



# The Main Feature

## Season 39 - Issue 11 screening 28.2.19

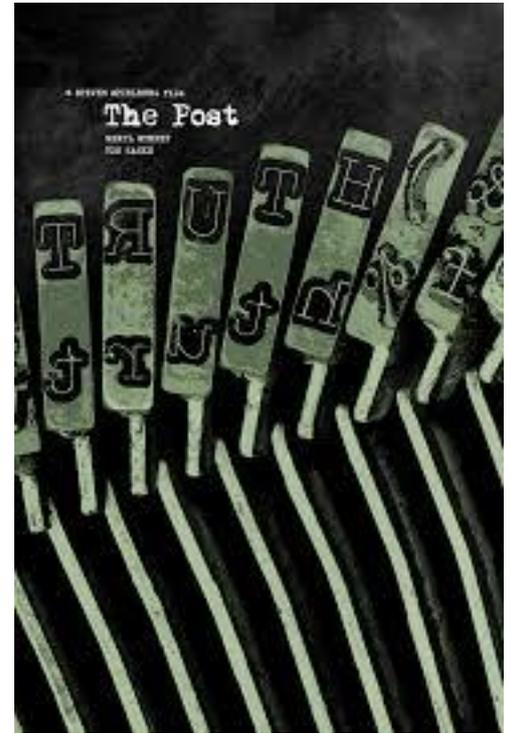
USA                      2018                      1 hr 57mins                      Certificate PG

Director                      Steven Spielberg  
Screenplay                      Liz Hannah and Josh Singer  
Cinematography                      Janusz Kamiński  
Music                      John Williams  
Editors                      Michael Kahn and Sarah Broshar

Cast  
Meryl Streep                      Katharine (Kay) Graham  
Tom Hanks                      Ben Bradlee  
Alison Brie                      Lally Weymouth  
Carrie Coon                      Meg Greenfield  
David Cross                      Howard Simons  
Bruce Greenwood                      Robert S McNamara

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

The First Amendment to the US Constitution



*The Post* is in turn a thriller, a detective story, a nostalgic hymn to the printing press and a piece of political commentary. In a nutshell, it tells the story of the battle to reveal the truth about the failure of US policy in Vietnam, which had been suppressed by successive administrations for years, by publishing government papers. The New York Times announced the existence of the so-called 'Pentagon Papers' but were slapped down with an injunction. The Washington Post's editor obtains a copy of the papers, leading to the legal and ethical dilemma at the heart of the film.

Its timeliness led to Steven Spielberg and his team bringing the film from idea to screen in less than a year. Spielberg read the original script in February 2017, filming started on 1 May and the film was released in January 2018.

"The level of urgency to make the movie was because of the current climate of this administration, bombarding the press and labelling the truth as fake if it suited them," Spielberg tells me, recalling the sense of offence he felt at documented, provable events being branded fake news. "I deeply resented the hashtag 'alternative facts', because I'm a believer in only one truth, which is the objective truth."

Interview with Jonathan Freedland – The Guardian, January 2018

From the point where I offered to write these notes, open warfare between the White House and the press spread like a wildfire. The publication of Bob Woodward's book "Fear: Trump in the White House" and an opinion piece in the New York Times criticising the 46<sup>th</sup> President (September 2018) added fuel. Played against this backdrop, *The Post* takes on a strange life of its own. It bears comparison to *Spotlight*, *All The President's Men* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, as it examines the role of the free press and the long-running sore that is America's history in Vietnam. Many of us remember the clothes, hairstyles, phones with dials and cables, and the paper-based world that it evokes to the point that you can smell the newsprint (and see it on your fingers after finishing your paper round!).

From the Pentagon Papers to Wikileaks via Watergate and Iran, we see that, as long as there's evidence, no matter how deep you think you've buried it, someone will dig it up. Once it's exposed, the race begins to publish, comment and analyse its significance.



Tom Hanks plays his usual reliable, solid, good guy, so we know without anyone having to be explicit about it that he's got right on his side. Bradlee is well aware of the risks, both personal and professional, in pursuing the Pentagon Papers but he knows that there is more at stake than his career: 'What will happen if we don't publish? We will lose. The country will lose.'

Hanks summarised Bradlee's attitude and the counter-argument (interview with Simon Mayo, January 2018):

What's the point of having this newspaper unless we run this story?

What's the point of having a newspaper if you will lose it by running this story?

Meryl Streep shows the development of Katharine Graham from self-effacing widow to decisive businesswoman. It is clear that she could be deeply compromised by her late husband's friendship with former Defence Secretary Robert MacNamara and she is understandably nervous about the effect that the

Pentagon Papers story could have on her attempt to get new investment in the Post. It's not a good time to be going to the banks when your business could be tied up in legal knots for years.

Simon Mayo: You get the feeling watching the movie that, though it's 1971 and we're watching it in 2018, that at the time the people on the paper felt that the soul of journalism was at stake and the soul of America was at stake. Do you think that is true now as well?

Meryl Streep: I think it might even be more true now because now the powers that be, at least in our country, are not only trying to introduce the idea that there is such a thing as an alternate fact but they are also trying to delegitimise the very institutions that deliver facts to us, just say that the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, the Los Angeles Times, that they're all a conspiracy of fake news. And that is the most pernicious part of this. I mean, in those days Nixon was trying to suppress a story; he didn't go after the actual organs that were delivering the story.

Tom Hanks: There seems to be a guerrilla war that's being put on the concept of truth as well as a delegitimising by way of chaos by any means about literally the fourth estate, the very institution that's codified in the first amendment of the constitution. You are entitled to have your own opinions, you are not entitled to have your own set of facts. A hundred and twelve degrees Fahrenheit is a hundred and twelve degrees Fahrenheit and for anybody to say 'that is fake news, they lie all the time, only believe me' -

MS: 'there is no science'

TH: 'there is no science' - means that when that truth is found, and it is confirmed and it is empirical ... that means enough seeds of discontent, of distrust, of belief of alternative facts will hold a bigger sway, so the facts will come out and it will not have the power of the truth behind it. That's what tyrants do. Tyrants say 'don't believe them, only believe me.' Well, the next thing you have is Nicolai Ceausescu.

MS: and state-sponsored news.

Interview for The Kermode and Mayo Film Review, BBC 5Live, January 2018

Further reading – the First Amendment annotated for legal professionals:

<https://constitution.findlaw.com/amendment1.html>

Gill McGlashan



*We thank Colyer Repoint for printing these notes free of charge*

15 Poole Road, Woking Tel: 01483 596280

Members will recall that Gill and I were on holiday in San Fransisco when the last film was shown.

We were booked to stay the week at the local Youth Hostel and were pleasantly surprised that they had a regular “cinema” evening, with a rather well laid out room:



On the walls were posters of film in which the city played a prominent role:



Unfortunately, we did not get to try the “Cinema experience” as our first night was so bad we left!

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Next film,  
on  
28  
March:



## Comments and reactions to: **Florence Foster Jenkins**

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	1	~	5	7	17	0	2

No of reaction slips received = 32

Average Score = 7.47

*Funny, excruciating and sentimental all at once*

*In some ways a sad film*

***Light hearted entertainment – well acted!***

***A real surprise!***

*A fine film! Incredibly sad but hilarious.*

*Far better than I ever imagined.*

***Very amusing! My favourite character was Mr McMoon***

*Good choice. Tried to watch it on the TV but much better on the big screen*

***Enjoyable it certainly was – not worthy or challenging, just great fun***

*Brilliant – good acting and very entertaining*

*Good acting all round*

***Excellently cast. All actors should be as committed***

*Very good entertainment, with comedy and sadness, superbly acted*

***Sad story – excellent performances by Meryl Streep and Hugh Grant***

*Interesting, well acted, especially by Meryl Streep*

*Brilliant – she’s great*

***Three great performances, particularly Streep – excellent film***

*Delightful – superb acting – characters; period; costumes etc*

***The moral may be “with enough money you can do anything”***

*A one joke film, but a very good joke, expertly acted, (particularly by Hugh Grant). Still, I won’t be buying the soundtrack.....*

***The best bathful of potatoes I have seen on celluloid***

*What is it with Hugh Grant and “bunnies”?*

(this will be an in joke for those who saw him play Jeremy Thorpe in the recent BBC drama)

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## Comments and reactions to: **Les Quatre Cents Coups** (400 Blows)

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	3	2	2	12	10	5	6	2

No of reaction slips received = 42

Average Score = 6.74

*Funny, excruciating and sentimental all at once*

*Overlong in parts*

***Slow and tedious with an unsatisfactory ending!***

***A film for a wet afternoon***

*Still great – moving and realistic*

*Sometimes funny, often sad*

***Fantastic to see it again, 50 years later.***

***A very thoughtful, moving film***

*Great to have opportunity to see this film again*

*Very good acting by the boy*

***Interesting episodes between the storyline, which I enjoyed***

***Tres French***

*Excellent and very funny but quite sad too – what an awful school in Paris*

***Wonderful cinematography – the real stars are Paris and her inhabitants***

*Amazing, the age of the film, yet still worth watching. A sad tale though.*

***A very good film of its time, and very nostalgic for us to see it so many years later***

*I like it as much as I did 60 years ago when it was first shown – excellent*

***Classic film – saw it 40 years ago and it has kept its appeal***

*A fine film. Have we progressed in our treatment of troubled young people?*

***Marvellous performance by Jean-Pierre Léaud - what a fine film***

*Dated and over-rated with an unsympathetic central “hero” and a veneer of sad seediness.*

*Sorry but not my “tasse du tea”*

***Interesting, brilliant acting by the boy – more and more depressing; typical of the period***

*One of the most honest – and beautiful, well acted – and painful films I’d ever seen [c. 1960, London] – unforgettable, moving.*