

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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The Assassin (2015)

Taiwan/China

Running Time 75 mins

Director: Hsiao-Hsien Hou

Cast: Chen Chang, Qi Shu, Yun Zhou



Reviews:

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian (January 2016)

Hsiao-Hsien Hou's beautiful and mysterious film *The Assassin* arrives here after a sensational premiere in Cannes last year, where its hypnotic adagio earned Hou the director's prize and connoisseurs hailed it as a masterpiece. For me, a second viewing revealed more of this film's erotic quality, more of its potential as an anti-violence parable, or even a mythic treatment of childhood abandonment and the search for closure. I admire it very much, but I can't give *The Assassin* all my heart because of its obscure quality, and my feeling is that

without homework, some of the film is still a bit impenetrable. Yet this is part of what makes it demanding and challenging.

The Assassin is adapted from the 9th-century wuxia martial arts tale by Pei Xing. There is an exquisitely lovely and poised performance from Shu Qi as Nie Yinniang, kidnapped from her family at the age of 10 by a nun Jiaxin (Sheu Fang-yi), and trained up to be a killer of corrupt and wicked officials. But Yinniang fails in one mission, because her target-victim had his infant son with him and she could not go through with it. To punish her, her mistress orders her to return to her hometown of Weibo, where she must murder the provincial governor Tian Ji'an (Chang Chen): her cousin, to whom she was once betrothed.

Hou's compositional artistry is matchless, and his juxtaposition of moments of stillness with sudden flurries of combat is a marvel of pure technique, and so is the work of cinematographer Mark Lee Ping Bin. Yet The Assassin could revive a debate over wuxia that surfaced 15 years ago, when Ang Lee released his very much more commercial Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon. Wuxia was a populist entertainment tradition, after all: it could be fast and funny. Could these new prestige versions be turning it into a glacial, orientalist object for western consumers? Well, the only thing that can counter this reservation is the film itself. Its moments of sublime gorgeousness are captivating. There is such delicacy and artistry in The Assassin, as if the film is spun from some exquisite, evanescent tissue of precious material, like Donne's "gold to airy thinness beat". Anyone who cares about great film-making has to see The Assassin

Club notices:

Our last presentation: 'A War'

There were 38 response slips returned after the showing of this film, the breakdown from these slips were as follows:

- 'Excellent': 12 votes
 - 'Very Good': 25 votes
 - 'Good': 0 votes
 - 'Satisfactory': 0 votes
 - 'Poor': 0 votes
- + 1 comment without any rating

If you want to add further comments on this film, you are welcome to do so by joining in on our "[A War](#)" [discussion forum](#).

Our next presentation:

The new season begins on Monday 25th September