



**Patron: Jim Broadbent**

**Registered Charity No. 1156478**

**Friday June 23rd, 2023**

## **The Gleaners and I (PG)**

*Dir:* **Agnès Varda**

*Starring:* **Bodan Litnanski, François Wertheimer**

*(review by Roger Ebert, taken from RogerEbert.com, used under fair dealing exemption)*

**Synopsis:** An 1867 painting by Jean-Francois Millet inspired septuagenarian documentarian Agnes Varda to cross the French countryside to videotape people who scavenge. Taking everything from surplus in the fields, to rubbish in trashcans, to oysters washed up after a storm, the "gleaners" range from those sadly in need to those hoping to recreate the community activity of centuries past, and still others who use whatever they find to cobble together a rough art. Highlighted by Varda's amusing narration.

In our alley we see men searching through the refuse for treasure. "The Gleaners and I" places them in an ancient tradition. Since 1554, when King Henry IV affirmed the right of gleaning, it has been a practice protected by the French constitution, and today the men and women who sift through the dumpsters and markets of Paris are the descendants of gleaners who were painted by Millet and Van Gogh.

Gleaners traditionally follow the harvest, scavenging what was missed the first time around. In Agnes Varda's meditative new film we see them in potato fields and apple orchards, where the farmers actually welcome them (tons of apples are missed by the first pickers because the professionals work fast and are not patient in seeking the hidden fruit). Then we meet urban gleaners, including an artist who finds objects he can make into sculpture, and a man who has not paid for his food for more than 10 years.

Everybody seems to know this practice is protected by law, but no one seems to know quite what the law says. Varda films jurists standing in the fields with their robes and lawbooks, who say gleaning must take place between sunup and sundown, and she shows oyster pickers in rubber hip boots, who say they must come no closer than 10, or 20, or 12, or 15 yards of the oyster beds, and cannot take more than eight, or 20, or 10 pounds of oysters--not that anybody is weighing them.

In a provincial city, Varda considers the case of young unemployed people who overturned the dumpsters of a supermarket after the owner drenched the contents with bleach to discourage them. Perhaps both parties were violating the law; the young people had the right to glean, but not to vandalise. But as she talks to the young layabouts in the town square, we realise they don't have the spirit of the other gleaners, and in their own minds see themselves as getting away with something, instead of exercising a right. They have made themselves into criminals, although the French law considers gleaning a useful profession.

The true gleaner, in Varda's eyes, is a little noble, a little idealistic, a little stubborn and deeply thrifty. We meet a man who gleanes for his meals and to find objects he can sell, and follow him back to a suburban homeless shelter, where for years he has taught literature classes every night. We look over the shoulders of him and his



comrades as they find perfectly fresh tomatoes left after a farmers' market. Varda and her cinematographer find a clock without hands--worthless, until she places it between two stone cats in her house, and it reveals a startling simplicity of form.

Agnes Varda of course is a gleaner herself. She is gleaning the gleaners. And in what appears to be a documentary she conceals a tender meditation about her own life, and life itself. Who is this woman? I have met her, with her bangs cut low over her sparkling eyes in a round and merry face, and once had lunch in the house she shared with her late husband, the director Jacques Demy ("The Umbrellas of Cherbourg"). The house itself was in the spirit of gleaning: not a luxury flat for two famous filmmakers, but a former garage, with the bays and rooms around a central courtyard parcelled out, one as a kitchen, one as Jacques' office, one a room for their son Mathieu, one Agnes' workroom, etc.

Varda is 72 and made her first film when she was 26. She was the only woman director involved in the French New Wave, and has remained truer to its spirit than many of her male counterparts. Her features include such masterpieces as "One Sings, the Other Doesn't," "Vagabond" and "Kung Fu Master" (which is not about kung fu but about love). Along the way she has made many documentaries, including "Uncle Yanco" (1968), about her uncle who lived on a houseboat in California and was a gleaner of sorts, and "Daguerrtypes" (1975), about the other people who live on her street. Her "A Hundred and One Nights" (1995) gleaned her favourite moments from a century of cinema.

In "The Gleaners and I," she has a new tool--a modern digital camera. We sense her delight. She can hold it in her hand and take it anywhere. She is liberated from cumbersome equipment. "To film with one hand my other hand," she says, as she does so with delight. She shows how the new cameras make a personal essay possible for a filmmaker--how she can walk out into the world and without the risk of a huge budget simply start picking up images as a gleaner finds apples and potatoes.

"My hair and my hands keep telling me that the end is near," she confides at one point, speaking confidentially to us as the narrator. She told her friend Howie Movshovitz, the critic from Boulder, Colorado, how she had to film and narrate some scenes while she was entirely alone because they were so personal. In 1993 she directed "Jacquot de Nantes," the story of her late husband, and now this is her story of herself, a woman whose life has consisted of moving through the world with the tools of her trade, finding what is worth treasuring.

## Credits

<b>François Wertheimer</b>	Self
<b>Jean La Planche</b>	Self
<b>Bodnan Litnanski</b>	Self
<b>Agnès Varda</b>	Self
<b>Director/Screenplay</b>	Agnès Varda
<b>Music</b>	Joanna Bruzdowicz, Isabelle Olivier
<b>Cinematography</b>	Didier Doussin, Stéphane Krausz, Didier Rouget, Pascal Sautet, Agnès Varda
<b>Editing</b>	Jean-Baptiste Morin, Laurent Pineau, Agnès Varda

**France 2000. Cert PG. 79 mins**

### New season 2023/24

The committee is pleased to confirm that we are returning to The Venue at Bishop Grosseteste University for a new season.

We have chosen 6 films to be screened every 2 weeks from September 15th. A further 6 will be screened in the new year, subject to the success of our return, which we will review with the University in December.

We will be setting up a membership scheme. Given the success of our summer season and the return season before that, we need - and expect - 200 to join us at least. Some things will be different from the way the Society operated before Covid and we need everyone to be aware of these changes. The full details of the season are set out below

- Membership fee of £35. There will be no discounts for students or seniors.
- Recruitment will start on 26 June and continue till the season starts in September.
- No temporary memberships or day tickets will be available
- Admission is by membership card, with the numbers counted by 'clicker' to comply with BGU fire safety rules.
- BGU will provide first aid cover.
- The bar will be open before and after the film and will close at 10pm. Audience members will be able to stay until 10.30pm.
- The bar and all aspects of the film presentation will be handled by staff and volunteers from Bishop Grosseteste.
- Improvements have been made to the projection equipment and sound system. 2 dedicated wheelchair spaces are available at the front of the auditorium.
- We will be reinstating printed film notes, the reaction slips and the raffle.

The 6 films we are showing are

**September 15** - The Blue Caftan (Morocco, 2022). A subtle and moving love story set in contemporary Morocco.

**September 29** - 1976 (Chile/Argentina 2022). A middle class doctor's wife finds herself drawn into opposition to her country's military government.

**October 13** - Plan 75 (Japan 2022). A science fiction film in which older people are invited by the government to think of themselves as expendable.

**October 27** - The Beasts (France/Spain 2022). A middle class couple from France encounter trouble from locals while trying to run a smallholding in Galicia

**November 10** - Close (Belgium 2022). Two teenage boys who are inseparable find their friendship is tested to destruction.

**November 24** - Joyland (Pakistan, 2022). A groundbreaking film from Pakistan that explores the life of a trans woman in a religious society with enormous sympathy. The film earned an Oscar nomination this year as Best International film