

## CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An independent film club based in Chelmsford

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**Bastards (Les Salauds) 2013**

France 120 mins

Director Claire Denis

Cast: Vincent Lindon; Chiara Mastroianni;  
Julie Bataille; Lola Creton; Michel Subor

'Claire Denis has created a menacing and atmospheric neo-noir, as headspinning in its way as 'The Big Sleep'. It isn't there to be watched and understood in the conventional sense, but experienced, or inhaled. Denis has once again commissioned a pulsing score by TINDERSTICKS that enhances the disquieting mood. Vincent Lindon, a star in the old school of charismatic French masculinity, plays Marco, a sea captain who returns to France when he hears that his sister is in trouble. Her husband has committed suicide, driven to despair by debt repayments to a shadowy businessman (Michel Subor) and also, apparently, by allowing this man to abuse his teenage daughter (Lola Creton) in lieu of cash. So, for revenge, Marco sets out to seduce the man's mistress, Raphaille (Chiara Mastroianni) and mother of his infant son. In the course of this film's chaotically disordered narrative structure, a terrible revenge appears also to be planned against this little boy, but who carries it out is left a mystery up to the final credits, and beyond. It is macabre and dreamlike. The deadpan preposterousness is tricky to negotiate, but leaves behind an oily residue of unease, as when you have woken from a nightmare.'

So wrote the film critic Peter Bradshaw in *the Guardian* in February 2014. If you enjoy gritty revenge thrillers – maybe you've been a devotee of *Spiral*, the recent long-running police thriller on BB4 – then this film will have its rewards. But Denis's 'neo-noir' work may make serious demands on its audiences' sensibilities. Beware!

Mark Kermode in *The Observer* pulled no punches. He didn't like it! For him, Bradshaw's 'disordered narrative structure' was simply 'a needlessly jumbled narrative' - Claire Denis, the director, called it 'a succession of leaps' - 'which attempts to add a veneer of profundity to the sordid stodge.' Oh dear! What it must be to have the job of a film critic, watching an interminable string of movies all week!

Claire Denis was born in 1948 (April 21, a Royal date!) Before working as an assistant director with the likes of Dusan Makavejeu, Costa Gavras, Jacques Rivette, Jim Jarmusch and Wim Wenders, she made her debut film in 1988 with *Chocolat*, 'a luminous depiction of the malaise of the post-colonial world': her father was a colonial administrator and she spent her formative years travelling across Africa. Denis has developed a highly individualistic style, favouring visual and sound elements over dialogue, and her editing technique has been compared to jazz improvisation for its rhythmic quality. These are characteristics picked up in the comments of Bradshaw and Kermode. Are we to define them as positives or negatives? So, she refuses the conformity to narrative, and structures of classical cinema, as well as psychological realism and scenic continuity, sometimes blurring the borders between dreams and reality.

On the level of content, Denis' films show deep affection for solidarity with marginalised characters usually absent from mainstream cinema - immigrants, exiles, alienated individuals, sexual transgressives – simultaneously questioning prejudices of the dominant white European culture and its myths of 'progress'. But then again, this could also be said to characterise virtually all the films we have shown so far in this year's CFC programme!

One of the main 'characters' in her films became the accompanying music, her particular use of pop songs and musical themes created in collaboration with, most often, Abdullah Ibrahim and British cult group TINDERSTICKS. Claire Denis is also considered to be one of the representatives of the New French Extremity, a term coined by James Quandt to designate 'transgressive' films made by French directors at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Denis's most recent films, which some CFC members will remember, are *35 Shots of Rum* (2008) and *White Material* (2009). She is a professor of film at the European Graduate School in Saafie, Switzerland, as are Peter Greenaway and Terence Malik, as well as the sculptor and artist Anthony Gormley, to name but a few.

Or next screening: *The Night of the Hunter* on Thursday 9 April.