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**The Lobster (15)**

*dir:* **Yorgos Lanthimos**

*starring:* **Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz, Olivia Colman**

*sponsors:* **Jonathan and Shuna Killin**

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The first half of *The Lobster* is set in a hotel whose 'guests' must find a mate within 45 days or be turned into an animal of their choice. One evening, they have to watch simple parables performed by the staff. In 'Man Eats Alone', a man chokes on something and dies; in its companion piece, 'Man Eats with Woman', he chokes on something and lives - because the woman is there to perform the Heimlich manoeuvre. Obviously the audience gets it: but not only that, no-one raises an eyebrow at how obvious it is. The world of *The Lobster* is governed by cruel and unexplained rules and inhabited by people who never question them; whereas *The Lobster* itself is designed to be enjoyed by people who do - by an audience primed to accede to its demands to make comparisons with Kafka and call its stabs of comedy 'absurdist'. But this reviewer is not convinced that the spectacle of the audience passively absorbing these parables isn't much less basic than the parables themselves.

Taken as a dystopia, *Lobster-land*, physically a self-consciously unnamed corner of Europe, has been arrived at through a process of exaggeration. The societal pressure to form procreative relationships is turned into an injunction; the 'biological clock' is given a *Logan's Run* twist; and unremarkable assumptions - centrally, that couples should have something in common - become iron laws. David (Colin Farrell) is sent to the hotel after being left by his wife, and to stave off the threatened metamorphosis enters into a relationship with a hyperbolically heartless woman, for which purpose he has to seem not to care when she appears to choke to death. As the perversity of this episode suggests - he at once obeys and defies the lesson of 'Man Eats with Woman' - the hotel can be taken less literally, as a manifestation of David's post-divorce anxieties, but there is plenty that remains within the realm of dystopian satire.

The hotel's often arbitrary rules belong to a far more repressive and prescriptive society than the modern Europe in which the action takes place. But however dated, the object of the satire is clear enough during the film's first half, which has its share of rather non-absurdist weakly observational comedy, as when the hotel manager (Olivia Colman) explains that by having children the hotel's new couples (who have to complete a probation period before being released into society) will be able to block out any other problems they might have.

The film's second half is harder to fit into either interpretation,

dystopian satire or post-divorce anxiety nightmare. By night, the



hotel inmates are forced to go out into the nearby woodland and

**Synopsis:** Europe, the present. After being left by his wife, David is incarcerated in a seaside hotel where, if he doesn't find a mate within 45 days he will be turned into an animal of his choice, as happened to his brother, whom David now keeps as a dog. The hotel is governed by numerous harshly enforced rules, one of which is that couples must have something in common.

David pretends to be unfeeling in order to commence a relationship with an unfeeling woman, but she sees through him and kills his brother to test whether he is truly heartless, and his tears tell against him. With the help of a maid, David escapes into the hands of the 'loners', who inhabit the woodland near the hotel and are hunted by the hotel-dwellers each night. After David joins them, the loners raid the hotel and break up some of the couples. The loners are also subject to various rules, above all that they must remain single. David, however, falls in love with one of them - a woman who, like himself, is shortsighted. On the day before they plan to run away, their secret relationship is discovered by the loners' leader, who blinds the woman as punishment. David ties up the leader and leaves her to be eaten by dogs, then runs away with the woman to the city. At a restaurant, David goes to the bathroom, intending to blind himself with a knife.

**Credits**

<b>David</b>	Colin Farrell
<b>Short-sighted woman</b>	Rachel Weisz
<b>Nosebleed woman</b>	Jessica Barden
<b>Hotel manager</b>	Olivia Colman
<b>Biscuit woman</b>	Ashley Jensen
<b>Heartless woman</b>	Angeliki Papoulia
<b>Maid</b>	Ariane Laped
<b>Lisping man</b>	John C. Reilly
<b>Loner leader</b>	Léa Seydoux
<b>Loner swimmer</b>	Michael Smiley
<b>Limping man</b>	Ben Whishaw
<b>Director</b>	Yorgos Lanthimos
<b>Screenwriters</b>	Yorgos Lanthimos, Efthimis Filippou
<b>DoP</b>	Thimios Bakatakis
<b>Editing</b>	Yorgos Mavroparisidis
<b>Sound design</b>	Johnnie Burn
<b>Costume design</b>	Sarah Blenkinsop

**Ireland/UK/Greece 2015**

hunt 'loners', winning extra days on top of the statutory 45 for each one they capture. After the Heartless Woman (few of the characters have names) kills his dog (formerly his brother), David takes sanctuary among them, but finds that the loners have their own set of unreasonable rules - or really just one: no sex, no kissing, no flirting - enforced with equal cruelty. Here, inevitably, David finds a woman he can fall in love with (Rachel Weisz) and they make a secret go of it until their discovery by the loners' leader (Léa Seydoux), who then has Weisz's character professionally blinded. What remains a constant in the hotel and among the loners is the extreme insistence on couples having something in common, and so the film ends with David weighing up whether or not to blind himself in sympathy. The rules of the hotel, even when arbitrary, are more or less recognisable; the arbitrary rules of the woodland are less those of an indifferent universe or an inhumane society than those of a writer-director too palpably seeking to evoke the idea of these things and achieve some formal balance while doing it.

The failure of *The Lobster* is ultimately a matter of form. The allegory fails to ring partly true because the narrative and our engagement with it are deliberately undermined in pursuit of a misbegotten Brechtianism. The narrator narrates things as we see them. Dramatic music plays over undramatic scenes. What would be the film's emotional climax, when Weisz's character reveals to David that she's blind, is performed with minimum effect. Director Yorgos Lanthimos's most irritating device, as in his breakthrough feature *Dogtooth* (2009), is the shop-worn 'shock-unresolved ending' - the cut to black before a crucial decision is made. The point of the Brechtian 'distancing' was to reveal to the audience the real social forces governing the action; it is senseless to apply it to a world governed by unreal forces whose origin and purpose are coyly withheld.

### Another View

*With distinct shades of the black and absurdist work of Luis Buñuel and with a twist of George Orwell thrown in for good measure, Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos's first feature in English has to rank as one of the most bizarre offerings in this year's competition selection at Cannes*

*For his strange world, he creates a spa resort hotel where the singleton guests are given 45 days to find a mate - or face the prospect of being turned into an animal of their choice and then released into the wild.*

*Marriage and children are still regarded as a prized activity whereas anyone outside the charmed circle is severely suspect. Lanthimos satirises our obsession with relationships and modern day electronic dating rituals although the results are not nearly as funny and knowing as the director clearly thinks.*

*Colin Farrell is just one of a cluster of starchy names who find themselves incarnating characters checking in for rehabilitation. He plays a divorcee with a certain vulnerable hang-dog air and for brief period he chums up with Ben Wishaw, as a young man with a limp, and John C Reilly, as middle-aged bachelor with a lisp, all of them in the same boat. The Farrell character's choice of*

*reincarnation is as a lobster because they live for a long time and he loves the sea.*

*Farrell tries to strike up a relationship with a stern blonde (played by Angeliki Papoulia) but when the coupling fails he escapes off into the forest where he meets Léa Seydoux as the leader of a group of anarchists and falls in love with Rachel Weisz's beautiful loner. The hotel where everyone is known by their room number, is ruled over by Olivia Coleman's (sic) matter-of-fact manager, who ensures the strict regime is carried out to the letter. Shot on the wild coast of County Kerry in Ireland (although the film has no specified location or time) it is rendered in muted tones.*

*Intriguing enough for the first two-thirds of its timespan, the film runs out of ideas as the conclusion comes near, which is a pity because that is likely to disappoint the cult fans who warmed to his earlier *Kinetta*, Oscar-nominee *Dogtooth* and *Alps*.*

**Richard Mowe, *Eye for Film*, 2015**

**Our next screening: Friday October 28th, 7.30pm**

## Sherpa

**(Australia, 2015. Cert 15)**

It's taken a while for documentaries to become firmly established as a legitimate part of a Society season. This season we have 2 outstanding examples, of which this is the first.

In 2014, Australian director Jennifer Peedom set out to make a film about the Sherpa community, without whose efforts attempts to climb Mt Everest would not succeed and yet whose roles are largely unrecognised and unappreciated. During the filming, a major ice-fall killed 16 of them and led to 2 things - an international rescue effort and the first strike in the history of mountaineering, both of which made headline news around the world.

The film not only captures the glory of the Himalayas (which you'd expect) and the drama of the climb but records what provoked the strike and its aftermath - revealing some disturbing truths about the Everest industry and those who support it by wanting to climb the mountain. It deservedly won the Best Documentary award in the 2015 London Film Festival.

Astonishingly - and as far as we can tell - it has had almost no exposure in theatres in this country apart from the London Film Festival and the Sheffield documentary festival. This is an exclusive screening therefore and the Society is deeply grateful to the producers of the film Felix Media, and the director Jennifer Peedom, who have allowed us to present it as part of our programme.