

**FILM**

The autobiographical works of English filmmaker Terence Davies (most recently responsible for the excellent screen adaptation of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*) are hypnotic, glorious visions from what seems to be a literally photographic memory.

1988's *Distant Voices, Still Lives* and 1992's *The Long Day Closes* are very thinly veiled accounts of his upbringing in 1950s Liverpool, including the struggle to accept his homosexuality. They're also very much about his family, particularly the former; the names change, but the figures—a long-suffering mother, an abusive father whose early death is an event the films deal with equivocally, two sisters and the omnipresent little brother who represents Davies—remain fairly constant throughout.

The filmmaker is nostalgic to the point of obsession, and it isn't just the images that seem like an old-fashioned sort of photographic portraiture; it's in the structure, too. Sequences are edited together like a photo album, with each cut or fade the sensory equivalent of a page

## British beauty

### The tragicomedy of family in the world of Terence Davies

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

being turned. Davies lovingly sets much of this to the music he remembers, using any excuse for characters to break into song—choral, Christmas carols, "Auld Lang Syne," pop tunes sad and spry—signifying the beauty of fondly remembered human expression.

Unlike the defiant, sexually celebratory films of his peer Derek Jarman, Davies' early work is anguished and almost singularly personal, exploring the intersection of same-sex attraction, Catholicism and family ties that cut and gag even as they comfort. It's interesting, then, that as Davies goes farther back into the years of his childhood, he



A boy and his movies in *The Long Day Closes*; Terence Davies with Gillian Anderson on the set of *The House of Mirth* (inset)

becomes more sympathetic, more comprehending of his family's dysfunction and his own sexuality.

*The Long Day Closes*, the pinnacle of his autobiographical acuity, is his most touching (and most gay) film. It finds his alter ego at a just-prepubescent age, gazing wistfully from

the window of his widowed mother's flat at the shirtless construction workers across the way, enduring the taunting of his schoolmates and escaping to the movies—a rapture expressed in an ecstatically beautiful shot in which moviegoers in their rows of seats are equated to worshippers in pews.

But even the religion of cinema has, for

Davies, its profoundly exquisite disappointments. "Why don't you go the pictures?" his mother asks, sensing his restless despondency. "Because I've got no one to go with," he says, and his guileless, shattering tone of bitter realization moves you to tears, restoring your faith in the power of the movies in spite of itself. **JM**

**REVIEW**

**101 REYKJAVIK**

The pieces of *101 Reykjavik* don't really begin to fall into place until the middle. Until then, this Icelandic import (opening May 10 at Hollywood Theatre) seems nothing more than yet another study of an unemployed, trendily dressed, "hip" twentysomething—a thin stereotype seen everywhere from *Reality Bites* to dozens of television ads for sexy cars.

Indeed, our (anti)hero, Hlynur (Hilmir Snaer Gudnason), is as aimless and resentful as

they come, with an undeserved chip on his shoulder almost as outsized as his wrong-headed sense of entitlement. He lives with his mother and avoids gainful employment by abusing Iceland's welfare system.

By night, Hlynur parties with friends and has joyless sex with a girl he doesn't like. (The feeling's reciprocated.) By day, he seeks electronic porn and avoids the girl as well as his social worker.

Before long, though, the emptiness of Hlynur's alienated posturing—its underlying fear and insecurity—become apparent, retrospectively rendering almost forgivable the intolerance he brings to the first part of the film. We then follow

along with some empathy as his mother, Berglind (Hanna Mari Karlsdottir), introduces him to Lola, a Spanish woman who teaches her flamenco class. (There's a very unfortunate synch-instrumental rendition of The Kinks' "Lola.")

Played by Victoria Abril (*French Twist, Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*), Lola is a splash of carefree, sexually vivacious Mediterranean sun in Hlynur's cold world. Things become complicated, however, when he sleeps with her just before finding out she is his mother's lover. Soon, Lola announces that she's pregnant and that the baby will be raised by her and Berglind (who is unaware her new child will also be her grandchild).

The situation is grueling but also good for

Hlynur. At last, he is forced to stop sneering and deal with life, messy life: emotions, confusion, complication.

Hlynur's reaction to his mother's lesbianism, and the film's attitude toward it, is nonchalant. (Iceland's enlightened sociocultural attitudes follow its Scandinavian geography.)

Despite being deeply flawed by forced whimsy and calculated quirkiness, *101 Reykjavik* is a not-bad example of post-gay cinema. Here, stigma-free queers collectedly go about things with dignity and a minimum of anxiety, while the heterosexual character must grapple with his lifestyle choices and identity.

—Christopher McQuain **JM**

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