



Le Week-End

Director: Roger Michell

Country: UK

Date: 2013

A review by Jenny McCartney for The Daily Telegraph:

When we first see Meg (Lindsay Duncan) and Nick (Jim Broadbent) in Roger Michell's new film *Le Week-End*, they are already aboard the Eurostar zooming to Paris, the city of lights and lovers. Young, canoodling couples are dotted around the carriages, but Meg and Nick are not young.

They're approaching retirement age, and – not far beneath their paper-thin brave faces – they find one another infuriating. Their marriage is bogged down in disappointments and bureaucracy, as they bicker over who has the Euros and Nick repairs pensively to the buffet car. They have reached the point at which, to paraphrase Philip Larkin, it becomes “more difficult to find words at once true and kind.”



The hotel (which Nick booked: a poorly-judged revisiting, one gathers, of an old tryst) is a disaster, beset by the perpetual drone of building work. To Meg, the disappointment is confirmation of Nick's wider inadequacies: she bundles him to an expensive hotel, where they lavish cash they can ill afford on minibar champagne and a spectacular view of the Eiffel Tower.

The bubbles have a way of suddenly going flat, however, as old resentments resurface. While the camera is in love with the visual romance of Paris, the plot teases us with the idea that this might be where a marriage has come to die.

The weapons favoured by Meg, still enough of a beauty to send Frenchmen starry-eyed, are explosive fury and steady rejection of her husband's sexual advances. Nick, meanwhile – who longs for his wife's constant presence in a way she finds maddening – takes refuge in a kind of depressive melancholy, which one senses might be contagious. He is a philosophy professor at a less-than-stellar academic institution, and his career has recently hit a fresh low: “I never thought that I'd turn out so mediocre.”



The great, delicate feat of Hanif Kureishi's screenplay, however (and of Duncan and Broadbent's masterly performances) is to make us care about this couple, despite the emotional savagery on display. They are witty and honest, and at different times both reveal a moving vulnerability. (There is one scene in which Nick, at a cashpoint, watches a young French girl shake her dark hair out of a motorcycle helmet, and you can see in his pained, transfixed eyes how much he feels he has irrevocably lost.)

So much now seems at stake that one can even forgive the pair their new-found habit of doing a runner from expensive restaurants: spontaneous law-breaking seems the only way to confirm they're not yet dead.

The catalyst for boiling point is a chance encounter with an old Cambridge friend of Nick's, now an internationally successful American author (Jeff Goldblum), who exudes a crude but warmly convincing sense of life's possibilities. He invites the couple to a party slick with high achievers, at which they have time to absorb the wealthy gleam of his apartment.

The crowning scene, in which Nick's true feelings are revealed at dinner, is both superbly pitched and almost unbearable to watch, but the script infuses what follows with a merciful note of hope.

This is a beautifully executed, fearlessly truthful and droll film on the emotional politics of reinvention, which takes Kureishi's long-term collaboration with Roger Michell (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Mother*, *Venus*) to new heights.

From: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/10373979/Le-Week-End-review.html>

Further viewing:

The script of *Le Week-End* was written by novelist and playwright Hanif Kureishi. His first film as a director, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) was popular, critically well-received, and influential. Roger Michell has directed a television mini-series and two other films scripted by Kureishi: *The Buddha of Suburbia* (BBC2, 1993), *The Mother* (2003), *Venus* (2006).

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