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**Friday November 22nd, 2019**

**Bait (15)**

**Dir: Mark Jenkin**

**Starring: Edward Rowe, Giles King, Mary Woodvine,  
Simon Shepherd**

**Sponsor: Sue Firth**

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**Synopsis:** Cornwall, present day. Cove fisherman Martin Ward scrapes a living selling his catch door to door. He has fallen out with his brother Steven, who uses their late father's boat for tourist trips, to Martin's disapproval. Martin is also at odds with urban couple Sandra and Tim Leigh, the new owners of his old family home, who have refurbished the property in folksy maritime style and rent rooms for tourists. Martin's ongoing dispute with the Leighs over parking leads to a confrontation in which his friend Wenna, who works in a local pub, punches Tim and is arrested. While saving for a new boat, Martin works with Steven's son Neil – who has started a relationship with the Leigh's teenage daughter Katie – and puts out pots to catch lobsters. After Katie's brother Hugo cuts open one of the pots and steals the contents to barbecue with friends, Martin confronts him in the pub and makes him mend the pot there and then.. Angry about him seeing his sister, Hugo pushes Neil off a quayside.

The prevalent mode of psychologically focused rural drama in British narrative cinema - seen in Clio Barnard's *Dark River* (2017), Francis Leigh's *God's Own Country* (2017) and Paul Wright's supernaturally tinged *For those In Peril* (2013), to name a few - tends towards impressionistic realism, emphasizing the concrete everyday world and characters' often melancholic interiority in roughly equal measure. *Bait*, a first feature by Cornish writer-director Mark Jenkin, is a striking departure from this norm: it deals in no nonsense terms with starkly abrasive emotional registers; it roots its narrative in specific socio-economic experience and accompanying set of conflicts; and it flouts the familiar codes of non demonstrative British realism by assertively highlighting its own filmic qualities and its makers' defiantly samizdat stance.

*Bait* is proudly described by its producers as a "handmade feature film" – and for once this isn't run-of-the-mill faux-guerilla rhetoric. Jenkin's methods here are very much in keeping with the "Silent Landscape Dancing Grain 13" manifesto he devised in 2012. Its rules include shooting on small-gauge film, silently, in black and white; post-synching sound; "subverting or ignoring genre constraints"; and perhaps the most important and most artistically stimulating, and certainly most pragmatically English-sounding - working "with a minimal degree of fuss". While unmistakably Dogme-esque, the manifesto is hardly dogmatic: the final, 13th rule stipulates that filmmakers should break one of the previous 12.

Not explicitly stated in the manifesto but certainly central to Jenkin's own practice and ethics, is the imperative of localism. Working with a Cornwall-based cast and crew and operating in partnership with the School of Film and Television at Falmouth University, Jenkin shot and processed his feature himself. He filmed it in Charlestown and the Penzance area on 16mm black-and-white Kodak stock with a 1976 wind-up Bolex camera, and used unconventional processing materials including coffee, washing soda and vitamin C powder.

This approach, imprinting Jenkin's authorial signature directly into the grain of the film, yields consistently extraordinary effects: scratches, little tempests of spots on the image, flashes of solarization. Along with copious inserts of familiar things that take on a heightened *objet trouvé* quality, (handcuffs, scuffed boots, fish heads on a plate), there are also images that



are more conventionally aesthetic but nonetheless strikingly beautiful, framed as they are in an otherwise every day context: dense banks of cloud on the horizon; the carved wooden faces that decorate the local pub; a young man crouched on the beach in rain gear, sky and sea behind him, which might almost have come out of another study of a fishing community, Visconti's great neorealist drama *La Terra Trema* (1948).

The visual textures are matched by an idiosyncratic approach to rhythm. Working as his own editor, Jenkin favours a staccato style cutting in discrete inserts (close-ups of ropes, walls and other surfaces); intercutting conversations to disorienting effect; or shuffling between separate events, notably the pub scene in which fisherman Martin makes spoilt urban teen Hugo Leigh repair the lobster pot he has damaged, alongside of Hugo's sister Katie and her boyfriend, and of Hugo's dad Tim sipping white wine. The post-synched sound is also aggressively anti-realist from the very start: listen to the insistent beat of Martin's angry footsteps as they resonate against the background of silence, all the exaggeratedly amplified scrape of the thread used on the lobster pot. Elsewhere, more conventionally realistic sound concisely sketches in social context: the middle-class background hum of BBC Radio 4 news in the Leigh household.

Jenkin's heightened visual textures resemble the practice of Ben Rivers and Guy Maddin, but to different effect; where Rivers transforms documentary images to make them uncanny, and Madden fondly, clearly exaggerates the look of antique celluloid, Jenkin's style is ostensibly at odds with subject matter rooted in the contemporary everyday. His theme is gentrification and the hostilities that have built up as Cornwall's coastal communities have shifted from a fishing economy to one based on tourism. Protagonist Martin is at odds with his brother, seeing his use of their father's fishing boat for tourist trips as capitulation to the visitor invasion – for him it is demeaning both to the family heritage and to the community. The brothers' old home has been bought by well-off Londoners the Leighs, incomers who have transformed this coastal property into a kitsch fetishization of itself, filled with nautical trimmings ("All ropes and chains," complains Martin. "Looks a bit like a sex dungeon"). The Leighs - the males, at least - understand little about the place they have colonized, and the same goes for their paying guests; a hipster dad, presumably down from London, rages about fishing boats waking him at 7am – though Tim's wife Sandra quickly set him right about people's need to make a living. Jenkin's satirical bile reaches its peak in a sequence involving a boatload of stag-party revellers, one man dressed from head to foot as a giant penis (the humour is effective in its counterintuitive understatement, with the tableau seen from afar).

While built around an extended flashback, Jenkin's narrative doesn't obviously call for the complex structure he has created, which occasionally teases us with disrupted chronology. A brief flashforward to a nocturnal incident that sees barmaid Wenna arrested, feels superfluous, and Hugo's eventual face-off with Martin's nephew Neil seems almost arbitrary as a dramatic pay off. Arguably, the depiction of this milieu did not really require decisive events, and a more fluid, relaxed approach might have served Jenkin's purpose just as well.

What both narrative and style achieve, however, is an energy that keeps us watching closely from shot to shot, where a more conventional execution might have encouraged us to relax into the flow of events. As it

is, we are never less than fully awake and engaged, both in the actions and in the social strains it depicts. Jenkin's tension-generating approach has the elements of a Western – the lobster-pot showdown is executed with the flavour of Sergio Leone though the threat of violent confrontation is diffused by the comical bathos of Hugo's enforced needlework. The editing style also creates the fragmented dynamism of a graphic novel, with individual images (the studies of objects, the extreme close-ups of lead actor Edward Rowe) having the self-contained force of comic book frames. In addition, the post-synched dialogue, seemingly attached to its speakers rather than emanating from them, brings to mind the effect evoked by sound theorist Michel Chion in his comments on the Italian post-synching style of Fellini et al, in which recorded dialogue effectively takes on the status of speech balloons.

Ensuring continuity through all the dislocation are strong acting and a witty, sometimes scabrous script, as when Chloe Endean's winningly acerbic Wenna muses on posh Katie and her local date: "How's she going to suck his dick with that plum in her mouth?" Similarly, in an imposing lead performance, actor and comedian Rowe will often wryly undercut his scowling man mountain persona with a sharp one-liner.

There is no escaping a degree of caricature, both in the casting - the supercilious 'Now look here' tones of Simon Shepherd's Tim - and the shorthand approach to the Leigh's M&S lifestyle, from shots of their fridge full of blueberries and prosecco to Tim's absurd Lycra sportswear. However this does not compromise the film's protest against a Britain that has become a theme park version of itself at the cost of local communities' economic and cultural survival. Counterpointing the ethnographic and touristic, *Bait* encourages us to question what we expect to see in supposedly authentic filmed depictions of life outside cities. Setting itself at a decisive and spikily pugnacious distance from the often reassuringly lyrical British vein that might be termed 'sensitive rural', it comes across as a sustained manifesto for the potential dissident force of a new photochemical underground.

#### Credits

<b>Edward Rowe</b>	Martin Ward
<b>Mary Woodvine</b>	Sandra Leigh
<b>Giles King</b>	Stephen Ward
<b>Simon Shepherd</b>	Tim Leigh
<b>Chloe Endean</b>	Wenna Kowalski
<b>James Thirlaway</b>	Mrs Peters
<b>Isaac Woodvine</b>	Neil Ward
<b>Martin Ellis</b>	Billy Ward
<b>Joanne Jacobs</b>	Hugo Leigh
<b>Georgia Ellery</b>	Katie Leigh
<b>Molly Hawkins</b>	Sophie
<b>Director</b>	Mark Jenkin
<b>Written by</b>	Mark Jenkin
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Mark Jenkin
<b>Editor</b>	Mark Jenkin
<b>Production design</b>	Moe Vogel
<b>Sound design</b>	Daniel Thompson
<b>Costume</b>	Marie McKeown

**UK 2018. 88 mins**

#### Another view

With Robert Eggers' *The Lighthouse* and now *Bait*, 2019 is quickly becoming a banner year for experimental seafaring cinema. This half-mast monochrome gem from writer/director Mark Jenkin takes a somewhat trite and mundane subject – the gentrification of a Cornish fishing community – and spins it into a visually arresting expressionist mood piece that's quite unlike anything you've seen before.

Filmed on location using a 16mm Bolex camera with black-and-white Kodak stock, it's a flinty requiem for a rapidly vanishing way of life and a vital shot in the arm for British social realism.

Taciturn fisherman Martin (Edward Rowe) is quite literally rudderless, his brother Steven (Giles King) having turned their father's trusty vessel into a pleasure boat for daytrippers. Compounding Martin's malaise, the harbourside cottage he was raised in is now occupied by a couple of London yuppie types, who have splashed chintzy faux nautical decor all over the place. "Been modernised," Martin laments to Steven. "Bloody ropes and chains – like a sex dungeon."

As tensions between the locals and seasonal tourists simmer, Martin continues to ply his trade by casting a partially worn-out net from the shoreline and stashing what little cash he makes into a kitchen tin labelled 'boat'.

While the narrative is anchored in contemporary concerns about the loss of regional culture and traditions, the analogue equipment and old-school editing techniques Jenkin employs give the film a distinctly archaic look and feel. High-contrast cinematography, overdubbed dialogue and extreme close-ups combine to immersive effect, creating the impression of discovering a lost relic of early cinema that's been freshly salvaged from an old shipwreck.

Jenkin owes a debt to the pioneering documentary work of John Grierson and Robert J Flaherty, but as an example of elegiac post-modern ethnography, *Bait* is entirely its own thing.

**Adam Woodward: Little White Lies**

#### **Our next screening: Friday November 29th, 2019, 7.30pm Return of the Hero (France 2018. Cert 12a)**

Is there a better and more topical way to end 2019 than with a French period costume comedy-drama about fake news?

In this wickedly enjoyable romp directed by Laurent Tirard (*Le Petit Nicolas*), Jean Dujardin (*The Artist*) plays the charming Captain Neuville. He is about to marry the naive Pauline when war breaks out, forcing him to depart for the battlefield. After not hearing from him for months, Pauline becomes ill with worry, pushing her sister Elizabeth to write letters purporting to be from Neuville, recounting stirring tales of derring-do. When he does return, he is welcomed in glory.....but is he the hero his letters have suggested?

Brighten up the winter gloom as Flashman meets Jane Austen...doesn't that sound enticing?