

# THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY

UK 2014, 102 MIN

PETER STRICKLAND

WINCHESTER  
FILM SOCIETY  
 WINCHESTER  
SCIENCE CENTRE  
AND PLANETARIUM

The witty and wonderfully eccentric third feature by the British writer-director Peter Strickland is set in a soft-focus, out-of-time, mitteleuropean world that might seem familiar to fans of 1970s Euro arthouse-sexploitation movies but has peccadilloes and peculiarities all of its own. It's a world populated only by women, for example, in which the work of specialised bondage-furniture-makers is in heavy demand, and talks at the local Entomology Institute are regularly sold out.

In between lectures, lepidopterist Cynthia (Sidse Babett Knudsen) and her lover Evelyn (Chiara D'Anna) enact S&M role-playing games in which Cynthia is the decadent mistress of their opulent mansion, and Evelyn is the servant whose work is never quite up to scratch and who must accordingly be punished in various devious and filthy ways. But while Cynthia would appear to be on top, the power dynamics within their relationship are chaotic and unstable. Neither is entirely comfortable in their role; reality – or what passes for it in a Strickland film – keeps on impinging on their fantasies, and their carefully choreographed scenarios keep on toppling into absurdism.

Strickland's film is rich, pleasurable and multi-layered – to last week's big S&M drama, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, what an expensive black forest gâteau is to a mass-produced vanilla slice. But while it's shot with an eye for the avant-garde and an obsessive, fetishistic attention to the detail, texture and manner of the Seventies films whose aesthetic he has borrowed, it's far more than a pastiche or mere stylistic exercise.

In fact, in the aestheticised, isolating world in which they live, Cynthia and Evelyn's heartfelt efforts to please and to reach one another become unexpectedly moving.

**Laurence Phelan, The Independent**

The Duke of Burgundy is a gorgeously clever erotic fable. Think of Genet and embroider with Borowczyk. Writer-director Peter Strickland, an Englishman living in eastern Europe, follows *Berberian Sound Studio* with this tale, matchingly surreal and deracinated, of two women in a mistress/servant ménage à deux. They are trapped, willingly, in play-acted love games. But then what is will in sadomasochism? Your will is left in trust, or in truss, to your partner.

Bonding isn't just emotional. Evelyn (Chiara d'Anna) likes to be tied up and locked in a chest. Cynthia drinks a lot of water. She likes watersports, and we don't mean synchronised swimming. A torture bed is under consideration for purchase...

First the film is weird, then funny, finally heartbreaking. Always it's visually dazzling. Cynthia's lepidoptery hobby keeps the screen flickering with butterfly colours and textures, as if their prismatic iridescence is a clue to the rainbow caprices of the heroines' amorous experimenting. Their roles get confused, intricate, interchangeable. "Try to have more conviction in your voice next time," says the servant partner to the mistress partner, when the latter weakens at one moment — we're all human — into a tender cadence.

**Nigel Andrews, Financial Times**

**WRITING CREDITS:** Peter Strickland **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Nicholas D. Knowland **MUSIC:** Faris Badwan & Rachel Zaffira (as Cat's Eyes)

**CAST:** Evelyn Chiara d'Anna | *Dr Lurida* Kata Bartsch | Cynthia Sidse Babett Knudsen | Lorna Monica Swinn

VOTING FOR *Force Majeure* A20 | B46 | C19 | D3 | E6 | Rating 68.9% | Attendance 100

Our next screening | **Kajaki** | Tuesday 19 January 2016. 8.00pm

'...A tale that is a visceral war movie...' **COMMITTEE WARNING – CONTAINS STRONG BLOODY INJURY DETAIL**