
CINEFANTASTIQUE

SCREENING THE IMAGINATION

Week 10: *Poor Things* (2023) and *Joker: Folie à Deux* (2024)

Yorgos Lanthimos

- Born in Athens
- A background in experimental theatre
- Made a succession of short films
- Made his directorial debut with mainstream comedy *My Best Friend* (2001)
- Greek Weird Wave'
- Deadpan acting, and characters with stilted speech.
- 'Absurdist dark comedy with violent and sexually explicit content
- Eccentric world-building
- He has often explored sexually taboo subjects in his films, such as rape and incest.
- Sociopolitical
- Explores the nature of power and its impact on the people who are vying for, using, or being exploited or influenced by it.

Poor Things (2023)

- Based on the novel of the same name by Alasdair Gray
- The novel was a postmodern 'retelling' of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Bella Baxter (Emma Stone)

- Victoria's death and 'resurrection' into Bella reflects the tragic lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter Mary Shelley
- Mary Wollstonecraft – proto feminist – author of *The Vindication of the rights of Women*, died of complications 11 days after giving birth to her second daughter, Mary
- Mary who would become Mary Godwin/ Shelley, continued in the vein of her mother, but also 'creating' something wholly original too in the shape of gothic novel *Frankenstein*
- Mary lost three of her four children
- The resurrection of the dead in *Frankenstein* might be seen partly as a reaction to these real-life tragic events
- As with Karloff in *Frankenstein* (1931), Bella begins life as a child-like innocent
- She might also echo Elsa Lancaster's 'bride' in the *Bride of Frankenstein*, in her rejection of 'normal' relationships
- However, Bella, unlike Karloff's monster or Lancaster's 'Bride' who are destroyed before 'consummating' their arranged marriage "We belong dead", Bella embraces life and sex
- Bella asserts her power and authority through sex – refusing to be a victim, she uses her sexuality to grow and mature, while Duncan has a physical and mental breakdown

Bella Baxter and Mary Wollstonecraft

- Bella Has her 'awakening' both sexually and politically while in France
- Mary witnessed the death of Louis XVI – a profound experience – while in France

Joker (2019)

- A timely film which took the ‘superhero’ genre to supplant ideas about the crumbling nature of society, capitalist control, and the uncaring outcomes of harsh times.
- Hypocrisy, mental health issues and inequality are explored
- On many levels, Joker has less in common with the average superhero flick than it has Ken Loach
- While over the top and dressed in the costume of the comic book film it digs deep into societal problems and the problems caused by cults and their ‘comic’ figureheads

Joker: Folie a Deux (2024)

- Though *Joker* had been intended to be a stand-alone film, Phoenix expressed an interest in exploring the character of Arthur further
- Ideas that the sequel would follow a more traditional path were quickly dismissed
- Instead of seeing the character turn into *the* Joker it was decided that the focus of the film would be Gotham’s fascination with the court case and ensuing media ‘circus’
- *Joker Folie a Deux* is a musical which is not a musical, in that, the ‘musical’ numbers are restricted to ‘fantasy’ performances which seem only to happen in Arthur’s fragile mind
- Is less a comic book movie than an attempted deconstruction of the fanboy ‘superhero’ genre which has long outstayed its welcome
- If *Joker* had
- been a detailed character study, it’s sequel is a study of meaningless blockbusters, media reaction and kneejerk complaints
- Many viewers felt wrong footed by this film
- It’s a dark arthouse movie, smeared in the lipstick of a classic DC icon
- Fans, expecting something more linear in terms of story trajectory were instead led into a surreal musical shadow-play where things are not what they seem and the Joker is not even the Joker