

L'INTRUS (THE INTRUDER)

2004

(French with English subtitles)

Director/writer: Claire Denis;

Screenwriters: Jean-Pol Fargeau/based on the memoir of Jean-Luc Nancy;

Cinematographer: Agnès Godard; Editor: Nelly Quettier; Music: Stuart Staples;

Cast: Michel Subor (Louis Trebor), Béatrice Dalle (Queen of the Northern Hemisphere), Grégoire Colin (Sidney), Florence Loiret-Caille (Antoinette), Katia Golubeva (Young Russian Woman), Bambou (Pharmacist).

A man of a certain age is dying. The problem is his heart. Not only does it no longer pump as it should, but it has proven itself a failure in matters of love. Because the man still hungers for love, he decides to buy himself a new heart on the black market. Not just any heart but one that belonged to a young man – as young as the son he refuses to care for. But just as his old heart rejected his son, his body rejects this new heart. And since he was so heedless about how his new heart was obtained – that someone might have been murdered to give him a second chance at life – he will be punished by something worse than his own death.

Claire Denis's *The Intruder* (*L'Intrus*) is a film as primal and resonant as the myths and fairy tales one reads as a child or the dreams that psychoanalysts call “autobiographical” in that they replay the major events and turning points of one's life in a way that, despite the jumble of time and space, is exceptionally vivid and realistic in its detail. Some viewers seem bothered that they can't sort out the real from the delirium and the memories from the prophecies in *The Intruder*. But would anyone demand that of an epic poem?

Denis is one of cinema's greatest narrative poets, and *The Intruder*, the story of an adventurer, is her most adventurous cinematic poem. As in *Beau travail*, dialogue is minimal, but three or four metaphors carry us inward to the associative regions of the psyche and outward from the dense frozen forests of the Jura mountains to the terrifyingly serene expanses of the South Pacific. Agnès Godard's cinematography has never been more focused on the visceral; Michel Subor, Béatrice Dalle, and Grégoire Colin are magnificently present; the film's dogs, who exist between wildness and domesticity, are the sign of Denis's vision – and thieves of the heart as well.

Amy Taubin, May/June Issue, Film Society of Lincoln Center, 2005

Most of this week's new films will soon be forgotten. The only one likely to be remembered, though admittedly only by a handful of dedicated cinephiles, is Claire Denis's *The Intruder*. After working as an assistant to various cinematic mavericks, Jacques Rivette, Wim Wenders and Jim Jarmusch among them, Denis has dedicated herself to making poetic, metaphoric, allusive pictures about people living on the periphery of everyday society. Her best picture to date is *Beau Travail*, a hypnotic transposition of Billy Budd to a Foreign Legion outpost in present-day Africa.

In *Beau Travail*, Michel Subor, an actor whose film career began with nouvelle vague, had a secondary role as the stern, fair-minded commandant. In *The Intruder*, he's at the very centre as Louis Trebor, a 65-year-old French recluse living in the mountains of the Jura.

Denis acknowledges as the starting point for her film a book by Jean-Luc Nancy called *L'intrus*, an account of the experience of undergoing a heart transplant, and Trebor has a bad heart and intrusive surgery becomes some sort of metaphor. No one person's account of this picture would be the same, but basically it involves a journey Trebor makes to a remote Polynesian island where he once lived and begat a son by a native girl.

The trip takes him via Geneva, where he takes a large sum of money from a safe deposit box, to Pusan, where he has a black market heart operation before sailing to Tahiti on a Korean ship he's bought.

In the dreamlike atmosphere Denis creates, it is not easy to distinguish between reality, memory and nightmare. Has Trebor killed a Russian and disposed of his body? Was he dragged through the snow by two riders as some kind of punishment? These matters remain moot, as does the source of his suspicious fortune. The images are frequently striking, the eclectic score is seductive, but nothing is truly illuminated and the obscurity is willed and wilful. *Philip French, 28 August, 2005*

"The Intruder," a new movie from the great French director Claire Denis, is about -- oh, OK, you caught me. The new Claire Denis movie isn't about "about." Nor is there an easy way to wrap up its grand images, deft rhythms, and arresting shifts in mood with a tidy, alluring synopsis. The woman has a camera, a peerless cinematographer in Agnès Godard, and a thrilling instinct for what to do with both.

...The plot ...ripples in deference to the currents of the shot making, not the other way around. Loosely, it's the tale of Louis (Michel Subor), a fit, handsomely weathered gentleman in his late '60s, and his ailing heart. But even that morsel of news doesn't get us far. Denis seduces us into following what becomes a stunning, almost surreal spiritual adventure.

Louis lives in snowy isolation with a pair of huskies in France's Jura Mountains near the Swiss border. He appears to have a shady past and a grown son (Gregoire Colin) living near Geneva. The movie's title extends beyond the figures who creep around in darkly lit interludes and the fact that Louis expertly slices the throat of one after he breaks into his house. These associations nudge "The Intruder" into the land of mystery. Who is this man? Why is he paying cash for a new heart? And does he really want one from the black market? Oh, and why is that Russian beauty stalking him?

Denis composes a majestic dream book of shots and sequences: a human heart atop the snow, a huge ball swinging on the side of an ocean liner that suddenly spews streamers and confetti, and, most stunning of all, Beatrice Dalle as the most fabulous dog sledder in the history of movies. (The credits call her the Queen of the Northern Hemisphere, and who are we to argue?) With an hour left, there's a trip to South Korea and another to Tahiti, where Louis goes looking for a life he left behind.

If you're so inclined, "The Intruder" can be appreciated as a riff, alluding in intervals to Chester Himes, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jean-Luc Godard, and, most clearly and most intelligently, Robert Flaherty and F.W. Murnau's 1931 South Seas opus, "Tabu." Of course, missing or ignoring the references does nothing to prevent our being captive to the movie's thrall.

Enigmatic as it is, "The Intruder" dares us to see movies as visual marvels tethered to humanity. Like Taiwan's Hou Hsiao-hsien, Denis wants cinema not simply to reach a more exalted realm but for it to exist there permanently. She's fighting to keep movies free from narrative shackles, and while she'll never win an Oscar, she deserves some kind of Nobel Prize.

Wesley Morris, Boston Globe, 2006

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