



Caravaggio focuses on the tragic, lurid love affair between the iconoclastic Italian painter (Nigel Terry, right) and one of his life models (Sean Bean).

homosexual sonnets while the lovers onscreen wander through various landscapes in a visual metaphor of love's journey. That sounds simpler than it is: The images are extremely erotic, but their meaning and sensuality are derived through the radical processing that the film stock itself has been put through, giving it a texture that renders it one of the most intensely physical cinematic experiences you'll ever have.

Finding Jarman back on the subject of his first passion, painting, 1986's *Caravaggio* (8 p.m. July 20) is also probably his most straightforwardly narrative work, and his first film to star future muse Swinton, who plays one of the iconoclastic Italian painter's demimonde. Like *Jubilee* before it, *Caravaggio* is delightfully, nonchalantly anachronistic: One of Caravaggio's benefactors taps at a credit card calculator, and a critic writes up his attacks on the painter with a Royal typewriter. The film's central story is that of the tragic, lurid love affair between Caravaggio and one of his life models (a young Sean Bean), although Jarman takes many opportunities to contemplate and comment upon the situation of the artist in society, both then and now.

The next year, after having directed music videos for The Smiths and Pet Shop Boys, Jarman made his (arguable) masterpiece, *The Last of England* (7 p.m. July 23), which briefly quotes Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" and is itself an extended, tortuous, yet overpoweringly beautiful howl of protest against the neoconservative, economically draconian (and, not incidentally, ultra-homophobic) dismantling of English society by Thatcherite policies. Lush, color-saturated footage of middle-class family life in post-World War II socialist England is juxtaposed with modern images of blighted cityscapes and people in grinding poverty, all manipulated and edited for maximum hellishness and accompanied by a soundscape as ominous as anything David Lynch ever concocted. *The Last of England* is also perhaps Jarman's highest achievement as a creator of words as well as images; the film's narration, written by Jarman and spoken by Nigel Terry, is as excoriating, mournful and frightening as the visuals, and the two elements together create a supremely elegiac effect.

With 1993's *Wittgenstein* (8 p.m. July 27), Jarman takes an unexpectedly deliberate and restrained approach to the life of the famously intractable, sexually repressed early-20th-century philosopher of the title. Filmed entirely on a soundstage with minimal props, the film uses light, color and space in a way that brings to mind both the obsessively ordered artifice of Jarman's queer-English-cinema contemporary Terence Davies and the mysterious bare-stage power of Lars von Trier's *Dogville*. Jarman finds similar meaning in the life of Wittgenstein to that he found in the life of Caravaggio; his empathy for those with unruly imaginations who must work in and against their time and their

society is unmistakable.

In the late '80s, shortly after completing *The Last of England*, Jarman tested HIV-positive; *Derek* documents his compellingly radical activism of this period, during which he joined protest-marching organization Outrage rather than the more polite Stone-

wall, which counted Ian McKellen as a member and which Jarman apparently considered a cadre of sellouts. 1993's *Blue* (7 p.m. July 31) could be described as his "AIDS movie." But again, he manages to be extremely political while avoiding topicality; *Blue* is explicitly about AIDS being coped with (or not) by a human body and by society, but it's not *Philadelphia*. With its alternating narration, music and dreamlike snippets of sound—its sole visual a blue screen replicating the retinal effects of AIDS treatment—the film is part journal, part screed and part conceptual art challenge along the lines of Guy Debord's *Howlings in Favour of de Sade*, which similarly consisted exclusively of sound and color, forcing viewers to re-evaluate their definition of cinema. *Blue* is a fitting end to a body of works that are all, in their own ways, both difficult and ornate.

With his embrace of his own queerness in his life and in his work, Jarman belongs, artistically speaking, to a rare cinematic tradition that includes Jean Genet, Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith; his stubbornly skeptical political commitment puts him in the company of Fassbinder and New Queer Cinema successors like Todd Haynes and Tom Kalin. In bringing these essential, unique works onto a big screen, the Northwest Film Center is providing a wonderful and extremely rare opportunity to those interested either in cinema or queer cultural history. It's an endeavor that deserves our patronage, and an opportunity that should not be passed up; it's unlikely to come again anytime soon. **10**

The Northwest Film Center presents OF ANGELS AND APOCALYPSE: THE CINEMA OF DEREK JARMAN July 11 to 31 at Whitsell Auditorium, 1219 S.W. Park Ave. For a complete schedule visit www.nwfilm.org.

CHRISTOPHER McQUAIN is a Seattle freelance writer.



Wittgenstein takes an unexpectedly deliberate and restrained approach to the life of the famously intractable, sexually repressed early-20th-century philosopher.

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