

**AUTUMN**

**NOTED**

**2012**

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT



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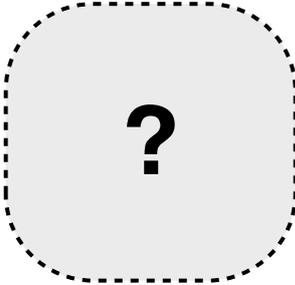


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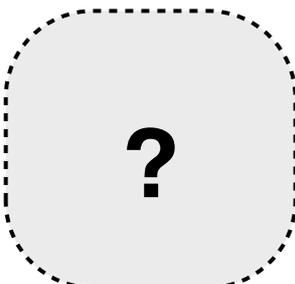
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# Editorial

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The last issue of the Newsletter of the English Department was all about photography. Our dear NOTED was discovering the beauty of the alliance of written text and still pictures.

Reflecting our awareness that we live in a world in movement, where fluxes of creativity keep shaping us whether we want it or not, the Autumn 2012 issue of NOTED has adopted another media than photography as its foundational ground: the film!

The cynics and other skeptics will be paralyzed with wonder at the mention of the amazing progress that NOTED has accomplished, passing from still picture to motion pictures, what a creative leap! Others will be glad that a media so prominent in our societies be placed at the center of attention of the students of the English Department.

But I should not skip ahead and rather tell you about the non-filmic content of this issue.

Alongside the usual Note from the Director, you will be pleased to hear from the students of the University of Notre-Dame, Indiana, who came to Geneva in search of answers regarding the genesis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which you may know was written on the shore of our beloved lake in Cologny. After that, our specialist in Joycean studies, Sam MacDuff will tell you about his impressions of the Joyce Symposium that was held in Dublin in June 2012, in a report called "Bloomsday in Dublin".

It isn't quite Bloomsday that the Film Club celebrates, but rather doomsday (Many of you must be saying, 'Oh no, he did not...') Those of you imaginative enough may even hear the characteristic

podom-pom-pshi noise celebrating my lame play on words). The Apocalypse is indeed the thematic glue that will connect the films screened on Thursdays.

To encourage students to write more about films, the Film Club has set up a "Film Review Competition", the winner of which will have their review published in NOTED, but who most of all will win a FREE FESTIVAL PASS.

Do not dawdle on the way, fellow critics, and immediately start writing the most terrifically awesome movie review so that you may earn the right to attend the 2013 Black Movie Festival for free, which will take place in January 2013.

You will notice that even the Theatre section has been taken over by films. Gervais Clark's review of an adaptation by Julie Taymor of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* epitomizes how--sometimes for the worse--live acting becomes recorded acting.

Finally, it would not be right to omit to mention the Creative Writing section of NOTED. As you may see, it is non-existent in this Autumn 2012 issue. Probably an artistic representation of the power of silence and absence to convey meaning, some of you will think. I suspect it is not quite the case; I would

not go so far as to suggest a possible lack of interest for creative expression, how would I dare suggest that you, dear literary students, could lack the passion to weave your thoughts into text? It is indeed an ignominious reflection that deserves nothing else but censorship! Some of you might even want to prove me wrong in the next issue, who knows...

Perhaps, the absence of pieces of creative writing is simply the result of a lack of time, of visibility of NOTED, of interest for the English Department, or a lack of courage to face external criticism. I genuinely wonder...

In the end, it does not really matter. All these lacks, I believe, lead to one thing, which to a large extent pains me: we are short of a creative writing section. I cannot tolerate that, so in an act of creative rebellion, I fill it with an empty set!

For the next issue of NOTED, I beg you, Students of the English Department:

# WRITE!

Your Editor,  
Arnaud Barras

# Features

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## Note from the Director

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I am very pleased to extend a warm welcome to all students joining the English Department this autumn and to say to returning students that we are glad to see you back with us. The English Department is happily entering a more stable year, this year, after the arrival of a significant number of new teachers last year. Indeed, we congratulate two existing members of staff who move to more senior positions in the department: Tabea Ihsane who has been appointed to a *chargée d'enseignement* position in English linguistics and Emma Depledge who is now a *maître assistante* in Early Modern English. Sadly, we must say a final goodbye to Michael Rööfli and Ioana Balgradean who are moving on in their professional careers.

Although she has been with us since the beginning of the spring semester, I would like to renew our welcome to the

English Department librarian, Hélène Vincent. In the time she has been with us, Hélène has shown what a positive asset she is to the department. Much of Hélène's work is not immediately apparent, but every time we use the library catalogue we benefit from her hard work, especially now after the months Hélène has spent conscientiously cataloguing the backlog of books from earlier this year, books that are now easily identifiable and accessible. Hélène's cataloguing work has been increased by the very generous donation of the late Professor Emeritus Gregory Poletta's books to the English Library. I would like to express the gratitude of the department to Professor Poletta's family for this legacy, which will enrich the intellectual lives of all who pass through the department in the years to come and, in this way, is a fitting tribute to the contribution that Professor Poletta made to the

department during his years as Professor of Modern English Literature.

We welcome back Professor Lukas Erne, who has returned from his spring-semester sabbatical research leave, during which time he was a Fowler Hamilton Visiting Research Fellow at Christ Church College, University of Oxford. Petya Ivanova also returns from an extended research visit at the University of Essex, which was funded by a prestigious award from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF). A number of teachers will be absent this year, as they pursue their research: Kimberly Gaydon is spending the autumn semester in the US where she will be working in the Library of Congress in Washington DC as well as in the specialist libraries of Ohio State University and Bowling Green State University; Tom Simkin has taken a full year of research leave which he will pass primarily in the UK; Erzsi Kukorelly has been awarded one of the University's prestigious "Subside Tremplin" which will allow her to concentrate exclusively on her research in the spring semester.

In the Writing Lab we welcome our new monitor, Jayne Brady, and welcome back Bryn Skibo-Birney. I would like to take the opportunity to offer, on behalf of staff and students alike, our warmest thanks to the outgoing monitor, William McComish, for the excellent work he has done in the Writing Lab.

Our department continues to make a substantial contribution to the administration of the Faculty and the University. Guillemette Bolens continues

in her role as Vice-Rectrice; her role in the department continues to be fulfilled by Lucy Perry; Genoveva Puskas remains as Vice-Doyenne with Lena Baunaz assuming some of her teaching duties.

As we welcome everyone back to the English Department, it is a pleasure for me to remind you that while our department offers an academically stimulating environment we also offer a number of valuable opportunities for having fun. You can find details of these activities on the departmental website and the *rentrée* is an excellent opportunity to make a "new year's resolution" to become involved. The theatre group goes from strength to strength; the students' association (ADEA) hosts a number of events every year; the Film Club has been revamped this year (you can read more about these exciting changes in this issue of NOTED) and, of course, NOTED itself. These activities enable you to participate actively in the social life of the department and, at the same time, to practice and improve your English. A very important part of the department's interaction between staff and students is the formal committee, the *Commission Mixte*. At the meetings of this committee any issue of concern to students or staff is discussed (usually over a glass of wine). The committee is comprised of representatives of each of the groups that make up the department: undergraduate and postgraduate students, *corps intermédiaire*, and *corps professoral*. The current members of the Commission Mixte are: myself, Deborah Madsen (president), on behalf of the

*corps professoral*; Valerie Fehlbaum and Fiona Tolhurst on behalf of the *corps intermédiaire*; Linda Hinni and Bryn Skibo-Birney on behalf of the student body. We are looking for two BA students to join the *Commission Mixte*: one person to represent first-year students, the other to act as second-year representative, so if you are interested in becoming involved please contact me as early in the semester as you can. And do not forget to speak with your representative if you have anything that you would like to be discussed by the

*Commission Mixte*. Whether formally through this committee or informally through any of the extracurricular activities offered by the department, I encourage you to become involved and contribute to the vibrant intellectual and social environment that the English Department offers.

Bonne rentrée!

Deborah Madsen

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## Frankenstein and Geneva

By Students of the University of Notre-Dame

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We are a group of six American students from the University of Notre Dame who had the amazing opportunity to spend a week in Geneva researching and beginning a documentary about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its modern day legacies. We worked closely with the University of Geneva in our endeavor, and are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to learn from Dr. Elizabeth Kukorelly-Leverington, Professor Neil Forsythe, and Ms. Kimberly Frohreich, assistant to Professor Madsen in American literature. Additionally, we enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the themes and implications of *Frankenstein* with students at the university, in particular the theatre group led by Nicholas Weeks.

In our quest to better understand the modern day legacies of *Frankenstein*, particularly those in the arts and sciences, we structured our research around core questions and landmarks of the novel. The major themes we sought to research were what it means to be human, and the complex relationship between art and science. We traveled to various places related to the novel, including Mont Blanc, the Plaine de Plainpalais, and the Villa Diodati.

One of the highlights of the trip was our visit to the Villa Diodati. With the assistance of Dr. Kukorelly-Leverington, we were able to visit the grounds of the Villa, the house Lord Byron was renting the summer *Frankenstein* was written. It

was there that Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and John Polidori were staying when they read ghost stories and challenged one another to write a horror story. It was out of this competition that *Frankenstein* was born. Standing on the grounds where these literary giants once stood was an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience. It put the novel in perspective and allowed all of us to appreciate the magnitude of the novel, and how one event can truly change the world. *Frankenstein* was one of the most influential novels ever written, and spawned an entirely new genre of literature: science fiction.

In addition to locales directly related to *Frankenstein*, we visited many locations that provided insight into several major themes of the work. When we began studying the novel, we did so in the context of Mary Wollstonecraft's political theory and its influence on her daughter, Mary Shelley. Political themes such as oppression and tyranny permeate *Frankenstein*. The monster's struggle against his creator is indicative of a group struggling for equality and liberty. As such, it seemed appropriate to visit the United Nations, as an example of a force fighting for basic human rights in much of the world. We were able to interview a tour guide and get his opinion on the major themes of *Frankenstein*. The interview was remarkably insightful and gave us the opportunity to reflect on how humanity is a social construct. Our visit to the United Nations gave us an additional viewpoint on how the creature's place in society is determined by society itself, and not necessarily dependent on whether the creature is a

human being in the scientific sense. It reminded us that the struggle for human rights is an ongoing one, and the plight of the creature can be applied to many groups of people today.

While the political questions addressed in *Frankenstein* are significant, the more widely recognized aspect of the novel is its commentary on scientific progress. CERN, one of the most prominent locations of scientific research in the world, provided us with the opportunity to explore this question. With the assistance of Professor Hildreth from the University of Notre Dame, we interviewed several prominent scientists, working on the most cutting edge projects in physics, about the dangers of scientific research and the limits that should be placed on progress. Additionally, we discussed the role of science in society, scientists' responsibilities for their discoveries, and the applications of their research. The physicists we spoke to believe that science should be pushed to its fullest extent, because if it is slowed down then the human race's ability to adapt will slow as well, and our race may face the threat of extinction. They also told us that they see no difference between art and science—instead of speaking of a relationship between the two, we should see them as one and the same. Both strive toward a singular goal and the ability to discover something new. This was an incredibly insightful comment for us because one of our major focuses was exploring the art and science of being human.

Throughout this trip we gained insight into what *Frankenstein* means

today by asking various people different questions. These questions varied from what people imagine Frankenstein's creature might look like to what they thought the ethical implications for pushing the boundaries of science might be. We received a broad range of answers that provided us with new perspectives on the novel and its importance.

For our major interview of the trip, we interviewed scholars from the University of Geneva and Lausanne. These interviews were incredibly enlightening because they gave us new perspectives on the novel. Professor Neil Forsyth, who is a Miltonian scholar, was able to give us more information on the importance of *Paradise Lost* to the novel. It is an integral part of *Frankenstein* because it allows the creature to make a connection with literature and allows him to find himself. Dr. Kukorelly-Leverington explained the importance of *Frankenstein* at the time, especially as it was written by a female author. Ms. Frohreich, who works on examining presentations of the "other" in literature, explained how the portrayal of the creature is a common theme throughout literature. Being able to interview these three literature specialists gave us invaluable insight into how the novel has impacted the world, and how it helps us discover what it means to be human.

We also had the chance to meet and interview the artist Alex Bianchini, who was brought to our attention by Dr. Kukorelly-Leverington because of his exhibit entitled "I am by Birth a Genevese," which is the opening line of *Frankenstein*. His exhibit brought

together the work of many artists, just as Victor Frankenstein brought together many body parts to form his creature. Bianchini spoke to us about the pride he feels for Geneva, as well as the role his city played in the creation of *Frankenstein*. He expressed his conviction that art must be allowed to push boundaries and should not be limited by concern for consequences. Interviewing Mr. Bianchini allowed us to begin to see Victor as an artist, and the creature as his masterpiece. The interview also reminded us that Victor was not only a scientist, but he was also a man suffering for his art.

We also conducted interviews with various people we met on our trip, including the student theatre group from the University of Geneva. One question we asked was whether there should be boundaries to science. Some people thought that there should be, and playing God by creating man was an immoral and dangerous action that surely crossed those boundaries. Others gave us examples of how Victor Frankenstein's creation was similar to the atomic bomb. Still more said they believed that science should not be limited, but the ways in which science is used should be carefully monitored, as while science is generally intended for good, what it is used for often is not. The physicists at CERN told us science should be boundless. It was intriguing to hear all the different responses because it allowed us to truly see the range of opinions on the danger of science, a major theme of *Frankenstein*.

Probably the most interesting responses we received were from the

questions on whether the creature deserved to be considered human. Many people said he did not because his origins were not the typical biological process, while others said his mental faculties and ability to feel were what should define him as a man. Some said it was his fear or his anger and capability to hate that made him a human. The answers to these and our other questions changed with each person we asked, and the only unified belief about the creature that we found was that he was tall, green and had bolts coming from his neck. It was remarkable to hear so many different answers to our

question, and they all gave us a good sense of how difficult it is to pin down exactly what it means to be human.

Overall, our trip was a success. It allowed us to really explore the issues we wanted to discuss in our documentary with amazing people in a beautiful city. We are incredibly grateful to the University of Geneva for allowing us to interview their students and film on their grounds. We are also especially thankful for the help of Dr. Kukorelly-Leverington, who was an integral part of making our trip a success.

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## Bloomsday in Dublin

By Sam MacDuff

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In June I had the good fortune to attend the 23<sup>rd</sup> International James Joyce Symposium in Dublin. The symposium was held in Trinity College and University College Dublin, which Joyce himself attended. Over 300 Joyce enthusiasts from around the world congregated for a week of high jinks and theory about the city's most famous prodigal son. With panels on all of Joyce's major works, covering topics as diverse as gender politics, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, cinema, new media and copyright, there was something for everyone. There were

outstanding keynote addresses from some of the most renowned Joyce scholars working today, including Anne Fogarty and Vicki Mahaffey, as well as an impressive range of papers from graduate students, independent scholars, and established members of the "Joyce industry." Professor Spurr gave a highly acclaimed paper on "Joyce's Countergospel in *Finnegans Wake* 2.4," and he also chaired a panel on "Epiphanic Joyce", where I read a paper on "Death and the Limits of Epiphany", comparing the structure of Wordsworth's "spots of time" to Joyce's

epiphanies of death. With two of the most respected scholars of the literary epiphany - Morris Beja and Ashton Nichols - taking part, the panel was well-attended and well-appreciated. Thanks David! And thanks also to Professor Madsen, the English department and the faculty for generously supporting my trip – without your help, it wouldn't have been possible.

As well as the serious business of Joyce studies, the conference team invited several prominent Irish authors such as Colm Tóibín and Patrick McCabe to read from their exciting new works, organised a series of Dublin tours, including a guided tour of the *Dubliners* exhibition led by art historian Dr Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, promoted a recital of Joycean songs accompanied by Fran O'Rourke on Joyce's own guitar, and hosted a sumptuous gala dinner. As well as discovering Joyce's Dublin, one of the highlights of the week for me was a visit to the Book of Kells, an early ninth-century illuminated manuscript of the gospels whose elaborate Celtic knotwork provided one of the inspirations for *Finnegans Wake*. Other highlights were those many evenings when PhD students and Professors alike gathered in one or other of Joyce's early inspirations - the many pubs and bars he immortalised in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* -

to sample a little local whiskey or a plain pint of Guinness and enjoy the famous craic.

The culmination of the week was the great Joycean celebration of Bloomsday, held every year on June 16th to commemorate the day on which *Ulysses* is set (and the day Joyce first "walked out" with Nora Barnacle). Forget about academics, this is where Joyce lovers the world over come to dress up in bowler hats and Edwardian costumes to reenact scenes from Joyce's "little story of a day (life)." From Bloom's breakfast of toast and kidneys at the Gresham Hotel (remember "The Dead"?) to Bella Cohen's Brothel in Nighttown and Molly's famous soliloquy at 7 Eccles St, fans of the novel can trace its events throughout the day with a series of reenactments, impromptu performances and surprising Joycean encounters – I even had the good fortune to bump into Joyce's great-grandson at the Joyce Centre. For anyone with even the slightest interest in Joyce, I would highly recommend a trip to Dublin on Bloomsday – with free events throughout the day, ranging from the outstanding readings of Bloomanatics to the open-air seisiún (or "session") at Stephen's Green, to the fabulous gala evening laid on by Sweeney's pharmacy at the Mont-Clare Hotel, it really is an amazing celebration of Joyce's world.

# Film



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## Film Club: Important News

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With the new semester now well on its way, we would like to share some exciting transformations that have been slowly taking place over the summer and are now ready to be revealed:

**THE FILM CLUB HAS CHANGED**, adopting a new schedule and concept which will have more continuity, more discussions, more student involvement and more fun!

**First on the list of the important changes is THE FORMAT:**

We understand that it may be difficult for some of you to attend the screenings regularly. Indeed, in the past we have tried to provide as many screenings as the semester schedule would allow. The new format, however, will aim for quality rather than quantity, and this is why we've decided to reduce the number of screenings from 13 to 7.

Also, the new program will offer more than just screenings of films! As of the fall semester all screenings will include introductions by various guests

from our department, but also outside of the university. These introductions will aim to provide interesting complementary information about the films, and raise some important questions which your instructors may not have time to address during the seminars. After the screenings, we are hoping to hold discussions and although we know that some of you may need to rush off, we hope that these will also be beneficial to you and that you will enjoy bringing your opinions and expertise to these exchanges.

Indeed, **your opinions and knowledge count and we would like you to get involved in the creation of the program.** Each semester we will devote time in the schedule for "students' choice" films and we are all immensely looking forward to hearing from you. This semester, during the second screening (Short Film Night, Oct 25<sup>th</sup>), you will be given time to present and defend your choice of films. All those attending the evening will vote for the

best and most convincing choice at the end of the presentations. More information on the process of selection will be given at the first screening of the semester.

The change of concept for the Film Club also brings us onto another subject: CONTINUITY.

Rather than showing a whole lot of very different and unrelated films, we would like to test a more THEMATIC approach to the screenings. Indeed, the idea of having a “red thread” running through the semester has a number of very attractive aspects. Most importantly, this will allow us to go in more depth into a particular theme and have interesting comparative discussions. Although the theme for this semester has already been set by the organizers, the theme for next semester is still open to discussion and we would like you to help us out with that. We welcome all suggestions.

After a lot of thought and some intense discussion, we would like to launch this new Film Club with the theme of

## THE APOCALYPSE!!!

As you may know, the last day of the fall semester coincides with the Mayas’ prediction of the apocalypse. What better way to celebrate this extraordinary event than to watch a student’s choice film about it on the penultimate day of our existence?

Slowly building up to December 21st, this semester’s schedule will look like this:

- Oct 4 **Children of Men** (2006) by Alfonso Cuarón
- Oct 25 **A Short Film night:** This evening will explore a variety of advertisements, short films (including animation) and documentaries on the subject of the apocalypse. One of the films which will definitely be included in the lot is an Uzbek animation inspired by a chapter from Ray Bradbury’s novel *The Martian Chronicles* entitled “There will come soft rains”.
- Nov 1 **Mad Max** (1979) by George Miller
- Nov 15 **π (PI)** (1998) by Darren Aronofsky
- Nov 29 **Melancholia** (2011) by Lars von Trier
- Dec 13 **Prometheus** (2012) by Ridley Scott (Prequel to the *Alien* saga)
- Dec 20 **A surprise screening: “Students’ Choice”.**

As you can see, the final screening of the semester will depend entirely on your decision and we are looking forward to your “apocalyptic” suggestions.

The final change in the running of the Film Club concerns the TIME and PLACE of the screenings:

**The screenings will take place on Thursdays, in room B112 (Bastions building) from 19h15.** As always, you

are welcome to bring your friends and family, a picnic and something to drink.

In any case, whether you want to actively participate in the creation of the program or discussions, or you are a lover of cinema and want to drop by to watch a good movie, we are looking forward to seeing you on Thursdays! Those of you who figure on the BA and MA mailing lists will receive electronic

reminders before the screenings with additional information about the films to come. Also, look out for our posters in the Bastions building and at the Comédie.

In the meantime, enjoy the semester – the end is nigh! ;)

The Film Club Crew  
(Bryn, Sam & Anna)

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## The FILM CLUB in NOTED: A “FILM REVIEW” COMPETITION

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We know that there are a number of you who are enthusiastic film goers and throughout the year, Switzerland holds a number of wonderful film festivals which can be quite costly. **The Film Club can help you to tackle this problem and will provide a FREE FESTIVAL PASS each semester to a student who writes the BEST FILM REVIEW of one of the films screened throughout the semester and which will be published in NOTED.** In the fall semester we will be sponsoring one of you to go to THE BLACK MOVIE FESTIVAL in Geneva (18.01.2013 to 27.01.2013) by providing you with an “all-you-can-watch” pass to the event! The sponsorship for the spring semester is still to be determined – we’ve heard that the NIFFF is a great place to be at in July, but if you have other suggestions, we will be happy to follow up on that.

We are looking forward to reading you!



**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
FILM CLUB**

**PRESENTS:  
THE APOCALYPSE**

**CHILDREN OF MEN (2006)**

THURSDAY, OCT. 4

DIR: ALFONSO CUARÓN

INTRODUCED BY: BRYN SKIBO-BIRNEY AND SAM MACDUFF

**SHORT FILMS NIGHT**

THURSDAY, OCT. 25

INTRODUCED BY: MICHAEL RÖÖSLI

**MAD MAX (1979)**

THURSDAY, NOV. 1

DIR: GEORGE MILLER

INTRODUCED BY: MARTIN LEER

**π (PI) (1998)**

THURSDAY, NOV. 15

DIR: DARREN ARONOFSKY

INTRODUCED BY: ANNA IATSENKO

**MELANCHOLIA (2011)**

THURSDAY, NOV. 29

DIR: LARS VON TRIER

INTRODUCED BY: SPECIAL GUEST

**PROMETHEUS (2012)**

THURSDAY, DEC. 13

DIR: RIDLEY SCOTT

INTRODUCED BY: ANNA IATSENKO

**STUDENTS' CHOICE**

THURSDAY, DEC. 20

INTRODUCED BY: TO BE ANNOUNCED



**UNIVERSITÉ  
DE GENÈVE**



FREE ENTRY. ALL STUDENTS WELCOME

7:15 PM

ROOM B112, UNI-BASTIONS

# Theatre

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## Hopkins wrestles to keep her film afloat as Taymor scuppers *Titus* By Gervais Clark

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In this colourful and action packed film, Julie Taymor adapts Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* to the screen. Having won the war, Titus Andronicus returns to Rome as a victorious general. He holds Tamora, Queen of the Goths, and her three sons captive. In honour of his own dead sons, he sacrifices her eldest born. Titus then turns down the imperial crown and designates Saturninus, the late emperor's eldest son, to lead Rome. Saturninus first announces that he has chosen Titus' daughter Lavinia to be his wife, despite the fact that she was already promised to his brother Bassianus. However, he then marries Tamora. Intent on avenging her eldest son's murder, Tamora has Aaron frame

two of Titus' sons for Bassianus' murder. She also encourages her two remaining sons, Chiron and Demetrius to rape Lavinia. They then cut off her hands and tongue so that she cannot reveal their crime. Titus is deeply disturbed by the calamities he is afflicted with and begins to show signs of madness. However, he draws his family around him, plots his revenge, captures Chiron and Demetrius, kills them and feeds them to Tamora and Saturninus by concealing their flesh in pie. He then kills Lavinia, reveals all, kills Tamora, is killed by Saturninus, who in turn is killed by Lucius, Titus' last surviving son, who finally becomes the new emperor. The production is fast paced and

entertaining, however it is also plagued by puzzling stylistic choices, a distracting maelstrom of costumes and by extremely uneven acting. In this sense the film is disappointing, often setting high standards but regularly falling very short of its full potential.

The film opens to a brief addition to Shakespeare's text in which a child plays with toy soldiers, throws a tantrum and by the power of his imagination escapes to the Colosseum. A majestic tone then descends rapidly, with hundreds of soldiers covered in the grime of battle entering the Colosseum by moonlight carrying their dead. The spectacular architectural setting, the chilling colours and creative camera work all contribute to producing a gripping and dramatic atmosphere, drawing the spectator in and building up expectations of terrible events to come. Unfortunately, bizarre pseudo military marching, more akin to hip-hop choreography, immediately deflates this painstakingly crafted effect. This strange step, possibly designed by Monty Python's *Ministry of Silly Walk*, is no doubt more fitting to Michael Jackson's *HISTORY* music video than to one of Shakespeare's tragedies. By contributing no additional meaning, this drawn-out stylistic choice is initially puzzling, then unconvincing, and finally becomes tiresome and distracting. The uneven tone is set and this pattern of raised and dashed artistic hopes will repeat itself throughout the film.

The action is set in a collapsed set of time periods, bringing together classical Rome, the 19th century and the

Fascist and Nazi regimes. Fusing all of these Roman political models into one of the Roman plays is an interesting take on Shakespeare. While the original text is using the symbol of Rome to question Elizabethan England, the film uses Rome as a backdrop to examine modernity. This elegant device is constructed through effective use of Italian fascist architecture, evocative colours and symbols, as well as through audaciously designed costumes. While some of these costumes efficiently contribute to the action, the sheer quantity of them generates a tiring effervescence that is very distracting. Saturninus is one of the more potent examples of this affliction. Although he does not appear in every scene, he is portrayed in seven different costumes throughout the film, sometimes only for a few seconds. This extreme variety produces no additional or deeper meaning, and is therefore superfluous. Furthermore, the costumes, while very creative, often slip into the grotesque. Saturninus enters the action wearing a *Matrix*-esque ankle length black leather overcoat with a red lining, a shiny silver form-fitting mock turtleneck and black leather trousers. Later in the film, during the hunting scene, he is attired in a leopard-skin lined tan leather overcoat, with a matching leopard-skin trimmed faux Prussian helmet, shiny steel cuirass and cavalry breeches. These and other fussy costumes, along with a curiously long slicked mesh of hair hanging down the side of his face and peculiar makeup, make Saturninus look as if he would be better prepared for the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* than to lead the Roman

Empire. While one might be surprised that the film was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Costume Design, one can only be relieved it did not win as the costumes burden the film far more than they support it.

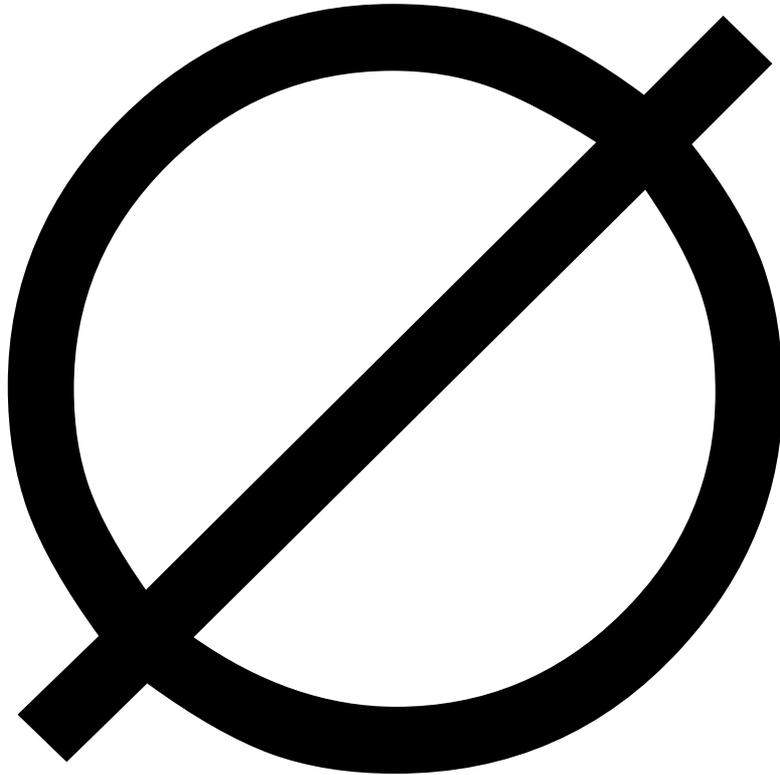
With the film already so out of focus, all hopes are pinned on the actors' performance. Luckily, Anthony Hopkins' portrayal of Titus is majestic and is able to transcend many of the film's shortcomings. Taymor chooses to stick to the original verse dialogue, with minor adaptations, and Hopkins delivers the Shakespearean lines beautifully. Judicious sequences of camera close-ups highlight the emotion he is able to infuse into the role. His sudden mood swings, the subtle movements of his eyes and his powerful grimaces ring true and do justice to the complexity and fecundity of the text. Colm Feore and Laura Fraser as Marcus Andronicus and Lavinia also deliver very honourable performances. Jessica Lange's Tamora and Harry Lennix's Aaron are similarly strong deliveries, unhappily weakened by garish costumes, absurd tattoos and odd haircuts. At this point, the casting director should have proclaimed a hiring freeze, as all other characters are either neutered by two-dimensional acting or are simply debased. The epitome of this phenomenon is the performance of both Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Chiron and of Matthew Rhys as Demetrius. Their

grotesque gesticulations fall completely flat, lack any form of gravitas and provide no substance to characters that could have been complex and deeply disturbing, and who are at the very centre of the action. Instead, they are utterly convincing as replacements to *Beavis and Butthead* or as candidates for *Jersey Shore*. Thus, the handful of capable actors do their best throughout the film to keep the action afloat, while the supporting actors do quite the opposite of what one might expect of them.

For these reasons, Taymor's *Titus* provides the spectator with an awkward entertainment experience. The film oscillates wildly between being a world-class drama and a cheap television B movie. One can also not avoid comparing it to the other two major modernisations of Shakespearean tragedies on film in the late 90s. There is sometimes a glimmer of hope that the *Titus* can rival Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996), however Julie Taymor overdoes it and is never able to focus the film's energy for long enough in a particular direction in order for her production to ever come together. One can therefore only hope that the spectator will have the patience to sit through the aggravation and appreciate the nuggets of great drama floating around erratically.

# Creative Writing

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# Impressum

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NOTED is a biannual newsletter produced by the staff and students of the English Department of the University of Geneva. Find your free copy of NOTED at the Department (Comédie), the English library, or online:

[http://www.unige.ch/lettres/angle/vie/newsletter\\_en.html](http://www.unige.ch/lettres/angle/vie/newsletter_en.html).



**UNIVERSITÉ  
DE GENÈVE**

**FACULTÉ DES LETTRES**  
Département de langue  
et littérature anglaises

Publication of the Next Issue:  
Deadline for Contributions:  
For Contributions and Feedback:

Beginning of Spring term 2013  
**1 February 2013**  
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