



The Main Feature

Season 44 – Issue 15 – Screening 24 April 2025

Poor Things

UK, 2023, 142 mins, Cert 18

Director	Yorgos Lanthimos
Writer	Tom McNamara from the novel by Alasdair Grey
Cinematography	Robbie Ryan
Music	Jerskin Fendrix
Production Design	Shona Heath, James Price
Costume Design	Holly Waddington
Make Up and Hairstyling	Nadia Stacey, Mark Coulier, Josh Weston

Cast

Emma Stone	Bella Baxter
Mark Ruffalo	Duncan Wedderburn
Willem Dafoe	Godwin Baxter
Ramy Youssef	Max McCandles
Christopher Abbot	Alfie Blessington
Jerrod Carmichael	Harry Astley
Vicki Pepperdine	Mrs Prim



Alasdair Grey (1934 – 2019) was a Scottish artist and author with a highly fertile imagination. He is best known for his novel *Lanark*, written over thirty years and combining realist and dystopian surrealist depictions of his home city of Glasgow. His writing style is postmodern and has been compared with Franz Kafka, George Orwell, Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino. He wrote his novel *Poor Things* in 1992, a postmodern retelling of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley.

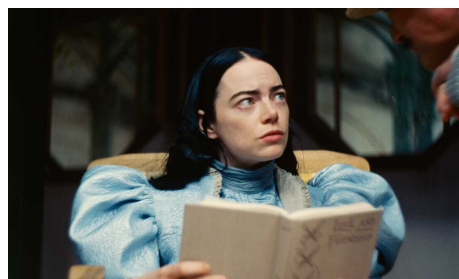
The novel has been brought to the screen by Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos and screenwriter Tony McNamara. The film had a long gestation – Lanthimos began discussions with Grey about acquisition of the film rights in 2009 but only returned to the project after working with Emma Stone on *The Favourite*.

The narrative follows the life of Bella Baxter (Stone), a surgically fabricated woman created in the late Victorian era by eccentric surgeon/mad scientist Godwin Baxter (Willem Dafoe) who was himself the subject of physiological experiments by his father. Bella is made up of the body of a pregnant woman who has committed suicide and the brain of her unborn child. She refers to her 'father' as God and presents the familiar paradox of a child's mind in an adult's body (think awkward

physical movements and babyish talk together with absolutely no filters). Dr Baxter recruits medical student Max McCandles (Ramy Youssef) to observe and record Bella's physical and mental development, though he does not allow her to leave the house. Bella becomes engaged to McCandles but goes away with Dr Baxter's debauched lawyer, Duncan Wedderburn (Mark Ruffalo). The remainder of the film is taken up with Bella interacting for the first time with the outside world, learning about herself and her body, her sexual desires, human relationships, what can (and cannot) be referred to in 'polite society' and politics. The story is part Frankenstein and part Pygmalion. Through it we see social commentary on patriarchal institutions, social equality, socioeconomic matters and sexual politics. And given the film is rated 18, expect lots and lots of sex, nudity and strong language. The intimacy co-ordinator, Elle MacAlpine, certainly earned her fee.

The film is shot in black and white for the periods when Bella is confined to the house, blossoming into colour when she leaves. The style is a fusion of high Victorian, surrealism, fairy tale and steampunk. The production design is lavish, the prosthetics formidable, and Bella's wardrobe is a character in itself.

But is it just a triumph of style over substance? Much depends on how you view Emma Stone's performance. The Financial Times said: 'As Stone and Ruffalo perform a mad, broken-doll jig on a lavish cruise ship, you may find yourself clapping along like an excited toddler. Yet like that toddler, you may also grow fractious, and finally sleepy. I did anyway. Bella is a wonderful creation. Even in adulthood, though, she brings out the side of Stone that makes you feel you're watching someone's very talented child stealing the school play. And if Gray's novel hums with provocative ideas, Lanthimos is smart but skin deep. Like *The Favourite*, his new film comes to feel like a costume drama for an age that thinks itself above costume dramas. And actually, deep down, for all the scalpels and self-pleasure, a rather standard dose of Hollywood feelgood.'



Empire disagreed: '[Lanthimos] hands the centre-stage to Bella, and to Emma Stone. She makes the very most of that spotlight. Clearly still intoxicated by her collaboration with the director on *The Favourite*, Stone has turned in maybe her richest, most interesting, utterly fearless performance yet. She begins as a literal baby, an acting challenge that in the wrong hands could feel like a drama-school exercise; with Stone at the wheel, it's odd, keenly observed, full of texture and wisdom. Bella's progression is both incremental and rapid: beginning non-verbally, she slowly builds a vocabulary, ending the film as a thesaurus-verbose polymath, gleeful in her curiosity, incautious in her lack of filter. Watching her work is a constant, unpredictable thrill.'

Poor Things did well at the Oscars, receiving eleven nominations and winning the awards for Best Actress (Emma Stone), Best Production Design, Best Make-Up and Hairstyling and Best Costume Design.

Michael Hipkins



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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 30 April 2025
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

The Development of Sound in Cinema

For a few years after the Second World War, my late Uncle Ben was a sound editor working on films such as *The Winslow Boy* (1948) before he moved into editing film for BBC news. So whilst on holiday recently my attention was drawn to a presentation by a small arts association of six short films which illustrated the development of sound over cinema history. The films were interspersed by remarks from a present-day sound editor.

Paradoxically, the first two films were silent. *The Brahmin and the Butterfly* (France, 1901, director Georges Méliès) is a brief (two minutes) fantasy with a fixed camera and some trick shots but the images narrate the whole story. The next film, *Cops* (US, 1922, directors Edward F Kline and Buster Keaton)



is a classic two-reel (18 minutes) silent film which needs dialogue cards to move the plot along. It is a film just waiting for the invention of sound.

Then came an early work by Jean Vigo who, despite his short life, is still well-known for *Zéro de Conduite* (1933) and *L'Atalante* (1934). *La Natation par Jean Taris* (France, 1931, director Jean Vigo, 9 min) is a documentary about a swimmer who competed for France at the Olympic Games in 1928, 1932 and 1936. The film shows his swimming technique recorded in an indoor pool. The sound is initially an announcement through a megaphone, and then a commentary by Taris describing how he swims. The ambient sound was added afterwards (sometimes rather randomly). The film also has innovative underwater shots, close-ups, slow-motion and reverse motion.

Next was *Heureux Anniversaire* (France, 1962, directors Pierre Ataix and J C Carrière, 12



min) which won the Oscar for Best Short Subject in 1963 and is in effect a silent film in much the same manner as

Jacques Tati's *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* (1953). With little dialogue, some running jokes and a score whose repeated motifs underpin the action, it shows a Parisian trying – unsuccessfully – to drive home through heavy traffic for the birthday dinner prepared by his wife who, when he eventually arrives, has eaten the dinner and is suffering the after-effects of having drunk all the wine.

After that, *Pas de repos pour Billy Brakko* (France 1984, director Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 4 min) was a big contrast – a full-on assault of the senses, with a rapid succession of images based on graphic novels accompanied by a voice-over and an entirely synthetic soundtrack. The plot is secondary to the style and the black humour of what one critic described as pulp cinema.

The final film was *Music for One Apartment and Six Drummers* (Sweden, 2001, directors Ola Simonsson and Johannes Stjärne Nilsson, 9 min) in which a group of musicians wait outside a flat until the elderly couple take their dog out for a walk, then break in and perform percussive music on improvised instruments found in each of the rooms. There is no dialogue, just the music, which was added after the filming.

The sound editor's remarks after each film helped us to understand the evolution of recording techniques, and how creative the sound editor has to be, so that the attention of the audience is drawn to dialogue, or special sound effects, or ambient noise, according to the focus the director wants. What he said has certainly made me listen more carefully – and appreciate the work of Uncle Ben.

Michael Hipkins

Comments and reactions to: **Chocolat**

No of reaction slips received = 24

Average score = 6.96

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

Didn't like watching the subject matter found it upsetting, very well-acted especially the last scene

A good film – but I have never liked clowns and found the violence a difficult watch

Enjoyable film

Skimming over the latter part of the story made the narrative less compelling

Definitely 'hot' Chocolat

Second half was a lot better. Beautiful location/set shots. Interesting but not a must-see

Some good moments, overall mediocre film

Very enjoyable – good film – story and acting

An interesting film – I enjoyed watching it. It is a pity that parts of Chocolat's story were invented for the film

A very unusual and interesting film, direction, acting and era

Un très bon movie

An interesting story with some good depictions of the mores of the times, even if one relatively important aspect (his acting and reception as Othello) is most improbable and unreal. Brilliant acting saves it, but we wouldn't rush to see it again. One can see how it might not have been a great success with modern movie goers

Superb acting by the co-stars, really gripped me. Charlie Chaplin's grandson was first-class as the serious clown.

Position	Film	Average score
1	One Life	8.80
2	Maudie	7.97
3	The Great Escaper	7.96
4	Wicked Little Letters	7.66
5	The Holdovers	7.62
6	Anatomy of a Fall	7.22
7	The Taste of Things	7.16
8	Chocolat	6.96
9	The Color Purple	6.77
10	Past Lives	6.46
11	Winners	5.88
12	Barbie	5.59
13	Slow	5.54
14	All of Us Strangers	4.75



Forthcoming attraction: 8 May 2025 – **The Blue Caftan**

The Blue Caftan is full of elegantly woven narrative and emotional threads, giving the work a delicately rendered cumulative impact. [It] venerates the tradition of craft while arguing that true freedom also requires a break with an oppressive status quo. BFI

In The Blue Caftan, the garment in question is a bespoke item created with meticulous care by Halim, a Moroccan maalem or master tailor. As the gown takes shape, with its intricate gold embroidery, it becomes a metaphor for the film itself: a superb piece of old-fashioned narrative tailoring by writer-director Maryam Touzani. Financial Times