



THE FILM

VERDICT

14 SEPTEMBER 2023



OLDENBURG REVIEW DAILY

COMPETITION

LITTLE GIRL BLUE



Oldenburg

VERDICT: Mona Achache brings invention, curiosity and raw vulnerability to excavate traces of three generations of female writers in her family and power abuses in France's literary scene.

Carmen Gray, September 13, 2023

French-Moroccan filmmaker Mona Achache digs for knowledge to better understand the several generations of female writers in her family in the docufiction Little Girl Blue, and more specifically, to come to terms with her mother Carole Achache's suicide, who died in 2016 at age 63.

The film, which screens at Old-

enburg International Film Festival after its premiere at Cannes, is a highly personal, frank and emotionally vulnerable departure from her comedies *The Hedgehog* (2009) and *Les Gazelles* (2014), with prospects for international interest heightened by an intense, gripping performance from star Marion Co-

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VERDICT SHORT

CLEANER

VERDICT: A tentative friendship begins between a cleaner and the woman who employs her in this delicately wrought drama about relationships and their boundaries.

Ben Nicholson, September 13, 2023

Lesley Conroy's *Cleaner* is a film that hinges on its performances.

It was made as part of the Actor as Creator initiative, run as a collaboration between Screen Ireland and the Bow Street Academy, that is intended to allow actors to produce a short film that expresses their creative vision. In this instance, Lesley Conroy wrote *Cleaner*, and while handsomely directed, it bears the hallmarks of a work intended

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Cleaner from page 1

to showcase its on-screen talent. The story follows Angela (played by Conroy), who builds up an unexpected rapport with the woman whose home she is paid to maintain. Told as much through gesture and body language as through dialogue, the film crafts an impressively naturalistic camaraderie while remaining cognisant of the unspoken boundaries being crossed.

The plot is deftly charted through the changing way that Mairead (Carolyn Bracken) addresses Angela on the envelope she leaves on the countertop with her wages in. In the film's opening sequence, it merely says 'Cleaner' demarcating the transactional nature of their relationship. However, when Angela steps in to look after Mairead's children in an emergency, the professional line between them becomes blurred and a friendship emerges – before long the envelope goes from saying 'Angela' to being adorned with embellishments like a smiley face or a kiss. Despite this, as the two women grow closer, the audience becomes painfully aware of the potential reality check that looms on the horizon.

Conroy's script, and the two women's performances, do a great job of conveying this tension. As they interact with increasing ease and intimacy, the lopsidedness of their

[Full review, click here](#)

Little Girl Blue from page 1

tillard, signed on to embody the director's late mother in re-enacted conversations.

The tragedy of a suicide in a family colours and reshapes everything that went before. Little Girl Blue shows the director, appearing as herself and addressing us and the departed in voiceover, in a Parisian apartment. She sifts through stacks of old photos of her relatives and letters in crates, fixing some to the wall. These traces are recast as evidence, as remembering takes on the form of an existential investigation. Recorded conversations with "surviving witnesses" of her mother's childhood are exhumed and played back, considered as clues to the seeds of her final act. Mona's father had implored her not to waste her energies on something intrinsically incomprehensible and direct them instead to the living. But for the women in the family, who wrote about their mothers and reproduced their ambiguities and psychological struggles across generations, the mystery of who their predecessors really were has been all-consuming and defining. Trauma as well as talent are their legacies.

The film consciously examines

what it is to retell a story and mythologise it. Existing in a family in which numerous dramatic, clandestine tales were floating around warped one's sense of self, what it meant to be interesting, and one's conception of purpose. Among the swirl of tales, in which the generations blur, is one about a gang rape in Pamplona during a bullfight. A sense of gendered violence as an inevitability was planted in the women of the family, who considered themselves cursed.

Central to these reflections is the figure of famed avant-garde writer and one-time vagabond Jean Genet, who was a close friend of Monique Lange, Mona's grandmother and an editor at the publishing house Gallimard as well as a writer in her own right. That closeness extended to Carole, with her mother's complicity, and when she was only eleven, she would skip class to visit him. Genet, always controversial, does not come off well in the film. He's characterised as a perverse influence who hated the "banal" above all else, and would break people by pushing them as far as he could into their own contradictions, simply for a kick (his tightrope-walker lover Abdallah also died by suicide).

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THE BOOK OF SOLUTIONS

VERDICT: Back after a long hiatus, French writer-director Michel Gondry's most personal film to date is a scrappy, self-indulgent but entertaining love letter to asshole artists.

Stephen Dalton, May 21, 2023

Film-makers are needy, narcissistic, bullying egotists with every right to demand the impossible from the lowly underlings who work for them. If they were not, they would never get any films made, and certainly none that qualify as Great Art. This seems to be the dubious take-home message of Michel Gondry's first feature in eight years, *The Book of Solutions*, the visionary French writer-director's most nakedly autobiographical work to date.

Of course, as with previous Gondry comedies like *Eternal Sunshine of*



Partizan

the *Spotless Mind* (2004), *The Science of Sleep* (2006) and *Be Kind, Rewind* (2007), his new feature is leavened by ironic humour, off-beat charm, hand-crafted special effects, jaunty music and inventively quirky visuals. Whether these factors save it from sinking into a special-pleading apologia for asshole artists is arguable, but they go a long way to making *The Book of Solutions* more fun than most navel-gazing genius-is-pain movies. World premiering in the Directors' Fortnight sidebar

in Cannes, this slender comeback is too uneven and self-pitying to rank among Gondry's best work, and is likely headed for limited art-house play outside France. But the director has carved a unique stylistic niche in European cinema, and it is good to see him back on the big screen.

The Book of Solutions is loosely inspired by Gondry's bruising post-production battles on the surrealist literary rom-com *Mood*

[Full review, click here](#)

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VERDICT: An outlandish, radical trip inside Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa's mind, gorgeously realised as a mysterious office of alter-egos and clacking typewriters.

Carmen Gray, January 31, 2023

To adapt any beloved author's novel for the screen is notoriously difficult. But to be so bold as to base a film on the fragmentary and esoteric outpourings of Fernando Pessoa, famed for *The Book of Disquiet* and other works that made him a giant of twentieth-century literature, might just be approaching madness. Luckily, madness is a terrain that Portugal's Edgar Pera, an idiosyncratic director known



Rotterdam

for his wild experimentation, feels at home in. *Não Sou Nada — The Nothingness Club*, screening in the Big Screen Competition at Rotterdam, and termed by Pera a "cinenigma", is a radical, outlandish and gorgeously realised noir-style mystery and trip into the mind of

the Lisbon-born poet and philosopher, who wrote under a number of different personae (which he called "heteronyms"). Perhaps too bizarre and conceptual for wide release, this film will nevertheless have no trouble finding its audi-

[Full review, click here](#)

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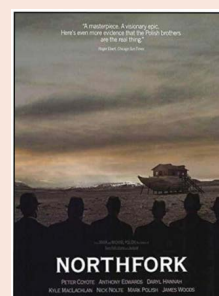
Director Harry Kuemel is the guest of honor.

Festival Highlights: the German Independence Award went to "The Invisibles."



2001

18-year-old Keira Knightley presents the German Premiere of "The Hole". "Anam" becomes the first German film to win the German Independence Award.



1997

Oldenburg celebrates its 10th anniversary with an abundance of films and parties. Festival Highlights: "Northfork" wins the German Audience Award.

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