



[Little White Lies film magazine](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Blogs](#)
- [TV](#)
- [Interviews](#)
- [Reviews](#)
- [DVDs](#)
- [Shop](#)
- [Forum](#)
- [The Magazine](#)

Search littlewhitelies.c

[Blog](#)



Berlin Film Festival 2009 – Reviews

Sophie Mayer reviews *El Niño Pez*, *Marin Blue* and *Can Door Huid Heed* at the Berlinale.
Sophie Mayer | 09.02.09 |

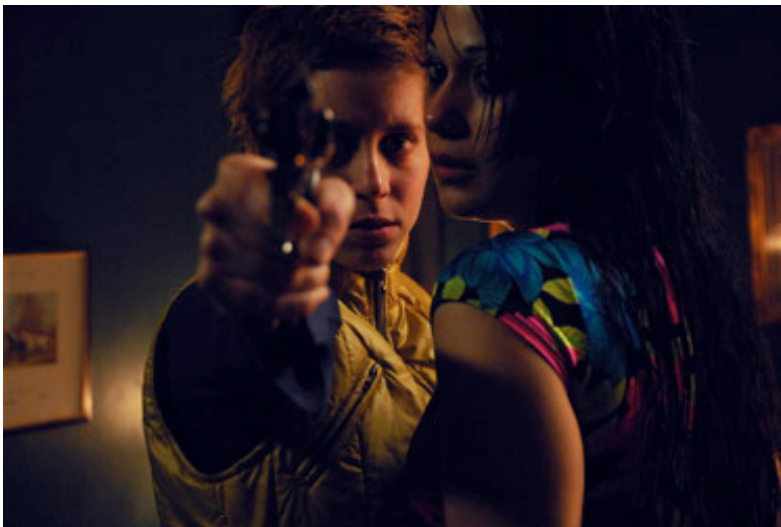
[3](#)

Related reviews and interviews

- [Go and see Flame & Citron for free](#)
Win a pair of tickets to see Ole Christian Madsen's superior World War II act1r.
- [Berlin Film Festival 2009 – Round up](#)
Sophie Mayer signs off from the German capital through the lens of Quentin Crisp biopic An Englishman In New York.
- [Berlin Film Festival 2009 – London River, Land of Scarecrows, The Private Lives of Pippa Lee](#)
More reviews from an ice cold Berlinale.
- [Berlin Film Festival 2009 – Agents Provocateurs](#)
It was doc day at the Festival, with Sophie checking out new films by Michael Winterbottom and John Greyson.
- [Berlin Film Festival 2009 – Breillat and Delpy Shine](#)
Catherine Breillat and Julie Delpy both embolden Berlin with frank tales of power and desire, cruelty and darkness.

[El Niño Pez](#)

If I'd expected to find [that tough beauty](#) anywhere on Day One, it would have been in **Niño Pez**, the second film from prodigiously talented novelist, screenwriter and filmmaker **Lucía Puenzo**. Her first film, [XXY](#), was startling, spare and incredibly sexy. With its focus on a singular protagonist, it had a deft confidence that made it almost unbelievable that this was a first film. With Niño Pez I wonder if there's a cinematic equivalent of the bottom-drawer novel, the one that gets hauled out and dusted off after a young author's scored a massive success and needs a follow-up stat. An adaptation of Puenzo's own novel, it's less sure-handed, muddier, less rounded. Which isn't to say it's no good: in fact, it's a thoughtful unpicking of the once-fashionable lesbian-killer movie, with shades of Heavenly Creatures weighing a little too heavily.



Complicated by a dual narrative structure in which past and present come together in the middle, the narrative pacing is off – the middle, in which the thriller element is ‘solved’, feels like an ending; while the end feels like the start of a third act – and a lot of talking needs to be done to fit everything together. Beneath that plot structure all sorts of fascinating things are going on, about class, race and corruption in

Argentina, about power in relationships between women, about dusty bus trips across borders, about fathers, about water. All this hangs on the slender legend of the titular fish child, which can't sustain the weight. So the film swings between the brittle social traumedy of BA's middle classes and dreamy evocations of desire, both brilliantly done if feeling a little **Lucrecia Martel**, and the trappings of the thriller (guns, shady guys, prison) which are less confidently executed and feel like pastiche.

While still possessed of the breakout talent of the decade in feral heartbreaker Inés Efron as protagonist Lala (here with long mid-brown hair that gives her an uncanny resemblance to Natalie Imbruglia in her Neighbours days), the film underplays her ferocious intelligence with a character who is written as either unfeasibly naïve or developmentally challenged. Left to cry and make irrational choices, Efron rarely gets to use her ability to galvanise an ensemble. Perhaps because it's an incredibly talky film, with surprising amounts of awkward exposition from a director with Puenzo's sure visual sense. When the film lets its internal visual rhythms carry it, it's breathtaking: these often occur when the either of the two main characters, Lala and her girlfriend (and maid) Ailín, are alone. When Ailín discovers a tiny puppy in a garbage bag in a railyard after the credits, it doesn't matter that we don't know who the character is or how the sequence connects temporally to the opening scenes of Ailín discovering a dead man, but the visual logic is powerful and certain enough to intrigue and move.

Also, of course, puppy! Baby mammals (I feel a fit of the Carrie coming on) are the altruistic screen equivalent of fabulous costumes and huge stars, a play for the audience's tangled heart- and purse-strings. Two biggest box-offices in the US in the last few months: Beverly Hills Chihuahua and Marley and Me, both pup-fests. Lala and Ailín's nurturing of Serafín gives depth to their characters, but the contrast between her docility and the ferocity of the police dogs trained by Ailín's boyfriend/protector, is an overwrought, yet underplayed, metaphor.

[Marin Blue](#)

The snarling dogs do, though, bring a bold ugliness into a film that has more than a streak of toughness about its beauty, as they do into Lala's unhinged middle-class dreaminess. It's a streak that the winsome hot ticket **Marin Blue** (dir. **Matthew Hysell**) could definitely use. I really wanted to love this film – in fact, I turned up an hour before the sold-out screening to elbow my way into a press seat. Abandoned Los Angeles, teen escapees from the shrink bin: it sounded amazing. Meditative. Possessed of (in the director's own words) an "austere beauty." Well, there's beauty in spades, but it's of the 'look at me' sort of maudlin poetry in love with its own aesthetics, so I expected an admittedly lovely shot of a bird on a wire to be followed by one of a drunk in a midnight choir.



Marin is a film that thinks it's Keats and comes off as Carrie. Its protagonists are defined by the kooky behaviour produced by their oh-so-disaffected perfect-metaphors-for-American-adolescence-in-a-sounding-like-Calvin-Klein-products-way disorders: Amnesia for Him, Narcolepsy for Her. Think of it as Nick and Norah's Infinite Prescription, complete with impossibly hot post-adolescents pretending to be geeky outsiders. After all, what location could be meet-cuter than a ramshackle mental institution run along guidelines set down not by DSM, but by the American Indie Handbook? My hopes for an excoriating examination of the over-medication of middle-class American kids evaporated as soon as Marin (**Najarra Townsend**) started singing fey lyrics over the institution's comms system, a trick nicked from the infinitely superior [See Grace Fly](#). Instead of analysis of any kind, there's an affected and affectless pastiche of early Hal Hartley mashed up with My Own Private Idaho and finished off with a TVtastic feel-good veneer.

[Can Go Through Skin](#)

For truly crumbling exterior-as-interior-as-exterior, the award of the day goes to **Esther Rots' Can Door Huid Heed**, whose Dutch title's glottality I love. It means 'Can Go Through Skin', and if its title suggests it could be grouped with Carine Adler's Under the Skin and Marina de Van's In My Skin, you'd be partially right. I don't know whether Can Door Huid Heed is a Dutch proverb, or one of those warnings you find on tools or chemicals with little skull-and-crossbones signs, but the latter would definitely make sense literally, in that protagonist Marieke (**Rifka Lodeizen**) spends most of the film ripping up manky carpet and wiring up a cottage in Zeeland.

Truly a low-budget wonder, Can Door was shot with a tiny cast and crew in sub-zero Zeeland. Most of the time, only Marieke is onscreen, holed up in her cottage – sometimes literally hiding in an alcove in the kitchen – which she has bought as revenge against the boyfriend who dumped her, and a retreat after a pizza delivery man attempted to drown and rape her in her apartment. Stop and imagine the Hollywood scenario that would follow. In fact, just rent **The Brave One** and sigh into your beer for the great movie that could have been, ruined by the narrative logic of revenge and redemption. Can Door is definitely in the line of rape revenge movies, charted in a great article in [the most recent issue of Bitch](#), harking back to A Question of Silence (Marleen Gorris), the Dutch film that kickstarted the genre as something more than femmesploitation.

Like Niño, it's an inversion and working through. Marieke does carry out acts of revenge, but the film is so tightly wound the viewer's unsure which are real and which are in her head (does she really have PizzaMan

tied up in her attic?). Like a toxic chemical, the attack has gotten under Marieke's skin; the film draws attention to the fact with repeated close-ups of Marieke's skin, particularly the point where her neck meets her shoulder, a close-up that is first given as the POV of the attacker. Blisters, moth-eaten holes in sweaters, cold water spilling through thin layers of ice and into city shoes, voices in chatrooms, drunken sex, desperately pretending to be out: the film is brilliant at realising visually and aurally the uneasy shifts between numbness and total permeability that are the aftermath of a violent attack, the body rendered as vulnerable surface.



These holes, scars, punctures, cracks that let the light – but also the darkness – in are realised in the fabric of Marieke's cottage as well: the hole in the drain where a rat comes in, the dusty windows she tapes up, the chimney whose smoke gives away her presence. Yet the cottage, for all its leakiness, is as snugly made as the film (which also has some daring narrative leaks and leaps, so for a while I thought maybe the projectionist had skipped a reel) and provides a haven in which Marieke can return to feeling. With that security comes the temptation to vengeance, and here's where the film and some viewers will part company. I'm not sure what I think about the end, but I was held by the rigour of its intelligence. Rifka Lodeizen, stomping around in her wellies chatting to goats, gives a truly Björk-like performance, by which I mean on the edge of acting and really living the character. It says a huge amount for both the actor's and the director's hold on the audience that even when Marieke kills a kitten (gasp!) you don't lose sympathy for her.

As for beauty, every shot is gorgeously composed, but not in the sense of lavishness or preciousness that word implies. It's not quite film-as-Shaker architecture, but it has something of that astringency, like Carlos Reygadas without the insanely long takes, misogyny or humourlessness. But wintry Zeeland is as bleak a location as any Dardennes fan could wish for, and Amsterdam's murky streets aren't much better. But Marieke's determination to feel (look out for an incredible shot of her buttocks goose-pimpling as she lowers herself slowly into a bath of hot water) frames everything she sees with a curiosity value that, you realise, is all that's compelling her to stay alive. The use of close-ups is so striking and unusual that the camera's POV begins to blur not only into letting us see what the character sees, but feel what she feels. It seems like the product of an extraordinarily intimate shoot and working process (more on which after I interview Rots later in the week).

Be the first of your friends to like this.

[« Previous post](#)[Next post »](#)

Little White Lies magazine on Facebook

Like

4,397 people like Little White Lies magazine



David



Black



Adam



Rian



Gregg



Thomas



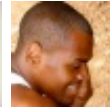
Gerard



Bettina



Malleable



Brice



Rafael

Comments (3)

Sort by: [Date](#) [Rating](#) [Last Activity](#)

Sophie · 86 weeks ago

0

Er, sorry, my Dutch is crap: Can Door Huid Heen, and interview with the amazingly talented Esther Rots coming soon!

Reply

[Report](#)[Ieneke van Houten](#) · 73 weeks ago

0

I saw this movie on a KLM flight. It definitely gets to you, the life-shattering aftermath of rape is brilliantly portrayed, but I would have enjoyed it more with a bit more clarity. Several reviewers have remarked that it is impossible to know what is real and what is in Marieke's head. I thought I was too dense, or unfamiliar with movie language, to understand that. I much prefer knowing what is real. Also, it would have been nice to know a bit more about the character. How does she afford this house, crumbling though it is? What on earth does she do for a living?

Reply

[Report](#)[BeverlyHills-Veneers](#) · 9 weeks ago

0

Although they said that this is a low budget movie. I still love the story line and how the actors act in this movie. I'll give this one a 4 out of 5 star.

Reply

[Report](#)

Post a new comment

Enter text right here!

Comment as a Guest, or login:



Name

Displayed next to your comments.

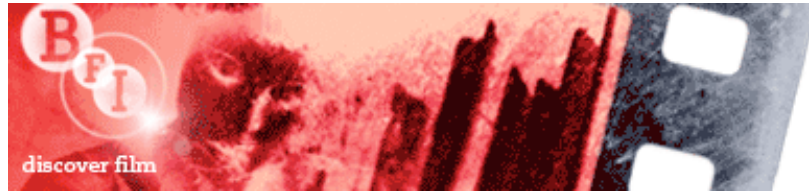
Email

Not displayed publicly.

Subscribe to

Submit Comment

Comments by



RESCUE THE HITCHCOCK 9
We need you to bring these rare films back to life



SIGN UP TO OUR MAILING LIST
FOR OUR WEEKLY MAILOUT & 10% OFF IN OUR SHOP!

Email Address:



Little White Lies
LWLies

@russellmardell @voyagefantastic @olifrape
@somagallery @SPLshop @TinaMories
@thesschroeder @BroadwayCinema Thanks for
the #FF love guys! x
8 hours ago

#LWLiesRecommends today: Restrepo " An aggressive, sparse documentary, cut down to a mosaic of enduring moments."
<http://LWLi.es/restrepo>

8 hours ago

In cinemas today: A Town Called Panic "An unapologetic roller-coaster ride into a hyper-vivid, hyperactive world." <http://LWLi.es/panic>

9 hours ago

In cinemas today: Charlie St. Cloud "Sign-post scoring and drill-'em-home emotional beats weigh things down." <http://LWLi.es/stcloud>

9 hours ago

twitter

Join the conversation

latest comments

- Question 1: No. As this was a feature film, with a big-name actor constantly in the frame, I was always at some level...
Anton Bitel [Buried](#)
- Yes. I thought all of those things. The flat-toned british guy really took me out of the film. and Paul getting sacked on the...
adam [Buried](#)
- Does no one else think that the multiple camera angles used from the very beginning of the film completely spoil...
Matt Bochenski [Buried](#)
- If you click on the link above to FrightFest 2010 Day IV, you'll see that LWLies' view was not all...
Anton Bitel [Buried](#)



•



•



•

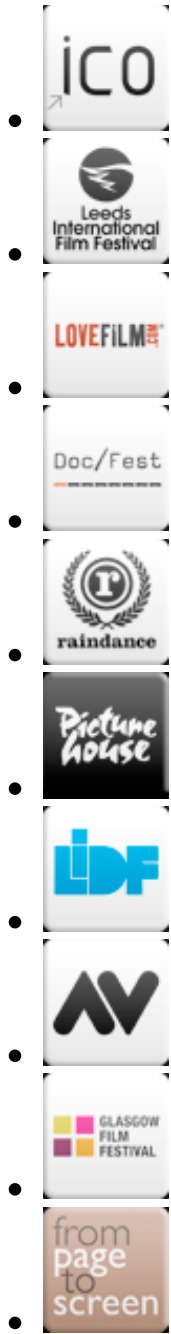


•



•





[About](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Stockists](#) | [Follow us on Twitter](#)

© 2005 - 2010 The Church of London Top Floor, 8-9 Rivington Place, London, EC2A 3BA Tel: +44 (0) 207 7293675

Published and designed by [The Church of London](#).