Title: When the Last Sword Is Drawn

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Abstract: Samurai films do not come much more elegiac than Takita's latest

film, which was adapted from a novel by Asada. Using a complex flashback structure, *the* film delivers an embroiled and occasionally

confusing tale. Its most original aspect is the character of

Yoshimura, a samurai with more than a hint of *the* holy innocent about him. Takita's direction can be a little too picturesque, with elaborately choreographed fights in rain and snow and lovingly lensed shots of mountains and rivers. There *is* also a strong vein of sentimentality evident, seen for example in Yoshimura's tearful farewell to his doe-eyed daughter. However, *the* big set pieces are

shot inventively and energetically.

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cynical lady Sinead Matthews very young woman Rosie Cavaliero married woman Vinette Robinson Jamaican girl mother of seven Pamela Barnes Jim Broadbent judge Richard Graham George Anna Keaveney Nellie Simon Chandler Mr Wells Marion Bailey Sid Mitchell very young man Alan Williams sick husband Heather Cameron Billie Cook Billy Seymour children Nina Fry Lauren Holden dance hall girls cynical lady Joanna Griffiths Peggy Angie Wallis Nurse Willoughby Sister Beech

Lucy Pleasence Sister Coombes Tracey O'Flaherty Tom Ellis police constable Robert Putt station sergeant Crain Conv station constable Jake Wood ruffian Mr Lewis Michael Gunn gaoler Paul Raffield magistrate's clerk Philip Childs Jeffrey Wickham prosecution barrister Nicholas Jones defence barrister Stenhan Dunha Angela Curran Jane Wood prisoners . Eileen Davies prison officer

Certificate 12A Distributor Momentum Pictures 11,256 feet +0 frames 125 minutes 4 seconds

Dolby Digital In Colour Prints by Delaye

London, 1950. Vera Drake lives with her husband Stan and their grown-up children, Ethel and Sid. She works as a cleaning lady, and secretly performs abortions for girls in trouble. When one of her patients almost dies, the police call at her house where the family is celebrating Ethel's engagement to Reg, and the pregnancy of Joyce, Stan and Vera's sister-in-law.

Vera is interviewed at the police station, where she is shocked to learn that her friend Lily took payment for booking the abortions. Prior to being arrested, she confesses her crime to Stan. Next morning, she is granted bail. Sid initially spurns her, and Joyce is reluctant to visit. At the trial, Vera is sentenced to two years and three months. In prison, she meets other women jailed for the same crime

Older audiences might let out a warm sigh during the moment in Vera Drake when the title character, a 1950s domestic whose twinkling eyes are buried in a doughy face like raisins pressed into a bun, retrieves a key from beneath a doormat. In his third period work (after the 1993 play It's a Great Big Shame! and Topsy-Turvy from 1999), Mike Leigh proves himself adept at stemming the flow of nostalgia. Viewers who find solace in that key under the mat, or in the talk of bread and dripping, will be brought up sharp by the punishment doled out to Vera when it transpires that she has been performing illegal abortions. Her husband Stan is a mechanic whose work ethic is: "Bring 'em in, mend 'em, push 'em back out again." Not so different really from Vera.

The picture documents post-war English class prejudice as methodically as Fassbinder mapped out West Germany's



Grate expectations: Imelda Staunton

social and racial battleground in Fear Eats the Soul (1974). Class tensions manifest themselves in Leigh's film in the contrast between Vera's clients, most of whom undergo their terminations in squalor, and the experience of Susan Wells, a rape victim whose relative wealth, as well as her insider knowledge of the correct phrases to use in a psychiatric interview ("suicidal feelings", "madness in the family"), allows her a short stay at a bright clinic. The class divide is symbolised by visible barriers. A hospital screen, an IV stand, a staircase, a court bench - each cleaves the frame starkly in two.

The unifying factor is Vera, played by Imelda Staunton, who gets the kind of adoring close-ups, if not the wardrobe and hairdo, that a Hollywood star would kill for. She is frequently the only active element in a shot, scuttling between rooms filling teacups and emptying bedpans for incapacitated relatives and neighbours. Once she has been arrested, her stillness reverberates. With no further need to keep track of her errands, Dick Pope's camera goes into a funk. Those constant chirruping offers of tea, which Vera seemed to make in every alternate line, dry up, leaving our ears parched. The mention of a hot beverage has never sounded so cruel as when it is made by a WPC unaware that she has assumed Vera's defining function as bluntly as she has confiscated her wedding ring. Vera's identity will follow. Leigh gives the movie her name, but in the final line of dialogue, which hurts like a stubbed toe, a prison warden reduces her to "Drake".

The film's cleverest trick is to withhold for dramatic effect those elements that have grown comforting in earlier scenes. Vera's absence from the family home, for example, is articulated when Leigh begins stinting on the tight, busy compositions that had previously denoted warmth and camaraderie. In those scenes set at mealtimes in the Drake household, he seems out to break some record for the largest number of faces squeezed into a medium shot. Once Vera is gone, the film must adjust itself to the change in temperament. Alone in her cell, she misses the old

bustle, and so do we. When she is out on bail, Leigh stages an agonising Christmas dinner scene in which the camera cannot bring itself to capture everyone in a single tableau. Instead it takes in each family member individually during an extended pan round the room, just as Fassbinder did in that slow single shot in Fear Eats the Soul when Emmi announces to her vicious children that she has married Ali.

Like Fassbinder, Leigh uses the position and movement of the camera to underline the social implications of the narrative. He has made an exceptionally quiet film — Vera whispers her confession to her husband Stan in his ear, while those who felt battered by Leigh's last film, All Or Nothing (2002), will be relieved to learn that it is nearly two hours before a raised voice is heard in Vera Drake. The camera expresses more anger than any slanging match.

An exceptional breadth of context and compassion is evident here, though the film is as much a triumph of production design as it is of acting, writing and direction. Eve Stewart has created a network of dimly lit passageways from which cramped doorways open on to sitting rooms where conflicting designs (floral patterns compete on the lampshades, wallpaper and curtains in Vera's house) increase the claustrophobia still further. When the film has decamped to cells and courtrooms, the eye yearns for a return to that tangled chaos which the characters have made for themselves. There is no going back. The doors that have been open throughout the movie begin closing one by one - on a girl hospitalised by her violent reaction to an abortion, on Vera in her cell and again on Vera when she returns home and is snubbed by her son. In the last scene of Fear Eats the Soul. Fassbinder had the doctor close the door on Emmi as she comforted Ali in his hospital bed. Leigh leaves it ajar in the final shot of Vera Drake, framing the bereft family before using a simple piece of film language to express their emotional devastation - the fade to black, that door which no character may reopen.

Ryan Gilbey

When the Last Sword Is Drawn

Japan 2003

Director
Yojiro Takita
Producers
Hideshi Miyajima
Nozomu Enoki
Screenplay
Takehiro Nakajima
Based on the story Mibu
gishi den by Jiro Asada
Director of Photography
Takeshi Hamada
Editors
Isao Tomita
Art Director
Kyoko Heya
Music
Joe Hisaishi

©"When the Last Sword is Drawn" Film Partners Production Company Shochiku Lighting Tatsuya Osada Sound Recording Osamu Onodera

Cast
Kilichi Nakai
Kanichiro Yoshimura
Koichi Sato
Hajime Saito
Miki Nakatani
Nui
Yui Natsukawa
Shizu
Yuji Miyake
Jiroemon Ono
Takehiro Murata
Chiaki Ono

Certificate tbc Distributor Tartan Films tbc feet tbc minutes

Dolby Digital In Colour Subtitles

Japanese theatrical title Mibu gishi den

Tokyo, 1899. An old man, Hajime Saito, comes into a surgery to ask for help for his grandson. The doctor is packing up to move to China, but examines the boy. Saito notices a photo of a samurai warrior, Kanichiro Yoshimura. He calls this man his deadliest enemy and tells the doctor about his links with the man.

Years before, both were members of the Shinsengumi, an élite fighting force. Saito, a much more senior samurai, realised Yoshimura was a gifted warrior but took a virulent dislike to him and tried to kill him. Unusually for a samurai, Yoshimura was keen on money, fought for self-defence not glory, and yearned for the wife and children he had to leave behind. By abandoning his home clan, the Nanbu, he was considered to have disgraced himself. His childhood friend Jiroemon disowned him.

The Shinsengumi fail to adapt to changing times. One faction leaves to join the Emperor. Having left the Nanbu, Yoshimura refuses to be disloyal again. The Shinsengumi fight one last battle against the Imperial forces, armed with swords while their opponents have guns. Yoshimura stands up against the guns and Saito is sure that he has been killed.

Back in 1899, the doctor tells Saito that Yoshimura survived. He wanted to rejoin his clan but Ono (fearful of sheltering a Shinsengumi warrior) ordered him to commit hara-kiri. Yoshimura was left on his own to die, bequeathing a sword and some money to his family. We learn that Yoshimura's son also went to fight for the glory of the Nanbu clan, leaving his sister Mitsu behind. The doctor, we discover, is Chiaki Ono, the son of Jiroemon. His wife is Mitsu. Saito is moved to discover that he is in the presence of Yoshimura's daughter. He sets off with his grandson, who is not seriously ill. Chiaki and Mitsu prepare for their new life in China.

Samurai films don't come much more elegiac than Takita's When the Last Sword Is Drawn, adapted from a novel by Asada. Like late Ford or Peckinpah, it is a story about old warriors coming to the end of the line, their traditional way of life slowly suffocated by creeping modernity. The mood of nostalgia and yearning is established from the outset as old Saito reminisces about his samurai past. The catalyst is a photograph of a fellow warrior, Yoshimura, with whom he had an abrasive relationship years before. With its complex flashback structure, this is an embroiled and occasionally confusing tale. Its freshest aspect is the character of Yoshimura, a samurai with more than a hint of the holy innocent about him. As played by Nakai, he is a clown-like figure, his inane grin and occasionally buffoonish behaviour belying his courage and loyalty. Obsessed with money, not afraid to grumble and with a deadpan sense of humour, he is a welcome antidote to the macho, ritualobsessed samurai familiar from various Toshiro Mifune films.

Takita's direction can err towards the picturesque, with elaborately choreographed fights in rain and snow and lovingly lensed shots of mountains and rivers. There's a strong vein of sentimentality too, as with Yoshimura's tearful farewell to his doe-eyed daughter. But the big set pieces are shot inventively and energetically. Early on, for instance, the camera twists and swoops from on high to show the warriors of the Shinsengumi going through their paces in a courtyard below. There is one bloody but morbidly comic decapitation scene and the final battle, in which the swordwielding samurai are mown down with guns, is flamboyantly staged.

Some scenes do drag, particularly those featuring the political discussions of the Shinsengumi elders. Far more absorbing is the ever-shifting relationship between Yoshimura and Saito, the latter moving from hatred to a belated admiration. The film-makers convey effectively the bewilderment the samurai warriors feel as the modern world encroaches on their feudal lifestyle. When we see fighters committing hara-kiri or cutting chunks out of each other with their swords, it often seems as if we're still in the medieval era, but cameras, guns and such like provide constant reminders that these warriors are living anachronisms.

Whether it's John Sturges reworking The Seven Samurai in The Magnificent Seven or Quentin Tarantino making Kill Bill, Hollywood has always borrowed freely from Japanese cinema; perhaps Takita is trying to reclaim the samurai epic. The film was a moderate success at the Japanese box office, although tellingly it was far outgrossed by the Tom Cruise vehicle The Last Samurai, which had a similar set-up. Though Takita occasionally exposes the posturing of the warriors' lives, he is still openly nostalgic for an era when courage and swordsmanship were so highly valued. Sumptuously made and enlivened by Nakai's playful and moving performance, the film works well enough on its own terms, but ultimately feels sentimental and self-indulgent. A tougher, less romantic look at the dying days of samurai culture might have yielded more impressive results. **Geoffrey Macnab**

Would I Lie to You?

France 1997

Director Thomas Gilou Producers Aissa Djabri Farid Lahouassa Manuel Munz Screenplay/Adaptation/ Dialogue Gérard Bitton Michel Munz Director of Photography Jean Jacques Bouhon Editor Nathalie Hubert Art Director Olivier Raoux Original Music Gérard Presgurvic

©Vertigo Productions/

Films/Orly Films/Les Productions Jacques Roitfeld Production Companie Aïssa Djabri, Farid Lahouassa, Manuel Munz present a Vertigo Productions, France 2 Cinéma, M6 Films, Orly Films, Les Productions Jacques Roitfeld co-production with the participation of Canal+ With the participation of Centre National de la Cinématographie and the support of Procirep A film by Thomas Gilou Production Manager Bernard Bolzinger Unit Production Manager Julie Bordes Unit Manager Franck Baldo Location Manager Stéphane Cressend Pre-production Crew Gilles Balezeaux Matthieu Schiffman Assistant Directors 1st: Alain Olivieri 2nd: Odile Abergel Script Supervisor Valérie Chorenslup Casting Nathalie Bialobos Bruno Levy Camera Operator Patrice Wyers Steadicam Operator Bernard Wuthrich Associate Editor Olivier Chavarot Set Decorator Pascal Morin Costume Supervisor Marie José Escolar Marianne Camara Key Make-up Nurith Barkan Make-up Artist Kev Hairstvlist Eric Monteil Hairstylists Cicci Svahn Valérie Arguillère Title Design Title Designer Dominique Descantes Title Photographer Pascal Bouclier Music Supervision Original Music Production Executive Philippe Abitbol Music Recording Didier Lozaïc

Soundtrack "Viens à Juan les Pins" --Bob Azzam; "Let's All

Chant" - Gusto: "Cut the

Dirty Jesus; "Où sont les femmes" – Patrick Juvet;

Impulsion; "Stayin'
Alive" – N'Trance;
"Kouftanek mahloul" –

Orchestra: "Act Like You

Blond Blond: "Nice

n'Nasty" - Salsoul

Rug (Da Floor Mix)"

femmes" – Patri "I Like Remix" –

Know" – Fat Larry's Band; "Sidi n'Bibi", "Yase shalom" – Orchestre Dany Loy's; "La Monnaie" – les Neg's Marrons; "Elli Ghir" -Lili Boniche: "Have Fun Go Mad" – Blair; "Alabina" – Alabina; "Shoo Be Doo Da Day" -Stevie Wonder; "Resumen": "Funky Express"; "I Miss My Trumpet": "Hip Hop Sax": "Come On": "Brazilian Party 2"; "Shake"; "Swampy Jo' Sound Recordist Frédéric Ullmann Sound Mixers Bernard LeRoux Fabien Adelin Sound Editor Emmanuel Augeard Sound Effects Alain Levy Post-synchronization Tri-Track Sync. Patrice Séverac Catherine Dubeau Camille Laurenti Recordist: Denis Carquin Stunt Co-ordinator Alain Figlarz

Cast

Richard Anconina Eddie Vuibert Richard Bohringer Victor Amira Casar Sandra Benzakem Vincent Elbaz Dov Mimran Aure Atika Karine Élie Kakou Rafi José Garcia Serge Benamou Bruno Solo Yvan Gilbert Melki Patrick Sabrina Van Tassel Roméo Sarfati Victor Haïm Anthony Delon Emma Ward Gladys Cohen Liliane Cebrian Isaac Sharry Valérie Benguigui Richard Mangel Serge Malik Pierre Guedj Catharina Wadström Luc Sindres **Guy Amram** Gilbert Lévy Christophe Le Masne Adriano Ghiron Waiskol Fabrice Fornaciari **Betty Berr** Joseph Chanet Ali Mehar Akhtar Eric Munz Bernard Bolzinger Salvadore Martinez Isaac Brami

Certificate 15 Distributor Arrow Films 9,059 feet +13 frames 100 minutes 40 seconds

Dolby In Colou Subitles

French theatrical title La vérité si je mens

Paris, the present. Eddie Vuibert is offered a job in fabrics wholesaler Victor's warehouse after the businessman mistakenly thinks the penniless young Eddie is, like him, Jewish. When Eddie sells some cloth to a client of salesman Maurice, Victor promotes him to the sales department. Eddie befriends colleagues Dov - who is having an affair with tailor Rafi's wife Karine - and Serge; he also falls for Sandra, Victor's daughter.

When Victor turns down Eddie's proposals to change the way the firm is run, Eddie launches his own business, contracting a local workshop to copy fashionably designed fabric. When his first consignment is stolen - possibly by Victor - Eddie faces ruin. But Dov bails him out, paying off the gangster from whom Eddie borrowed a start-up loan.

Eddie goes into partnership with a millionaire contact of Serge's knows and expands his operations. Eddie opens an account with Victor's bank on condition that the bank continue its support for his old boss' now-struggling business. Sandra, who has split up with boyfriend Maurice, finds out about Eddie's kindness towards her father; the two begin dating soon after. Karine tells Dov she's pregnant with his child; Dov suggests she have an abortion. Eddie and Sandra get engaged, but she splits up with him when it becomes clear he's not Jewish. At the prompting of Victor, Sandra is soon reconciled with Eddie. Dov, meanwhile, learns that Karine has decided to have the child: she leaves Rafi for him.

The belated arrival of the comedy Would I Lie to You? - released in France in 1997 in the UK doesn't help one's appreciation of the film. Set in the high-fashion world of the Parisian garment trade, the movie has dated badly. From the garish pastelcoloured suits and open-necked silk shirts the main characters wear to the truly dreadful chansons they dance to in supposedly high-class nightclubs, the film's incidental trimmings are

a conscious exercise in retro kitsch. The approving depiction of the middle-aged characters' adolescent attitude to women. meanwhile, would been antediluvian in any decade from the last century.

But the most curious thing about the seven year gap between Would I Like to You's domestic and UK release is why such a slight work should have reached these shores in the first place, especially given the struggle French films of genuine ambition have in connecting with British audiences. Charting the ragsto-riches rise of Eddie, from penniless warehouse labourer to the head of his own fabrics firm, the film's focus on the workplace can be said to anticipate the recent wave of French cinema about business, from L'Emploi du temps to Stupeur et tremblements. But Eddie's success story is ridiculously hurried and the depiction of shopfloor rivalries rendered in the broadest of brushstrokes. There are dramatic implausibilities, too, notably Richard Anconina's failure to convince as Eddie: the young man is supposed to have the charisma and persuasive abilities to found a successful fashion empire in the course of a few months; but Anconina's bland performance means we have to take these qualities on trust.

The film's single point of interest is its handling of ethnicity. In order to advance among the predominantly Jewish garment wholesalers, Eddie himself pretends to be Jewish. The idea that he should thus want to be accepted by firstgeneration immigrants like businessman Victor puts a nicely progressive spin on the concept of 'assimilation'. But the film's portrait of this close-knit Parisian community lacks colour and detail. Plus, the film makes little of Eddie's deception other than some lame gags about his ignorance of the sabbat rituals. Would I Lie to You? has spawned a sequel that was a big hit in France, but getting UK punters interested in this trifling, inconsequential curiosity would test the abilities of any one of the salesmen featured here.

Edward Lawrenson





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