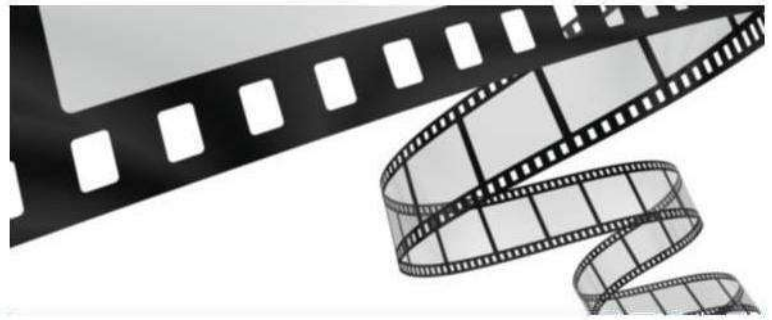


# CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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## Personal Shopper (2016)

France 110 mins

**Director:** Olivier Assayas; *Clouds of Sils Maria* (2014) / *Something in the Air* (2012)

**Screenplay:** Olivier Assayas.

**Cast:** Kristen Stewart, Lars Eidinger, Sigrid Bouaziz.

### Personal Shopper review – Kristen Stewart is truly captivating

*By Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian*

Olivier Assayas's *Personal Shopper* is stylish, mysterious and very strange. It is a ghost story and suspense thriller, yet also a sympathetically realist portrait of numbed quarterlife loneliness, and it's all held together by a really outstanding performance from Kristen Stewart who, in her unforced and unaffected normality, gives us a way into the drama, with all its natural and supernatural happenings. Stewart is eligible for next year's Oscars, but acting like this hardly ever gets prizes. She makes it all look easy.

I've seen *Personal Shopper* a second time, since it blew everyone at Cannes away last year, and another viewing redoubled its shivery fear, its uncanny, elegant ambiguity and also its poignancy. Stewart gives new force to that terrible old cliché: the old soul. She is in her mid-20s but has accumulated a lifetime of sadness. There are dark circles under her eyes, and Assayas's camera often gets in close enough to show a rash of tiny spots at the corner of her mouth. Her character has nothing like the provocative fragility of glamour; she lopes around in jeans and a sweater from the top of which white iPhone earbuds emerge. Her naked body is periodically revealed in a context candidly free of sexuality. Yet she happens to look sensational in couture.

Stewart plays Maureen Cartwright, a young American based in Paris who is an assistant or "personal shopper" to an imperious fashionista and supermodel called Kyra (Nora von Waldstätten). She is paid in wads of cash to bop around town on her scooter, or occasionally zip over to London on the Eurostar, picking up impossibly expensive designer clothes and staggeringly costly pieces of jewellery and bringing them back to Kyra's lavish apartment, to which she has the key. Sometimes she will obediently wait outside the bedroom while Kyra conducts an ill-tempered conference call with her lawyer about her charitable foundation's retreat for gorillas.

But Maureen has a secret, unknown to her employer. She is a medium, able to commune with the dead. Her twin brother died of a heart attack last year in the big Parisian home where they were brought up, and she is now investigating this huge, gloomy, empty property for traces of his ghost. The daringly protracted opening scenes in which she does this are genuinely spooky. Then Maureen starts getting creepy texts from an unknown person. Is it a stalker or her brother's unquiet spirit? Or might it somehow be her own id, her traumatised guilt channelled back at her through her smartphone?

There are some classic thriller moments, and Hitchcock himself might have admired the masterly sequence in which a row of her pursuer's threatening stacked-up texts show up on her just-switched-on phone. Maureen is in some ways a next-gen version of Catherine Deneuve in *Repulsion*, or perhaps the haunted Nicole Kidman in Jonathan Glazer's *Birth*. But actually, in her non-glam ordinariness, she is more like Daniel Auteuil in Michael Haneke's stalker nightmare *Hidden*: *Personal Shopper* has something of that drama's structural enigma.

In her own shrugging and self-effacing way, Maureen is obsessed with Kyra's life and her clothes, and at first I thought this was a Single White Female dimension to the story. But second time around, it looks more like just a joyless, professionalised addiction with which she can dull her pain and unresolved grief. Assayas includes a truly bizarre and captivating scene in which Maureen undresses and tries on one of Kyra's most glorious creations, and suddenly Marlene Dietrich comes on the soundtrack singing the Viennese folk lyric *The Planing Song*, about death planing everyone, rich and poor, down to the same level. It's a sensational coup, a vision of erotic despair, hubris and mortality. On second viewing, I grasped that Maureen's late brother was a carpenter, and in a separate scene his girlfriend is shown planing down a piece of wood.

It could be that Maureen is really the stalker, never able to leave the dead alone, provoking them, making them unhappy. But it doesn't make any difference to her unhappiness. Opinions may divide as to the movie's coda, which transports us from Paris to Oman and arguably duplicates the effect of the previous scene. The hairs on the back of my neck bristled.

You might also like: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/may/11/beyond-twilight-on-the-set-of-personal-shopper-with-kristen-stewart>

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/review-personal-shopper-and-the-misunderstood-art-of-kristen-stewart> from The New Yorker, March 2017.

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## Our previous presentation:

Based on the feedback slips returned on the night, you rated **Toni Erdman**, screened on March 18, 4.38 stars out of 5.

Please visit the current season page at <http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk> to read all the feedback comments. You can still provide feedback on this, or any other film, by visiting the Discussions page (<http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk/discussion/>).

## Our next presentation:

**Letters From Baghdad** will be shown on Friday, 06 April, starting at 8:00pm.