

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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The German Doctor

(Argentina: France, Spain, Norway, 2013)

Running time: 93 mins.

Written/directed by Lucia Puenzo

Cast: Alex Brendemuhl (Josef Mengele), Florencia Bado (Lilith,), Diego Peretti (Enzo), Natalia Oreiro (Eva), Elena Roger (Nora Eldoe).

“Awkward adolescence is a subject of some fascination for Argentinian director Lucia Puenzo, whose films ‘*XXY*’ and ‘*The Fish Child*’ both explored the terrain of early sexual awakening. Her new film, ‘*The German Doctor*’, also travels this road, focusing on a 12-years old heroine who crosses paths with one of the 20th century’s most notorious war criminals. The film’s title refers to Nazi ‘doctor’ [Mengele gained his Phd. from University of Munich in the early 30s] Josef Mengele, who fled to South America after the second world war when his inhumane experiments, mostly on sets of twins, in Auschwitz concentration camp came to light.

“Based on Puenza’s novel ‘*Wakolda*’, the film is set in 1960, during a window of several months about which little historical evidence as to Mengele’s whereabouts or activities exists. [It is known that he bought a farm, which he managed, together with a Hungarian ex-pat family, in Brazil]. Set in a Patagonian enclave of expatriate Germans, the story centres on the mutual fascination between Mengele, who calls himself Helmut Gregor, and Lilith, the daughter of an Argentinian couple in whose guest house Helmut decides to rent a room. Aside from the title character, the only other ‘real’ character in the film is Nora Eldoc, a real-life Israeli Mossad agent who was known to be hunting him. Lilith’s parents, Eva and Enzo, and Lilith are entirely fictional.

“Lilith is drawn to Helmut because he is handsome, exotic and a bit forbidden. “Mom says I do everything that is off-limits”, she tells him when they first meet. Asked if that’s true, she replies “sort of”. Helmut is drawn to Lilith and her family... Pages from his journals, which the film frequently cuts to, are filled with meticulous notes, measurements and clinical drawings of the girl and her parents. Eva, pregnant with twins, is a secondary obsession...

“What happens in the film – which feels like a real-life horror story – could have occurred, one supposes. But Puenzo is interested in larger truths than retelling the tale of Mengele. Those truths have to do not only with post-war Argentina and its seemingly open-door policy towards fugitive Nazis, but also with the nature of adolescent attraction. Mocked by her Aryan classmates for being a dwarf, Lilith feels accepted, even loved, by Helmut. His attention – whether prurient or genuine affection – feels empowering to her.

“...some viewers, however, may see the director’s literary touch as heavier than is necessary. Drawing a poetic analogy between Enzo’s hobby of repairing porcelain dolls – a metaphor for human perfection – and Nazi theories of racial purity... perhaps labouring the message.”

(Taken from a review in the *Washington Post* by Michael O’Sullivan)

Next screening: *Paths of Glory*, Monday 10 November. At this film we are supporting the Mayor of Chelmsford’s charity appeal on behalf of the Royal British Legion – please donate to the bucket collection.

Quiz Night: Friday 28 November. Tickets on sale in reception.