

I Was At Home, But...



At the beginning of Angela Schanelec's *I Was at Home, But...*, thirteen-year-old Phillip walks out of the woods at sunrise covered in dirt. His shoes are caked with mud. Then, he's clean and waiting with a teacher at his school. Seen through a window, Astrid (Maren Eggert) cuts over an empty schoolyard spotted with fall leaves and collapses at her son's feet. Phillip has been missing for a week, but this information is only obliquely given, if at all. A clue as to why comes later, when Astrid collapses in the dirt at the foot of her husband's grave or, at the end of the film, when she's again resting on the ground, in the palm of a stone in a river. Schanelec's films are always oblique, working around an event without necessarily voicing it. Or, you could say they're attentive to the mundane. If this film moves around grief, it's about other things: Astrid buying then returning a used bike; talking with a filmmaker about the difference between illness and acting; sleeping, sometimes, with her younger daughter's tennis coach; balancing reciprocal support and independence from her children. Phillip's class is performing Hamlet, in the same dry and measured style the film uses to draw attention to the materiality of passing moments. This coolness exaggerates any outbursts—M. Ward's cover of David Bowie's "Let's Dance" and Eggert's shouts and caresses. *I Was at Home, But...* is a rare case of generous cinema. Stories can offer ways of practicing grief.

Review by Harrison Wade

The Lighthouse



Following a slow and anguished pace reminiscent of his 2015 predecessor *The Witch*, Robert Eggers' *The Lighthouse* teems with more psychological unease. Shot in black and white and at a 1.19:1.6 ratio, the almost entirely squared frame thrusts viewers into a hypnotic realm that privileges the formal perplexity of symmetrical composition and a highly contrasted, exquisite play of light and shadows. Spatially and narratively, we are confined to a small island off the coast of New England, forced to closely confront the harsh tendencies of Ephraim Winslow (Robert Pattinson) and Thomas Wake (Willem Dafoe) while they tend to a lighthouse for four weeks. As the film progressively unravels their tumultuous and oppressive relationship to each other and their own selves, Eggers' psychoanalytic exploration is coupled with, if not dwarfed by the brilliant cinematography of Jarin Blaschke, whose work in this film was rightfully nominated for an Academy Award. Emphasizing a complex intimacy with twisting lines and shapes, the abstracted forms of the limited "things" on this small island become visually and conceptually linked to the ultimate and forbidden attainment of light, an unconscious drive toward ecstasy and the unknown made uncomfortably palpable by a consistently entrancing aesthetic program. While the logical development of events remains uncertain, seemingly magnified by pure affect, Eggers innovatively represents character motive as wavering indistinguishably between demented desire and cruel reality. *The Lighthouse* consequently foregrounds a gritty yet polished thesis on the human spirit under strain, desperation, and mania, confronting viewers with new limits of abjection and unmitigated drive.

Review by Marcus Prasad