

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

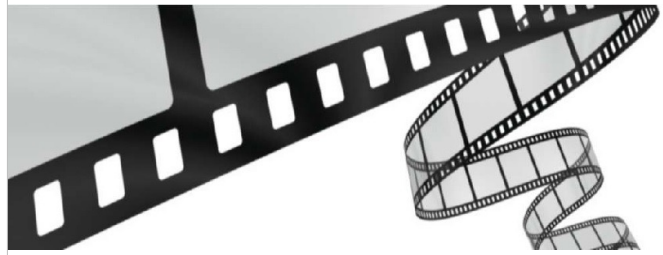
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SHOPLIFTERS

Dir. Hirokazu Kore-eda Japan 2018 121 mins

Kore-eda's very latest feature film, *The Truth*, has only just been released in the UK and is very much a French film with its two great stars, Catherine Deneuve and Juliette Binoche. But for our thirty-second season CFC is happy to open with 2018's Palme d'Or winning *Shoplifters*, in a traditional Japanese setting. Towards the end of the season, on 6 May 2020, the Club is planning to show Kore-eda's debut feature, *Maborosi* from 1995.

Shoplifters is complex and mysterious, "building to the most extraordinary surprise ending, a twist-reveal worthy of any psychological suspense noir", as *The Guardian* film critic Peter Bradshaw has written. However, it is another of the intricate and nuanced family dramas in the classical Japanese style, of which Kore-eda has made himself a modern master. But let Bradshaw continue: "[*Shoplifters*] plot shifts happen unobtrusively, almost invisibly, except for those big, heart-wrenching revelations in its final section... *I Wish* (2011) is still my favourite Kore-eda film... but [*Shoplifters*] is a brilliant and audacious film, one of his very best, a study of family trauma and fear of poverty, reviving themes from earlier films such as *Nobody Knows* (2004) and *Like Father Like Son* (2013). For all its calm gentleness, the film, which is based on a news story, is devastatingly clear-sighted about modern Japan, its dysfunctions and hypocrisies. Watching it, I found myself thinking of the Pink Floyd lyric: "Quiet desperation is the English way..." It's the Japanese way as well.

"Lily Franky (from *Like Father, Like Son*) plays Osamu, a man with a shifty, wheedling grin. He is effectively the Fagin-like head of an extended family of roguish people all nursing secrets and lies. This household appears to be a middle-aged husband and wife, a teen daughter (or perhaps younger sister to the wife?), a young son and a grandma - all living together in a cramped apartment rented from a suspect landlord who has to keep changing the names on his properties' title deeds as part of his tax dodge of 'flipping' notional ownership.

"Theoretically a casual labourer on construction sites, Osamu makes his money selling things he steals on daily shoplifting expeditions with his boy, Shota (Kari Jyo). His wife, Noboyu (Sakura Ando), works in a hotel laundry, stealing things left in pockets. The younger woman is Aki (Mayu Matsuka) who brings in her share of the family finances by taking part in a soft-porn peep show in town. Hatsue is the grandma, supporting the family with her pension and guilt-tripping the grown-up children of her late husband's second wife into giving her money which she mostly pops into pachinko slot machines. She is wonderfully played by veteran Japanese character actress Kirin Kiki. It was her last performance; she died in September 2018."

Into this nefarious family comes a little girl of maybe six or seven, a waif picked up (one could say 'stolen') one freezing night by Osamu and Shota, and in true Fagin style she is trained up as part of the team. It turns out that concealing the girl from the authorities - a possible act of charitable benevolence? - is part of a larger pattern of concealment in which the whole family is involved. Nothing is what it seems.

Our second film of the season is *Coldwar* on Monday 7 October. We shall be holding the AGM before the film starts. As in previous seasons, we hope to run the book/DVD stall in the foyer - all items £1: donations of unwanted books/DVDs gratefully received! Do try to spread the word about the Club and encourage friends/family to join.

