director of *Berberian Sound Studio* and *Katalin Varga*.

### SYNOPSIS

Somewhere, sometime in Europe...

Evelyn, an amateur Lepidopterist in her early thirties, cycles to a house of an Orthopterist called Cynthia where she undertakes various household chores. Cynthia is around fifteen years older than Evelyn. Her cold and unscrupulous conduct belies her elegance, yet Evelyn tolerates the illtreatment. In between various excursions to study butterflies and moths, Evelyn returns to the house where Cynthia subjects her to increasingly humiliating treatment. The tasks Evelyn has to perform become increasingly intimate, bordering on degrading, only she never protests. Eventually, it becomes apparent that the two women are engaged in a ritual of role-play involving dominance and subservience. After being 'punished' for forgetting to hand-wash some of Cynthia's underwear, Evelyn comes out of the erotic trance she's been under and we see how natural both women are with one another. Out of character, Cynthia is a warm and loving person, constantly eager to please Evelyn and always respectful of Evelyn's release word – 'pinastri'. Outside of their hermetic world, the couple go about their entomological pursuits with gusto and attend weekly talks on a given insect at the local hall moderated by the haughty Dr. Schuller. As the relationship progresses and the rituals repeat themselves, the true power dynamics are revealed. Time starts to become irrelevant as it's not clear whether these rituals are flashbacks or simply repeats that the couple favour. Cynthia is a reluctant dominant put under increasing pressure to 'perform' by Evelyn. Arguments arise as to who is compromising – the one who doesn't get what she wants or the one who always has to do what the other wants?

With Evelyn's birthday coming up, Cynthia tries to order her a custom made bed that she can be locked under, only the visiting Carpenter informs her that there is too much demand to deliver on time. Meanwhile, a devious neighbour called Lorna informs Cynthia that she spotted Evelyn polishing Dr. Schuller's boots in her backyard. Evelyn swears she went no further than a flirty boot polish, but this revelation is a dramatic setback for the couple, which results in a disastrous birthday party for Evelyn. Evelyn and Cynthia slowly climb their way back to their version of normality, but the relentless pressure on Cynthia to be someone she isn't takes its toll.

The endless erotic spells that Evelyn finds herself under, coupled with Cynthia's reluctance to indulge in Evelyn's newest fantasy where she stays locked in an ornate trunk for the whole night, imbue the house with a dark and strange energy that seems heightened by the presence of so many pinned insects. Cynthia eventually finds herself to be unable to be the stern madam Evelyn craves so much. A regular ritual of the couple's suddenly implodes resulting in both women having to find it in themselves to compromise. Evelyn convinces herself that she can stay together with Cynthia without indulging in any fantasies but as she cycles to the house we see Cynthia inside, putting her make-up on along with the same provocative outfit as she wore at the beginning of the film.



## THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY – directors' 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 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 soft-core 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





### **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. Sidse's lead role in the UK feature *The Duke of Burgundy* directed by Peter Strickland is her first English language feature project.

### **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.

**Peter Strickland – Director / Writer**

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.

**Andy Starke - Producer**

After ten years in the world of television post-production, and five years as part of psychedelic rock group "Regular Fries" (currently residing in the "where-are-they-now" section), Starke founded Boum Productions with award winning writer and film historian, Pete Tombs. For Boum, Starke has written, produced, directed and edited numerous TV, film and documentary projects.

Boum has received worldwide acclaim for its ground breaking Mondo Macabro DVD label, focusing on "the wild side of world cinema" and dedicated to preserving formally "lost" genre movies from countries not usually associated with "popular" cinema. In 2007 Boum founded Mondo Macabro Movies to bring original productions to the screen – the first, *Zibahkhana*, directed by Omar Ali Khan, was the first ever modern horror movie to be independently produced in Pakistan, and went on to win multiple awards and play worldwide on the festival circuit, before being sold for distribution in all the major territories.

In 2008 Starke and director Ben Wheatley founded Rook Films – the company's first original production *Down Terrace*, directed by Ben Wheatley, won multiple awards, received fantastic critical acclaim and was sold in the UK and US.

Rook's next two features with Wheatley, *Kill List* (co-produced with WarpX) and *Sightseers* (co-produced with Big Talk Pictures) have won multiple awards and received huge critical acclaim around the world. *Sightseers* had its world premiere at Directors Fortnight in the 2012 Cannes Film Festival, whilst Wheatley's fourth film *A Field In England* was the first film ever to be released simultaneously across all formats – including terrestrial television.

Since producing Peter Strickland's third feature - *The Duke of Burgundy* which premiered at TIFF2014, Starke has a slate of movies in development including Ben Wheatley's *Freefire*, Sidharth Srinivasan's *The Profane* and Jim Hosking's *The Story of Brian Howl & The Greasy Strangler*.

#### **Nic Knowland BSC - Editor**

Nic came into the film industry through still photography in the early '60s. He soon became a much sought after documentary cinematographer working on many World In Action programmes for Granada though the highly respected outfit Alan King Associates.

He became a founding member of Tattooist International in 1970 and during the '70s worked on programmes such as *Horizon* for the BBC as well as becoming John and Yoko's steady camera-man making films like *Rape*, *Bed Peace* and *Imagine*.

In the mid '70s he co-founded ICE to serve as an agent for Aaton who were introducing a new generation of Super 16 cameras that he had helped to develop. There followed a period in which he became one of the 'Promo King DP's' of the UK shooting iconic promos like *Imagine* for John Lennon, *Vienna* for UltraVox and *Rio* for Duran Duran, all have which been voted as Best of the Century or Best Ever at various times. He has also worked on many Dance/Physical Theatre films, *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* and *Strange Fish* for DV8 to name just a few.

He worked extensively with director Tony Palmer through the '80s and '90s shooting many films based on classical composers such as Benjamin Britten, Stravinsky, Puccini, Walton etc. and was cinematographer on *Testimony*, a feature film based on the life of Shostakovich starring Ben Kingsley which opened the London Film Festival in 1985.

Nic has been DOP on many features including *Institute Benjamenta* in B/W for the Quay Brothers which has become something of a cult film over the years. He also shot *the Piano Tuners of Earthquakes* on Digital for them.

Nic has worked on many TV dramas over the years including *Final Passage* for director Sir Peter Hall for which he won a BAFTA for his cinematography, Emmy Award winning US mini series, *The Murder of Mary Phagan* for director Billy Hale and *Separate but Equal* for Director George Stevens.

More recently Nic has been working on numerous commercials, TV dramas and several award winning projects with director Isabel Rocamora such as *Horizon of Exile* and *Body of War*. Last year Nic was nominated for Best Technical Achievement at the BIFAs and was awarded Best Cinematography at the recent BIFICAs in Buenos Aires for his cinematography on the multi award winning *Berberian Sound Studio* directed by Peter Strickland. Peter chose Nic to work with him again on his latest film, *The Duke of Burgundy*.

### **Cat's Eyes - Music**

Formed in 2011, Cat's Eyes is the collaboration of musicians Faris Badwan and Rachel Zeffira. With both members coming from very different musical backgrounds, Badwan with The Horrors and Zeffira arriving from a solo career involving opera and classical styles, the end result is refreshingly unique. There's no hint of this being a mere side project, the duo, whose debut concert was at The Vatican, delivered an eponymous debut lp of melodic, inventive and atmospheric pop that was met with universal praise, with a follow up due soon. *The Duke Of Burgundy* marks their first foray into the world of film soundtracks, expanding their already varied musical palate even further to create a work that is both integral to the film's character and strong enough to work as a stand alone piece. Their impressive score will be released as an album in 2014.



**Q: Talk us through the origins of this film, how did you arrive at such a concept?**

I met (producer) Andy Starke the day we got rejected from Cannes for *Berberian Sound Studio*. There was some contact with his company, not his production company Rook but his DVD label Mondo Macabro - we were looking for films to reflect onto the recording booth glass for *Berberian*. His partner in Mondo, Pete Tombs, was talking about this idea Andy had of doing a remake of Jess Franco's *Lorna The Exorcist* (1974). I was quite into it, to be honest, but then we mutually decided it might not be such a good idea. But then we decided: why don't we just do something in the style of Jess Franco, taking a lot of what I liked about his movies, ones like *A Virgin among the Living Dead* (1971) and other things like Bunuel's *Belle de Jour* (1967), stuff like that.

Berlin and Cannes had rejected *Berberian*, at that point no one seemed to like it and I really did think perhaps I was finished so why not just go back to how everything began and do something really low budget. The idea was to take the genre aspect of it but not necessarily tick all those boxes. So I wrote it without even thinking of taking it to anyone, but even just the idea made people curious to read the script.

**Q: What is it about these European films of that era you find so alluring and inspiring?**

I suppose in general I've always liked disreputable films, films that were kind of brushed off. Ok, now it's different with them all being reappraised, I mean even Jean Rollin is now seen as kind of highbrow. A lot of it goes back to The Scala (notorious cinema in London's King's Cross, now a music venue), because I didn't go to film school, so there wasn't this thing like Bergman and Hitchcock are god and everything else is trash. You could see films by Fassbinder, Russ Meyer, Herschell Gordon Lewis and some really unhinged directors. A lot of those films are completely unpolished but there's always something just incredibly strange and brilliant and mesmerising. It's never about watching a perfect film; it's about finding moments. Even in something like Ed Wood's *Glen Or Glenda* (1953) there are moments that are oddly poetic, *Tinto Brass* too, you can't even tell if it's on purpose as they were made so fast and cheaply. As a whole these films are quite uneven, for me it's about seeing something unique even if it's unpolished, even if it's bad there's some sort of voice there. I think the atmosphere is so strong, even something like *The Streetwalker* (1976) by Walerian Borowczyk, which everyone slags off – it has an atmosphere you just can't buy.

So I think it was taking elements of those films, what I wanted to do was start with this kind of sexual scenario but then pit it against the practical reality of it: what happens if you're all tied up then somehow you got a mosquito bite? Stuff like that really. There is an element of finding these unusual characters and perhaps making them a bit more human.



***Q: With Berberian Sound Studio and even back to your early short film Bubblegum you nail the atmosphere and mood of these films but sidestep the (and I don't mean this in the pejorative) sleazier aspects.***

It's weird I think a lot of that's subconscious. I can see that, after three films I can see how it's working. It was never meant to be cleaned up, but it's turned out that way. I always enjoyed the sleaze element, it's not as though I'm a prude. But also a lot of the visual extravagances have been done, you have to think up ways to get that strong reaction from someone watching it, but not necessarily laying it all out on the table. So with *Berberian* not showing blood and this one not showing nudity.

I enjoy the violence, I enjoy the sex in those films but I also enjoy the soundtracks, the set design. It's almost like that classic excuse when someone catches you with a dodgy film: "Oh, you know, I bought it for the soundtrack." It's true though.

Franco was really just a starting point, but his influence is still quite strong in there.

***Q: There is one little nod to Franco in the casting of the neighbour, Lorna, played by Monica Swinn.***

We got Monica through Pete Tombs and she was great. To hear all these stories about Jess Franco. She was saying he was a one-take guy, he moved so quickly. There was a romantic sense of them being outlaws, like a gang. She was in 23 of his films. She could be in one film and not know she was also in another one.

***Q: One thing that's striking about this film is the all female cast, something that feels very natural, it's not a gimmick or statement.***

Not at all, whatever you choose there will be some issues with it. There were issues I felt with having a man either as the dominant or submissive. The purest thing would've been to have two men, but I'm working on that for a completely different script. Being a male director having two women I am completely laying myself open to being criticised. But I thought one way to temper that perhaps was to make everyone become female. Even with that, there's a danger of it turning into a *Worm that Turned* farce, but without even trying, you get a completely different atmosphere by restricting a film to one gender. I also think what is strange about that is that it doesn't feel like a gay film as such, not that I've a problem with that, my next film is explicitly gay, but I didn't want that to be the subject of this one. It would distract the audience from the central theme, which is about couples having incompatible desires. It doesn't matter what you're into, being trampled on, whatever, it could be the smallest thing, but who is doing the compromising?

***Q: So how hard was it to bring all of these elements into a screenplay?***

I started in April 2012 and had it in good shape by January 2013. It changed quite drastically, the first draft was set in a city, they had jobs, there were men in it too. But I thought just have it with one gender, have it without jobs, just make it exist in this strange bubble. I think as soon as they have jobs it becomes this social thing. In the first draft Cynthia works as hairdresser and Evelyn is this spoiled rich girl, it becomes a bit 'Lady Chatterley' when class comes into it. To me it doesn't matter for this particular film, I wanted it to be more like a fable.

***Q: It's hard to pin down exactly where and when this story takes place.***

You're not sure where it is; it could be anywhere in Europe (although definitely not Reading) but anywhere in central Europe. I think that harks back to the fairy tale movies, even some of the Disney ones, you never quite knew where it was set. I know people slag off these "Europudding" movies; I always liked the ones where everyone has a slightly different accent but they all speak in English.

I was even thinking of having people dubbed but then it becomes a bit arch, it starts to lose its power somehow. I tried to avoid that whole route and not make it too retro. In that period they were trying their best, everyone set out to make a good movie. We could have stuck a filter on to make it look cheap but I thought why? We tried as hard as we could to make it look lustrous and sensuous. We tried to get this decadent feel to it, even with the credits we have perfume by Je Suis Gizella, - I think there was this Audrey Hepburn film, *Paris When It Sizzles*, which had a Givenchy perfume credit which I always loved, just thought that was fantastic.



***Q: Insects feature prominently in the film but not for symbolism or forced metaphor, what's the interest there?***

The first draft didn't have them, there's no intended metaphors there, although I'm sure you could find some if you force it. But it was mainly to provide a texture for the whole thing. Again it's part of that decadent atmosphere. I tried to keep it back as much as possible, when people start searching for some sort of metaphor that impedes the enjoyment somehow. There's an element to Evelyn's fantasies that is so precise, everything is listed, there's that aspect. Due to circumstance, we couldn't shoot earlier or later than September, which at first felt pointless given that most insects would be absent. However, we had no choice. But during that last pre-shoot draft, I really came round to the melancholy of all these insects dying, emigrating or hibernating. This long deep sleep of the mole crickets in an underground tomb caught the atmosphere of both Evelyn's desires and also the autumnal aspect of the relationship. But otherwise, entomology is what these characters do. It's their backdrop without any need for explicit metaphors or connections.

If you hear the mole crickets it almost sounds like (1980s UK power noise band) Whitehouse noise or tone stuff. I guess the big influence was Jean Painlevé's nature films where you present it as some sort of document but in reality you're doing something that's alluding to something more poetic.

***Q: Apart from Sidse Babett Knudsen (Cynthia) there are quite a few familiar faces from your previous films, how was the casting process?***

I always enjoy working with the same actors; I'd like to do it more in the future. The one who's been in all my features is Fatma Mohamed who plays The Carpenter, she is great. She's from this small village in the East of Transylvania, I think she's absolute dynamite.

The casting of Cynthia was difficult, we were trying other people and the casting agent, Shaheen Baig, suggested Sidse Babett Knudsen. Living in Hungary I wasn't really aware of *Borgen* but I knew her a little bit from some Danish films like *After The Wedding* (2006). So I met her and she really responded to the script, which was great. She really transformed herself and she inhabits that character. Sidse also has great comic timing albeit in a very dry sense for this film but all those small gestures and tics, which add so much colour, are completely down to her. As with any great actor, it's a privilege to see them become the person you wrote, to see that transformation on set and to somehow learn from it in terms of working with actors in the future. Even if Sidse wasn't such a great actress, I have to applaud her taking such a risk on contentious subject matter and a relatively inexperienced director.

***Q: Although there isn't any nudity in the film the script must have read as much more explicit, did this present any problems?***

Yeah, it did, that was on purpose. On set there's nothing worse than asking an actor to go that one stage further, sometimes it's better to write it further then pare it back on set so the actors are almost relieved. It's better to be as frank as possible when showing the actors the script. Of course Sidse had some questions, some doubts, for her it was a very big change from being the star in a TV show to this small two-hander film in a country she didn't know. I think she was perhaps a little out of her comfort zone.

It was even scarier for Chiara D'Anna (Evelyn), she'd only been in *Berberian* and now she was sharing scenes with someone much more experienced. They just met once in a hotel in Hungary at a readthrough, we had no rehearsals, then straight into it. But after some first day nerves she sailed through the film and displayed the same intense magnetism as Sidse.

With these things you just work through it day by day. You answer whatever questions they have and just listen, a lot of it with actors is just listening to their thoughts about character. The important thing for me was giving them no background, even though it's something quite important for most actors. I think with most of the films I've seen dealing with these subjects they always try to present a reason for the people being the way they are. Originally Evelyn was pretty much the bad guy, she was really nasty. But I thought I don't really want to be antimasochist, basically. I didn't want to be pro, I didn't want to be anti. Evelyn is a little bit spoiled but that's her character. What I did want to show is the aspect of control that masochists tend to have, which I'd never really seen in a film before because most of them that explore that fantasy they embody it completely; the sadist is a sadist completely enjoying the torments of the masochist. But in reality it's normally the masochist calling the shots and the sadist is probably not a sadist, but just trying to make the other person happy somehow.

So that I found really satisfying, plus I found there are a lot of similarities between filmmakers and masochists; the control aspect definitely. A lot of this film is about acting and directing, about the performance, the movement, these lines are said again and again. You can say the exact line the masochist wants you to say but if you get the nuance slightly wrong or get the tone slightly wrong it just kills the fantasy completely. But that's acting for you, if something's not quite right in your eyes it's dead, it's just not working. So I really loved that bit where she's about to piss on her and she's telling her off for not washing the panties but you can see her voice is breaking and she just can't do it anymore. And that masturbation scene where Evelyn asks Cynthia to try to have more conviction in your voice. It just kind of sums it all up. I really wanted to be neutral, to show this world and just not judge it at all. I mean I'm making fun of the practicalities of it but I hope I'm not making fun of the characters. I like it towards the end where Evelyn thinks she can get over her sexual needs, at the end you're not sure if she's had a relapse or it's just a flashback to the beginning of the film.

***Q: Like many relationships there's plenty of routine, but here it's more like ritual.***

I've always liked that in films or music, anything that involves some kind of spell. I think that Evelyn is in that sort of a state, that sexual fever she's fallen into. We used mirrors in front of the lens to show that heightened abandoned state.

***Q: That brings us onto the technical side of this film, it's very stylish and has lots of unusual imagery, was this difficult to accomplish?***

Technically it was mainly straightforward. The main problem was time; we only had 24 days to shoot. The distorted images, putting beveled mirrors in front of the lens that took time, it was all done in camera, nothing was in post. A lot of that was just trial and error, finding the right superimposition. Strangely the actors were at their most relaxed during those scenes. I don't know why that was, I was dreading shooting those sections. Sometimes we didn't even shoot sound, we played a lot of music on set.

***Q: There's a lot of post-production work with the insects, talk us through that, the style and sound and vision techniques used.***

We shot at the worst time of year. It would have been great in the winter or autumn but all the insects had gone and the leaves hadn't changed colour yet which was awful, but the colourist Greg Fisher corrected that. There was a lot of rain too which is unusual for Hungary. We'd just go with the rain, but it would suddenly clear up on a reverse shot. Completely unpredictable.

The insects were made from scratch. Jellyfish Pictures did all the CGI insects. It was quite a slow process finding the right insects, certain names like Old Lady and True Lover's Knot made sense.

I wanted quite dull colours for the insects. There was that Stan Brakhage film *Mothlight* (1963) I always found it incredibly spellbinding so it was our chance to do something like that digitally. Jellyfish had to do quite a bit in the end, it's quite incredible what can be done these days. There's a lot of back and forth with pre-viz. I was blown away by the insects Jellyfish made. Even just to look at still images of their moths was a treat in itself. The level of detail was astonishing.

There's this amazing sound piece that I knew from years ago by Michael Prime, he never released it, it's the mating ritual of these silk moths. So we used that for the dream sequence. We didn't use any effects at all on the recording, it's completely dry.



***Q: What is the significance of the Duke Of Burgundy title, you feature the butterflies with that name.***

I just found it amusing having a male name for such a female story. I like it because it's so misleading. I always liked that with albums like Throbbing Gristle's 20 Jazz Funk Greats which is, thankfully, as far from Jazz Funk as you can get. So you instantly think it's some kind of tasteful period film, mainly because of the word duke.

***Q: The house the story takes place in is very striking, where did you find it?***

It's in Hungary. That took a while, to find the right house. I'd been to this one house a few times and time was running out. It was a complete bomb site inside, I'm really bad at imagining sets. We had a very good production designer called Pater Sparrow, he did this amazing job of dressing it up. The bathroom was horrendous with these scuzzy offwhite tiles, but he and his team completely transformed it. There was the option of doing the film in a studio, but I'd done that on *Berberian* and for me I still can't enjoy it because I always think of it being in a studio and not a sound studio. The house turned out to have at one time been the weekend villa of one of the Hungarian communist leaders. It had a history to it. The roof had caved in, it stank of mold, it was a shell. It was huge, we only used a fraction of it. The village was one about four hours away. The institute was about three locations making up one.

***Q: You shot digitally but it looks so much better than many big budget movies shot on the same equipment.***

A lot of it is down to how you light it, that's (director of photography) Nic Knowland - he spends a lot of time lighting, he won't compromise on that. I love his work. What he did with the Quays is out of this world.

***Q: Berberian did eventually find huge acclaim. Did this put any pressure on you for this follow up?***

There is pressure but the longer you leave it the harder it gets, the best way is to just get on with it. At the start of my career my work was met with complete indifference. When I worked in WH Smiths in Reading I remember one of the managers asking me what I wanted to do for my career and I told him I wanted to make movies and he burst out laughing. That's a better form of motivation than film school. But it was great to have that positive response to *Berberian* especially when I thought no one would like the film. I wouldn't say they're autobiographical films but they are very personal. That's the thing, as long as you make personal films, even if no one else likes them, I like them. I think filmmaking has to be a selfish act otherwise you'd go nuts. There'd be nothing worse than making a film for other people and finding out even they don't like it. I'm fully aware this is a niche film and not for everyone but in my mind it's a love story, a tender love story. The hardest thing was to find the mid ground; if it's too 'nudge nudge wink wink' it doesn't confront anything or if it's too serious it inadvertently becomes comedy. I wanted it to have some humour but the question is how much is too funny. That was the hardest thing when I was writing it, just to find the tone really. Not to laugh at the characters but to sometimes laugh at the situations.

***Q: And I have to ask, speaking of the strange humour of the film, what exactly is a human toilet?***

I've never seen one. It was just picking something that would signify going too far for Cynthia, but again hopefully without judging that need of Evelyn's. There's this person she really loves but she's completely lost in this masochistic fantasy. That image of Cynthia looking through the window as The Carpenter describes how the human toilet works, it's kind of funny but sad at the same time. It's finding something as niche as possible so that although the audience feels removed from it they still get it. I'm aware that the vast majority of people seeing the film will be repelled or amused by the human toilet sales pitch. But once that reaction has died down, you can apply those emotions to any sexual activity that one lover wants, but the other finds distasteful.

***Q: The soundtrack from Cat's Eyes, the musical duo featuring Faris Badwan of The Horrors and multi-instrumentalist Rachel Zeffira, plays a huge part in the character of the film, how did you get them involved and how important was music to the film-making process?***

I'm not great at explaining or describing stuff, so I played a lot of music on the set, Sidse loved that. Music can present a whole tone or mood more easily than I can describe with my mouth. I struggle to convey things with my mouth, but I feel I can be pretty good at putting those things in writing or by selecting music. I played Ennio Morricone's *Sauna*, I played his music from *The Black Belly of the Tarantula* during The Carpenter scene, I played Claudio Gizzi's *Flesh for Frankenstein* soundtrack. The actors could really, really emote to that one. When Cynthia is sitting on Evelyn's face I played Mahler's *5th*, I also played it in the cricket sequence because I feared if I played the sound of crickets some of the extras might burst out laughing or look pained.

I'm basically playing the same music I listened to when writing the script, things like Basil Kirchin's *I Start Counting* soundtrack. Sometimes I get too hooked on the temp track music, in future I'd like to get people to do soundtracks before I even start writing. I had the same problem with *Berberian* and in a way it's not fair on the musicians. I managed to let go somehow with *Cat's Eyes*, but not initially. They did classical versions of their tracks then started messing around with effects; I'm really, really happy with the soundtrack.

I really loved the first album, that's one of the best things I've heard in ages. I shot two videos for them (which are still unfinished) then I just thought actually this script could be up their street so I sent it to them and they seemed willing to do it.

Luckily they said yes. There was only one thing they needed to do in advance, this song for Evelyn to mime to when singing. I really like the idea of a character going into song without it being ironic, just having it as a very melancholic part of the film, expressing things without dialogue. The band were very open, they'd give me demos, sometimes just piano recorded on their phones. The main conversations we had were about what instruments they were using, the mood, things like woodwind, the flute, oboe, things that I enjoyed on soundtracks very much but hadn't been used that much in the past few years. I wanted to avoid too many strings. I'm not a musician so I

can't talk about bars and beats so I'd talk in terms of mood and instruments, influences but without leaning too heavily on them. Rachel is from a very classical background, Faris is from a more experimental and, of course, rock and roll, background together they make a very interesting blend.

*Interview by Phelim O'Neill*

## THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY - INTERNATIONALE QUOTES

★★★★★ “The Duke of Burgundy is sexy and strange” - The Telegraph

★★★★★ “This is not just a filthy movie. It's a considerable work of art, and one that touches on a rarely discussed side of human sexuality completely free of judgement. You may be surprised to find shades of your own life in Evelyn and Cynthia's fragile relationship.”  
- The Guardian

★★★★★ “It's a brilliant work of erotic esoterica that sashays beautifully from the kinky to the oneiric.” - CineVue

“An act of cinephilic homage that transcends pastiche to become its own uniquely sensuous cinematic object, Strickland's densely layered, slyly funny portrayal of the sadomasochistic affair between two lesbian entomologists tips its hats to such masters of costumed erotica as Jess Franco, Tinto Brass and Jean Rollin, without ever cheapening its strange but affecting love story.” - Variety

“Visually ravishing, emotionally wise, and kinky as a coiled rope, this sui generis feature is a constant delight.” - The Hollywood Reporter

“A remarkable and unusual film” - Uncut Magazin (UK)

“Peter Strickland's wryly subversive S&M fantasy is everything that Fifty Shades of Grey isn't.” - The Independent (UK)

“The Duke Of Burgundy is a beautiful love story disguised as stylish smut.” - The AV Club

“The Duke of Burgundy brengt ode aan de sexexploitation cinema.” - De Film Blog

