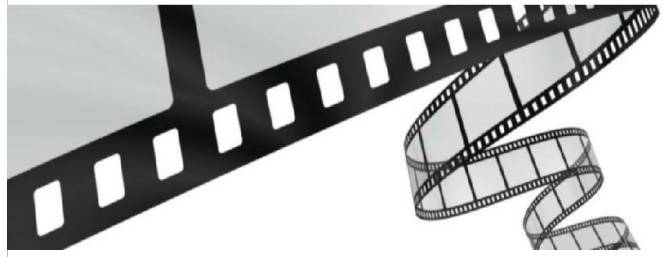


## CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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### *BIRDS OF PASSAGE* (Tuesday 21 January 2020)

Dir: Cristina Gallega & Ciro Guerra -2018 Columbia/Denmark/Mexico.  
126 mins.

Ciro Guerra's haunting masterpiece *Embrace of the Serpent* secured his country's first Oscar nomination for best foreign film: it was an astonishing film, inverting the colonial themes of Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* and Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, its mythic narrative told from the perspective of the indigenous Amazonian tribespeople in the jungles of Vaupes.

Now Guerra shares directorial credit with his long-time producer, Cristina Gallego, telling a tale of "gangsters and spirits", set in the La Guajira region of northern Columbia. The film is an investigation of "the great tragedy that would curse us forever: the great taboo that we are not allowed to discuss", as the directors describe it, revisiting the birth of the Columbian drug trade through the eyes of an indigenous Wayuu family. The epic sweep of, say, *The Godfather* trilogy is combined with the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, replacing the monochrome majesty of *Embrace of the Serpent* with a boldly coloured palette, as richly textured as the story itself.

In the Guajira desert of 1968, a young woman passes through a rite of passage and is ready to marry. Natalia Reyes is mesmerising as Zaida, especially in her dance where her blood-red cloak billows behind her. Jose Acosta is Rapayet, her suitor, who can only marry her if a substantial dowry of goats, cows, mules and necklaces can be provided. But Rapayet has developed a relationship with the *alijunas*, or non-Wayuu people, one that has "opened the world to him". His uncle, the mediating "word messenger" Peregrino (Jose Vicente Cotes), insists that his connections will bring rewards. Sure enough, a chance encounter with the Peace Corps Americans offers an opportunity to make a quick buck selling marijuana, enabling Rapayet to fulfil the dowry and claim his bride.

But such riches come at a price: guns, garish shirts and a trigger-happy lifestyle. Inspired by the real-life cannabis-trade boom of the 70s and 80s, while investigating Columbian myth and culture, *Birds of Passage* nods its head towards the tradition of American crime movies (i.e. Wellman's *The Public Enemy* and De Palma's *Scarface*) and Gallego and Guerra's paean to a lost world doesn't shy away from depicting the violence inherent in its subject matter.

Music plays a key element throughout, interwoven through the fabric of the film. The sound of song bookends the drama, plaintively performed by a shepherd who sings to remember "the story of love, desolation, wealth and pain... in the place of dreams and memory". Viewers may be reminded of a similar musical trope in our recent, and very popular, screening of *Woman At War*.

Our next screening: **The Third Wife** on Monday 3 February. Many thanks to all our members and guest who bring books, CDs and DVDs for the 'Book Stall' in the foyer: this provides valuable and necessary funds.

