

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An independent film club based in Chelmsford

Visit our website at:

www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk

Follow us on:

[Twitter.com/ChelmsfordFilmC](https://twitter.com/ChelmsfordFilmC)

www.facebook.com/ChelmsfordFilmC



The Club

Dir: Pablo Larrain

2015 – 98 mins.

Cast: Alfredo Castro; Antonia Zegers; Alejandro Farias; Marcelo Alonso; Alejandro Sieveking.

Pablo Larrain, the Chilean director, creates complex, troubling and oblique movies about a country emerging from denial of the Pinochet era and the lenient way that era was permitted to end. He sees a legacy of unresolved resentment and fear, and his cinema depicts a new kind of birthing pain that might only be fatal.

How much to forgive? How much to forget? In his *POST MORTEM* (2010) a morgue attendant during the 1973 Pinochet coup is asked to anatomise a certain very important body and is pressurized to come to conclusions favourable to the junta, while in *NO* (2012) [shown in a CFC programme] Larrain showed an advertising executive paradoxically avoiding negativity in the anti-Pinochet ‘no’ campaign during the presidential referendum 15 years later, evidently believing that strident criticisms of Pinochet could be counterproductive, and that it might be impolitic to confront or embarrass all those prosperous Chileans who failed to challenge his reign.

THE CLUB returns to this idea of guilt and denial, opening up new avenues for it, avenues that always lead back to politics and history. There is a claustrophobic intensity to the drama, very similar to the airless oppression of *POST MORTEM*, and with the same flavour of a bad dream. But this is an even darker and more uncompromisingly angry movie than the others. It is something to set alongside the masterly documentaries of Chilean film-maker Patricio Guzman, and perhaps Ariel Dorfman’s 1991 play *DEATH AND THE MAIDEN*.

The setting is bizarrely reminiscent of TV’s *FATHER TED*: a strange seaside ‘retirement home’ for Catholic priests, complete with a protective and faintly sinister mother-hen figure and one very old priest suffering from dementia, who has a dramatically important habit of reciting things that he has heard, like a crazed tape recording. All of these priests have done something wrong, but the Church cannot openly condemn them, or throw them out of the priesthood, still less hand them over to the secular authorities. So they sweep them under the carpet in this strange open prison, where they live in a dysfunctional brotherhood of shame.

And of course, the wrongdoing is child abuse, the reality of which is addressed brutally and explicitly, the film beginning with a shocking confrontation and stab of violence. But other sins, or quasi-sins, surround the main one: one priest stole newborns from young women whom he considered unable or unworthy to be mothers, claiming still-births, and giving the babies to respectable, childless couples in an unofficial adoption scam. Another priest, an army padre, is considered to be an embarrassment to both Church and State for acquiring knowledge of ‘secret torture houses’ in the confessional.

Child abuse could be seen as a metaphor for political tyranny, or perhaps *vice versa*. And Larrain allows some of his priests to defend paedophilia, eliding it with homosexuality, in a provocative way. Even more bizarrely, the priests and their jailor-nun figure have acquired a hobby – they are training a greyhound and putting it up for lucrative local races. Now, with their lives lived in total repression, the dog racing has become their new, addictive vice.

Once the initial act of violence has occurred, into ‘the club’s’ life comes Father Garcia, the Church’s special investigator and ‘inquisitor’, possibly here to close the house. But his proves virtually impossible as he learns more about the characters of the priests and their minder. Another metaphor for the Chilean conundrum: to condemn, to punish, to start again afresh... or not? And as Father Garcia drives away at the end of the film, we wonder if he hasn’t learned more about himself? In one telling scene at the end of the film, he is captured in a Christ-like pose, washing the feet of the old priest. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone?

THE CLUB is a startling and disturbing story in many ways, full of so many ideas. Larrain takes all the constituent elements, even the dog racing, to an end point of pessimism. The flavour of fear and disillusionment is all but overwhelming.

[These notes extracted from a review in *The Guardian* in 2015]

Next film: *RAN* is on 7 November. After *MUSTANG* on 5 December there is an opportunity to stay behind and discuss the films in the programme so far.

