

# THE FALLING

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CAROL MORLEY

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One of the greatest pleasures of cinema is watching a film that continues to unspool long after the closing credits have rolled. Writer-director Carol Morley's enigmatic latest has proved just such a movie for me; a tale of fevered faints and shared rapture as strange and mysterious as the swooning sickness at the heart of its narrative.

Set in an English girls' school in 1969, the film charts an outbreak of apparently hysterical communal collapse, which follows a traumatic loss. Yet like the troubled adolescents engulfed in its widening web of psychological intrigue, *The Falling* trembles and twitches with so much unreadable meaning that it's impossible to diagnose its hypnotic spell on first viewing – if at all.

As more and more pupils re-enact the fainting fit that accompanied Abbie's own "fall", the school's chain-smoking headmistress Miss Alvaro (Monica Dolan) looks on with pin-pricking, era-changing disdain. "This generation," she scoffs. "They think they're so misunderstood. If they'd any idea what it's like to be a middle-aged woman, they'd know what 'misunderstood' meant."

In her 2006 short film *The Madness of the Dance*, Morley dealt with "mass psychogenic illness", and returns to that subject in the wake of the 2011/12 Le Roy high school case, which saw students afflicted by involuntary twitching, which was (mis?)diagnosed as a "conversion disorder". Clear links to such key texts as Ken Russell's fiercely political *The Devils* (and perhaps,

by extension, Hans Christian-Schmid's *Requiem* or Dietrich Brüggemann's *Stations of the Cross*) point us toward psychosomatic interpretations. Yet Morley remains thrillingly ambiguous about the true nature of this epidemic, a fluid sense of the supernatural breaking through in near-subliminal flashes, even as the film grounds itself in the firm terrain of the everyday. Morley has cited *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *If...* as tonal touchstones, but I felt the uncanny tremors of Roeg's *Don't Look Now* or Hideo Nakata's *Dark Water* in the reflective surfaces of Agnès Godard's pastoral cinematography.

Most bizarrely, with its closeted, nunnery-like setting, psycho-sexual machinations and off-kilter theatrical inflections, *The Falling* set me thinking of the Italian giallo chillers of the late 60s and early 70s; would it take such a huge jump to the left to imagine this on a double bill with *The Equestrian Vortex*, featured in Peter Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio*?

*The Falling* builds on the breathtaking promise of 2011's docu-drama *Dreams of a Life*, confirming Morley's distinctive cinematic voice and placing her alongside Lynne Ramsay and Clio Barnard (two of the UK's finest contemporary film-makers) as an artist who can combine the authentic grit of British realism with the heady ambition of European experimentalism. Her work is deeply rooted in reality, but its true power resides in something altogether more transcendent, indefinable, magical.

Mark Kermode, *The Observer*

**WRITING CREDITS:** Carol Morley    **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Agnes Godard

**MUSIC:** Tracy Thorn    **CAST:** Eileen Maxine Peake | Lydia Maisie Williams | Abbie Florence Pugh | Susan Anna Burnett | Miss Mantel Greta Scacchi

Our next screening | *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* | Tuesday 3 November 2015. 8.00pm  
'Exhilarating girl power' – a stunning feature debut