



A Separation

**First film in
our Iranian
Film Season**

Tuesday 13th
March 2018 at
8.15 pm

Film notes by
Sandra
Bardwell
(InFiFa) and
notes compiled
by Mark
MacLennan
(InFiFa).

2011, Iran, Colour, Drama / Mystery, Running time: 123 mins.
Rated PG.

Directed and written by Asghar Farhadi

Cast: Payman Maadi, Leila Hatami, Sareh Bayat

The idea for this InFiFa Iranian season grew out of a newspaper article about the 50 Best Iranian Films and the programme for a recent Iranian Film Festival in Paris. It was enthusiastically endorsed by Eden Court's Cinema Programmer who regards Iranian cinema as almost second to none anywhere. Our original proposals had to be amended several times for various reasons but we hope the three films provide an enticing introduction to Iranian cinema.

It emerged at the beginning of the 20th century and soon became the country's most popular entertainment. A recognisable industry took root during the 1930s and the first sound film was shown in 1932. Unfortunately, strict censorship stifled creativity and most screenings were dubbed or copied foreign films. However, under Mohammad Reza Shah, the cinema came into its own during the 1950s and 1960 thanks to his promotion of westernisation.

Some film makers branched out, shooting on location and making documentaries and an Iranian New Wave developed, characterised by realism and subtle criticism. After the Iranian Revolution, the eventual opening of the Young Iranian Film Institute, even though it was ultimately controlled by the state, introduced a new phase. Following the Iran-Iraq war, Iranian films gained international recognition and awards, despite continuing censorship, consolidating the industry which still seems to thrive. *(From material in Reorient magazine)*



The director of *A Separation*, Asghar Farhadi (born 1975) has 12 films to his name, of which two have won Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film: *A Separation* (2011) and *The Salesman* (2017). After he was barred from attending the awards by Trump's ban on Iranians entering the US, his sharply critical acceptance speech was read on his behalf.

The remaining parts of the notes are taken from a review by Peter Bradshaw, published in The Guardian on 30th June 2011, edited by Sandra Bardwell from InFiFa.

An unhappily married couple break up in this complex, painful, fascinating Iranian drama by writer-director Asghar Farhadi, with explosive results that expose a network of personal and social faultlines. *A Separation* is a portrait of a fractured relationship and an examination of theocracy, domestic rule and the politics of sex and class; it reveals a terrible, pervasive sadness that seems to well up through the asphalt and the brickwork. The film shows a middle-class household under siege from an angry outsider; there are semi-unsolved mysteries, angry confrontations and family burdens: an ageing parent and two children from warring camps appearing to make friends. These are modern people with modern problems. After 14 years of marriage, Simin (Leila Hatami) and Nader (Peyman Moaadi) want to split. They live in a flat with their intelligent, sensitive 11-year-old daughter Termeh (Sarina Farhadi), and with Nader's elderly father (Ali-Asghar Shahbazi), who suffers from Alzheimer's and is in need of constant care.

Both of them work, and, ambitious for their daughter's education, they have hired a teacher from her school to come to this crowded flat to give her extra coaching for her imminent and crucial exams. But now Simin wants to leave Iran for a country where there are more opportunities for women generally and for her daughter in particular; Nader says it is out of the question. They must stay in Iran to look after his father. This debate has escalated into a demand for divorce. The audience is invited not to decide who is right and who is wrong, but to see afresh that in such cases there is no right and wrong. Both have some justice on their side.

As the movie progresses, terrible things happen in a succession of unintended consequences. Flawed people behave badly and they will make ferocious appeals to justice and to law in preliminary hearings very similar to the divorce court, heard by harassed, careworn officials. Despite the angry denunciations flying back and forth and the fizzing sense of grievance being nursed on both sides, the messy, difficult truth is that both parties can be justified, that all-or-nothing judicial war will bring destruction, and that some sort of face-saving compromise will somehow have to be patched up. The women see this, but not the men. When Simin and Nader part, and Simin leaves to live with her mother, an instant question presents itself – who is to do the woman's work ... the drab, menial work of cleaning the flat, and looking after Nader's poor, incapable father? Nader ... now he needs a traditional wife, in all but name – a drudge. So through Simin's connections, they engage Razieh (Sareh Bayat), a woman with one small daughter, whom she will have to bring to work every day, and who also has a secret she is keeping from her prospective employer. Despite the tough work involved – a 90-minute commute and the necessity of looking after a confused and incontinent old man, with no special training – Nader quibbles with her about pay and this humiliating exchange is to involve Nader in the lives of both Razieh and her own prickly husband Hodjat (Shahab Hosseini). The stage is set for a terrible confrontation.

Class matters, as much as gender. One scene shows a group of people at the flat, relaxing and having fun, playing table football. Friends can join in, as well as family. But not Razieh. She is shown rather miserably getting on with something in the kitchen ... she gets no respect. And she is further oppressed by her own religious sense.

When she realises that she will have to handle the old man's naked body in the bathroom, Razieh has to telephone her imam to get confirmation that this would not be a sin. She knows that in this world, the man's word is law, but which man? Her well-off employer or her impecunious husband? Everywhere in this unhappy household, there is conflict.

Farhadi shows how this situation is like a pool of petrol into which any event lands like a lighted match. Everyone is aware of their rights and how angry they feel at injustices and slights, and the women are grimly aware of the double responsibility of finding a working solution and persuading their menfolk to accept it. Yet one thing cannot be bargained away: the children. In the end, Termeh is the central figure. She sees everything, [but the]adults' pettiness and selfishness [become] an insidious kind of abuse. With great power and subtlety, Farhadi transforms this ugly quarrel into a contemporary tragedy.

Our next screening.....It's Winter

The Second film in our.....Iranian Season



Eden
Court
Cinema

Tuesday
20th
March
2018 at
8.15 pm

It's Winter, is an austere beautiful parable about men and their painfully conflicted view of themselves: a wintry tale that calmly occupies its own poetic time and space, and has an enigma at its core with something of the Martin Guerre myth. *It's Winter* is both hugely impressive and rewarding.



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