



The Main Feature

Season 44 – Issue 8 – Screening 9 January 2025

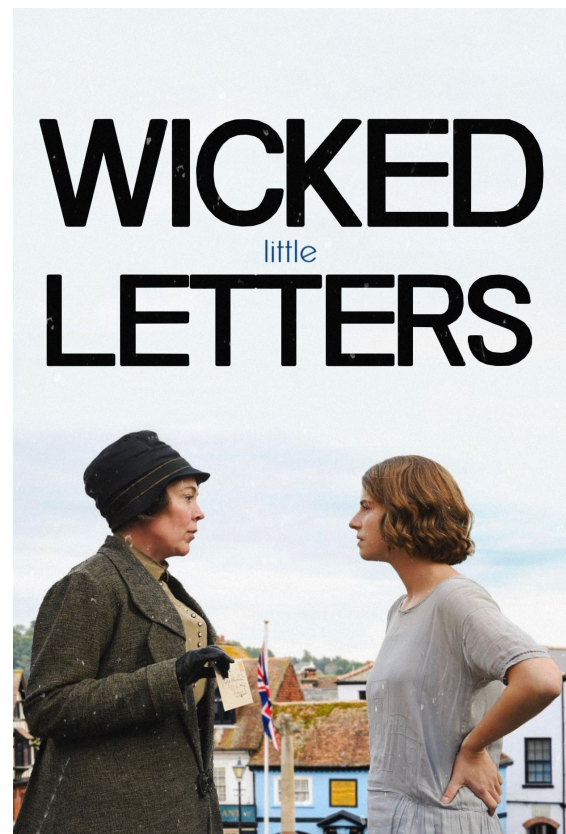
Wicked Little letters

UK, 2023, 100 mins, Cert 15

Director	Thea Sharrock
Writer	Jonny Sweet
Cinematography	Ben Davies
Production Design	Cristina Casali
Costume Design	Charlotte Walter

Cast

Jessie Buckley	Rose Gooding
Olivia Colman	Edith Swan
Timothy Spall	Edward Swan (Edith's Father)
Gemma Jones	Victoria Swan (Edith's Mother)
Malachi Kirby	Bill (Rose's partner)
Alisha Weir	Nancy Gooding (Rose's daughter)
Anjana Vasani	WPC Gladys Moss
Paul Chahidi	Chief Constable Spedding
Hugh Skinner	PC Papperwick
Eileen Atkins	Mabel
Joanna Scanlan	Ann
Lolly Adefope	Kate



Our first presentation of the New Year is a lightweight comedy-drama, set in Littlehampton, and based on real events there in 1920. As the opening credits coyly note “this story is more true than you’d think.”

Edith Swan (Olivia Colman) is a respectable (if mousy) spinster and a pious Christian, whose social life revolves around a weekly whist drive at Church. She lives in a cramped but spotless terrace house under the thumb of her grumpy, domineering father (who yearns for a return to life as it was before the War and is vehemently anti-suffrage) and gentler mother. Their neighbour is Rose Gooding (Jessie Buckley), a single mother from Ireland, a free-spirited force-of-nature with an inventively potty mouth. The two women initially form a friendship but this ends after a violent incident at Edward Swan’s birthday party and an anonymous tip-off leading to a visit from child

protection to check on Rose's parenting. The Swans start receiving a number of short, profanity-littered letters: after the 19th arrives, they finally involve the local police asserting that Rose must be the culprit. Rose is locked up pending trial. After she is released on bail, the poison pen letters start again, and fan out across the town, alerting the press and indeed Parliament to what is dubbed "the Seaside Mystery." Rose is re-arrested. WPC Gladys Moss (Anjana Vasan) is less sure of her guilt, but is patronisingly dismissed by her male colleagues. She eventually forms an alliance with three townswomen and her young niece - and the truth is revealed.



Olivia Colman is a familiar presence (*Empire of Light* was shown by the Club last year), and her dramatic versatility is to the fore here. Jessie Buckley is equally compelling as her co-star. A native of Co Kerry, British audiences first saw her on BBC1's *I'll Do Anything* in 2008, a reality show designed to find a new unknown lead to play Nancy in a West End revival of the musical *Oliver!*. Buckley came second (losing to Jodie Prenger) but she declined the offer to join the production as an understudy. She quickly made

her mark on TV (*War and Peace*, *Chernobyl*) and in films (*Wild Rose*, *Misbehaviour*, *Women Talking*). She played the younger version of Olivia Colman's character in *The Lost Daughter* (2021), for which both she and Colman were nominated for Oscars.

Interestingly, critical reaction to the film was far more positive outside the UK, where (maybe) a period British film with distinguished actresses (shock horror) swearing may have had novelty value. The review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes gives the film a rating of 80% from critics (and a very healthy 92% from audiences). The Chicago Sun-Times rated the film three stars out of four and wrote, "the chief delight is watching Colman and Buckley in action."

Here though the broadsheet critics were uniformly lukewarm, with the Guardian particularly unimpressed, labelling it "unconvincing, unfunny and bafflingly heavy-handed" and "a depressing seaside postcard of a film." Empire magazine perceptively commented that "it all actually fares better when it leans towards drama and social commentary over comedy" highlighting its tonal problem. The film was summarised on one website as "Comedy-Crime-Drama-History-Mystery," which covers most bases. The mystery itself is short-lived as the culprit is revealed early on in the film (no spoiler!).

The incessant bad language attracted some comment (but face it - it is the story). Colman was quoted on the BBC News website saying "some people walked out of the cinema watching our film and I just think they need to get over themselves. It's not a sign of a diminished vocabulary, it's fun, it's just an enjoyment and I see it as a seasoning." Buckley added "the ones who swear the least are the ones who need a good swear." More seriously, the writer (comedian Jonny Sweet) noted the parallels between yesterday's poison pen letters and today's social media, commenting that "anonymous hate really destroys people's lives and can be a real nightmare. That's what this story is about - it shows that you can write something anonymously and say some wretched old stuff and think you'll get away with it."

A final summary from an impressed reviewer on IMDb: "The outstanding moments in this film come from Jessie Buckley, who like Maggie Smith in her younger years bursts onto the screen with energy and charisma. Olivia Colman is always full of nuance and depth. These two central performances carry the movie. A very odd movie in some ways but worth your time if you can get over the anachronisms and the uneven tone."

Eugene Smith

Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 15 January 2025
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

Exactly a year ago (notes Eugene Smith), we listed **The Economist's** 14 Best Films of 2023 – and five of them are featured in this year's programme (*The Holdovers*; *Past Lives*; *Poor Things*; *Anatomy of a Fall*; *The Taste of Things*). Here is their 2024 "Best 15" list (culled from films released by November in the US or the UK).

All of Us Strangers (Dir Andrew Haigh/UK/105 mins/15/IMDb rating 7.6)

A lonely screenwriter (Andrew Scott) visits his childhood home and meets the ghosts of his parents (Claire Foy and Jamie Bell). He has one last chance to talk to them. A tender and intimate film. Being shown by WFC on 27 March

All We Imagine as Light (Payal Kapadia/India/118 mins/15/7.2)

A sensitive study of 3 women (Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha, Chhaya Kadam) working in a bustling Mumbai hospital. By night, the city offers enchanting glimmers of freedom, but the reality of life with little money or independence returns in the morning.

Anora (Sean Baker/US/139 mins/15/8.2)

A frenzied farce about a dancer in a strip club (Mikey Madison) who is paid to be the girlfriend of a Russian oligarch's brattish son. The winner of the top prize at Cannes Film Festival, this is a more complex *Pretty Woman* for a new generation.

Babygirl (Halina Reijn/US/114 mins/15/6.0)

A married boss of a robotics firm (Nicole Kidman) has an affair with a manipulative young intern (Harris Dickinson). A glossy erotic thriller which pays more attention to raw emotion than naked flesh.

La Chimera (Alice Rohrwacher/UK-Italy/130 mins/15/7.3)

A rumpled English archaeologist (Josh O'Connor) slouches around Tuscany in the 1980s, dreaming of a lost love. He helps a band of grave robbers unearth Etruscan artefacts to sell on the black market. But should some treasures—and some relationships—be left in the past?

Conclave (Edward Berger/US/120 mins/12A/7.6)

Adapted from Robert Harris's novel, this superbly controlled and slyly funny thriller stars Ralph Fiennes as a cardinal overseeing the election of a new pope. He soon learns that the front-runners have secrets.

Green Border (Agnieszka Holland/Poland/152 mins/6.4)

Belarus has lured refugees, pretending to offer a route into the EU. Polish border guards bar

the way; Belarusian guards will not let the migrants back. A touching, infuriating tale of how families seeking a better life became pawns of a despot.

Immaculate (Michael Mohan/US/79 mins/18/5.8)

An American nun (Sydney Sweeney) moves to an Italian convent, only to find that a geneticist-turned-priest is planning to clone Jesus Christ. As exploitative as it sounds but beautifully shot and cleverly constructed.

Love Lies Bleeding (Rose Glass/US/104 mins/15/6.7)

Kristen Stewart and Katy O'Brian play a small-town gym manager and a bodybuilder who team up against a murderous gun-runner (Ed Harris). This darkly comic crime thriller is violent, hallucinatory and sensual. Not for the faint-hearted.

Monster (Hirokazu Koreeda/Japan/127 mins/12A/7.8)

A Japanese widow (Ando Sakura) is frightened by the strange behaviour of her son (Kurokawa Soya). His actions are explained in three sections; a mystery, a satirical farce and a wistful drama. A deeply humane film.

Nickel Boys (RaMell Ross/US/140 mins/12A/7.7)

A dreamlike, impressionistic account of two boys (Ethan Herisse, Brandon Wilson) experiencing a brutally racist reform school in Florida in the 1960s. Adapted from the Pulitzer-prizewinning novel by Colson Whitehead, based on real events.

Perfect Days (Wim Wenders/Japan/124 mins/PG/7.9)

A lyrical drama chronicles a few days in the life of Hirayama (Yakusho Koji), a loner who cleans public toilets in Tokyo. Hirayama approaches his work and his hobbies with such dedication that his days do seem close to perfect.

Robot Dreams (Pablo Berger/US/103 mins/PG/7.6)

Set in 1980s New York, where a cartoon dog befriends a rusty robot. Every frame is crammed with ingenious jokes, but not a word of dialogue. Insightful and heartrending.

Sasquatch Sunset (David Zellner/US/88 mins/15/5.5)
Four shaggy Bigfoots roam around a seemingly unspoilt wilderness. The actors (including Jesse Eisenberg and Riley Keough) are unrecognisable, but the creatures are distinctive and lovable. A wonderfully inventive comedy and a haunting eco-fable.

The Substance (Coralie Fargeat/US/141 mins/18/7.5)
A Hollywood has-been (Demi Moore) clones herself, so that her younger, perkier version (Margaret Qualley) can relive her glory days. A colourful lampoon of sexism and ageism that becomes an uproariously gory monster movie.

Comments and reactions to: **The Holdovers**

No of reaction slips received = 25

Average score = 7.80

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

Fairly seasonal and suitable for the Club's Christmas slot. Not brilliant, but enjoyable

Boring! Picked up Boston onwards but then became predictable and too steeped in hackneyed psychotherapy moments!

Excellent film. Very enjoyable

Enjoyable. Good soundtrack

Excellent casting. Thanks to organisers

Thoughtful and gentle but not sickly sweet.

Excellent

I enjoyed the plot and the way the characters were developed. An enjoyable film

Sound not so good

Stopped just short of mawkish sentimentality

A wonderful film

A bit sad

Thoroughly enjoyed

Well put together, not too sentimental

Loved this film. Very moving. Brilliant

Position	Film	Average score
1	The Great Escaper	8.00
2	The Holdovers	7.80
3	The Taste of Things	7.04
4	The Color Purple	6.77
5	Past Lives	6.33
6	Winners	6.00
7	Barbie	5.59



Forthcoming attraction: 23 January 2025 – **One Life**

As we continue to grapple with today's issues of war, refugee crisis and growing antisemitism, the film's relevance is so troubling that you cannot fail to be moved by it. Observer

It's fine, in its workmanlike way. But the story is so inherently powerful and moving, and there is so much goodness and decency at work, it will set you off.

Take a whole box of tissues if you want to play it safe and would rather not deploy your sleeve. The Spectator

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