



ADVOCATE *insider*

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Cannes Day Two -- Women In Prison

Almost every day at Cannes begins with a major screening at 8:30 am in the Lumiere, the biggest screen at the festival. Perhaps hundreds of movies are shown daily at Cannes, from major premieres to cheesy B movies screened on dingy side street cinemas. But the 8:30 am movie is always a must-see for journalists, which cramps your fun the night before. On the way to the film you can pick up the "trades" -- Variety, Hollywood Reporter and five or six international magazines -- to catch up on reviews and news you haven't tracked online. No one very much liked "Blindness," which is a shame since the book seemed so promising as a bleak fable. Then again, Camus's "The Plague" has never made a good movie either.

Leonera -- The first screening of the day is Argentina's "Leonera," which I know is about a woman serving time in prison while giving birth to her son. What I didn't know was that she was serving time after waking up one morning in a bloody mess with her husband murdered and his gay lover awkwardly sharing their bed, severely wounded. Like every man in the film, the gay lover is not to be trusted and our heroine takes the fall, though she isn't even sure what happened. I wouldn't say the woman realizes she's queer, but in a classic case of situational lesbianism, she is hit upon aggressively by other prisoners till bonding with an older woman and establishing the first genuine and satisfying relationship of her life. Director Pablo Trapero's wife Martina Gusman is widely acclaimed for her performance as the lead, Julia, and while it's foolish to make predictions so early, she will certainly be a contender for Best Actress given the role and the general dearth of strong female leads (though Angelina Jolie might have something to say about this). I've based this all on reviews and reports from friends who saw the film. I accidentally overslept and never was able to catch any of the repeat viewings.

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Later that day, I get a glimpse of a hilarious poster on the Croisette: Jim Carrey is cuddling with Ewan McGregor and the movie is called, "I Love You Philip Morris." Apparently, it's based on the true story of a married father in Texas who was sent to jail, became obsessed with his cellmate and after the guy was released broke out of prison four times to be with him. The poster alone is hilarious, with a style akin to Steve Carrell's "goofy The 40 Year Old Virgin" poster.

Hunger -- Next is the mainstream debut of British artist and avant garde filmmaker Steve McQueen, who has made works playing with queer themes (his "Bears" shows McQueen and another large man trading suggestive glances) and who cites Andy Warhol as a major influence. His film is "Hunger," about the IRA prisoners who went on hunger strike and died in the early 80s. If you can call a movie beautiful which has scenes of feces-covered prison cells, then "Hunger" is beautiful. It undermines expectations the entire way. The movie begins by focusing on one of the guards who works at the prison, switches to a new prisoner entering the cells and only after a considerable amount of time lights upon the most famous hunger striker of all, Bobby Sands. Very little dialogue is used in the film; in fact, I wondered if people unfamiliar with the story would quite follow one of the key demands of the prisoners -- that they be allowed to wear their own clothes rather than the prison uniform of criminals, which had been the case until the Thatcher government decided to "criminalize" the IRA's acts of violence. Then there's a bravura scene that lasts at least ten minutes if not longer: Bobby Sands and a priest shoot the breeze, debate the ethics of the hunger strike and so on, all with the camera framing the two men face to face, never cutting, never moving until those ten or so minutes have passed and then focusing on Sands while he tells a childhood anecdote that lasts another four or five minutes about stumbling on to a wounded deer and drowning it to put it out of its misery. No glimpses of the outside world or the turmoil the strike engendered, only a brief acknowledgement at the end that Sands had been elected a Member of Parliament while the strike was going on, no depiction of his famous funeral where perhaps 100,000 people lined the funeral route in stark, remarkable silence. Critics were polite if divided on the film, though there's no question McQueen has genuine talent (not to mention a last name perfectly suited to the movies).

Other films today include "Waltz With Bashir," an animated documentary about a massacre in Lebanon in the early 80s (which is effective because of its form not its content) and the

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Turkic film "The Three Monkeys" by Nuri Bilge Ceylan (which is not as accessible as "Climates" but has a wonderfully dramatic final shot).

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