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INTRODUCTION

The following articles were all published on the Australian Jodie Foster site between 1997 and 2000. They represent my first foray into the publishing world, beginning with Nell. The articles are reproduced here as text clips only without graphics or photographs. For a press clippings of the entire articles including all the graphics, navigate to the [Australian Jodie Foster site](#).

JODIE FOSTER: A BIOGRAPHY

There is a strange mystery and magic that flits across the screen, that draws millions to sit in darkened cinemas night after night to experience once again, the catharsis that transports us to strange magical worlds, and frees us from our earthbound existence. And in Jodie Foster, we have a performer who is comfortably capable, of assuming the mantle of an all round performer. She is without a doubt an artist who by her example of tireless dedication has paved the way for others who would follow in her footsteps. A quiet achiever, who in spite of relentless pressure from the press and obsessed fans; has maintained her credibility and integrity and in so doing, has earned the respect of Hollywood and the adoration of millions of devoted fans.

Born Alicia Christian Foster to Brandy (Evelyn) Foster on November 19 1962, Jodie's first public appearance was in a Coppertone commercial at the age of three. She then went on from that to appear in a variety of television series, including such shows as; *Mayberry RFD*, *Gunsmoke*, *My Three Sons*, and *Paper Moon*. Jodie even at that young age, was already showing all the signs of the enthusiasm for film that has characterised her career ever since. Jodie's steady income assured the family of a comfortable lifestyle. Yet Jodie seemed as normal as any other children when she was growing up indeed, it has been her normality, especially when it comes to her private life that sets her apart from her peers. It was her unique ability to memorise scripts, along with a businesslike attitude to her craft, which has ensured her of a steady income. That is until her mother moved her onto the world of film. Her last television appearance was in a pilot for a CBS pilot called *My Sister Hank* in which she played Hank. Shortly afterwards Disney was to sign her up for the movie *Napoleon and Samantha*. Her co-star was a 550-pound lion who became a little too playful one day and attempted to maul her. It was an experience for the young eight-year-old that could have shaken her confidence completely. She was characteristically brushing the incident aside days later, saying:

"When I finally got undressed and showered there were two holes in my front and two in my back. So I got seventeen shots and had to eat broth and jello for a week."

Jodie's career blossomed after a score of Disney movies. Beginning with the dark and foreboding *Taxi Driver* directed by Martin Scorsese. She played the role of a street hooker named Iris; this role earned her an Oscar nomination for best supporting actress. At the time, the part was considered too controversial for a young impressionable teenager. Jodie had to go through an examination by the Los Angeles Welfare Board, before she could take the part. She handled their concerns with all of her usual self- assurance.

"Actually I think the only thing that could have had an affect on me was the blood in the shooting scene. It was really neat, though. It was red sugary stuff. And they used Styrofoam for bones. And a pump to make the blood gush out of a man's arm after his hand was shot off."

The film has recently been remastered and re-released and remains to this day a classic, attaining to a standard which few films have yet reached. It has been Scorsese's influence amongst others, that has since set the tone for Jodie's career ever since. Yet in spite of critical acclaim for her role Jodie maintained her own agenda, after a couple of Disney

movies; *Freaky Friday*, and *Candleshoe*. Director Alan Parker was quoted as saying about her; in regards to a previous movie with Scott Baio, the gangster spoof *Bugsy Malone*. (1976)

“She took the script from me, read it through once and said. ‘I’m, ready now,’ I didn’t believe her and told her so. She said. ‘Try me,’ so I read the lines to her and she came back word perfect. Now that’s total photographic recall. It’s phenomenal and she has it all the time....”

Jodie was to make other movies such as *Moi Fleur Bleue*, *Il Cosetto*, *Carny*, and *Foxes*, (1980) before going on to complete her education at Yale University. She had been educated before this at the prestigious Lycee Francais de Los Angeles, a multi-lingual school where students are exposed to other students from around the world. It was here that Jodie learned to speak French, and became so proficient in the language that she was able to later dub in the dialogue for her French films. And at a time when most child actors were struggling to make the transition to adult stars, Jodie chose instead to finish her education at Yale. It was a decision that has set her apart from her contemporaries, of her education she has stated:

“I learned how to read in the larger sense of being analytical, of not looking at surfaces and thinking, ‘That’s what things are...”

The gaze of the public eye was to follow her into the Ivy Leagues of Yale with the attempted assassination of President Reagan by a mentally disturbed fan, ostensibly in a bid to impress her. And while she was affected by the incident, in true style she responded with a moving article in *Esquire* written by herself and titled *Why Me?* It has been her refusal to buckle under, when faced with enormous pressure, which comes across so strongly. Even in the face of death threats, she has maintained her dignity and courage. Jodie was to graduate from Yale cum magna laude in 1985 after obtaining her Masters in English Literature.

A score of films after Yale ultimately led to *The Accused*, (1988) and her first Oscar Award. This film about a young woman Sarah Tobias, who suffered from a vicious pack rape, is based on an actual event, and for that role, Jodie received her first Oscar. It was typical of the roles she has taken on over the years; Jodie Foster has never allowed herself to become pigeon holed. Her next Oscar was of course *The Silence of the Lambs*, directed by Jonathan Demme where she played FBI agent Clarice Starling. She persuades a serial killer Hannibal Lector (Anthony Hopkins) to assist her in tracking down another serial killer ‘Buffalo Bill,’ who skins his victims in order to make himself a ‘woman suit.’

With one Oscar nomination and two, Oscars to her credit Jodie could so easily have gone on to star in another movie. It would have been the accepted thing to do, but she chose at the time to enter the world of directing. And after picking up the script for *Little Man Tate*, which she also re wrote, Jodie went onto both star in and direct. It was a courageous move and one that has earned her the distinction she deserves. She plays Dede Tate, the mother of Fred (Adam Hann Bryd) a gifted child who enters a competition for gifted children. At the time, asides from the autobiographical comparisons between herself and Fred, the movie was also noted for the resolution between hearts and minds rather than a climax.

Sommersby was next for Jodie after a cameo role in *Shadows and Fog*, a Woody Allen film. In *Sommersby* she plays a civil war widow who welcomes home her supposedly dead husband Richard Gere. *Maverick* was a light- hearted change for Foster when she joined with Mel Gibson and James Garner in a rollicking spoof of the hit series of the same name. Moreover, as Annabelle, Jodie proved that comedy was not beyond the reach of her talents. The film was to earn an Oscar nomination for best costume.

Jodie's next film was the acclaimed *Nell*, she received an Oscar nomination for best actress. Moreover, there were many, who felt that she should have received best actress for 1994 for *Nell*. It was a movie she also co-produced with Renee Missel, directed by Michael Apted of *Gorillas in the Mist* fame. *Nell* was an important landmark for Jodie, in that it was the first film produced by her company Egg Pictures, which was hatched in 1994. In addition, of Egg Pictures she has stated:

"If I fail I will have failed my own way instead of failing someone else's way. I want to make my own mistakes-I don't want to make someone else's"

Her next film *Home for the Holidays* starring Holly Hunter, Robert Downey Jnr, and Anne Bancroft was also produced and directed by Jodie Foster under the banner of Egg Pictures. There is a strange sense of déjà vu to this picture, there are no doubt many of us who could identify with family reunions such as those experienced by the Larson family. Foster has succeeded in bringing an element of realism to the screen, without sacrificing artistic merit, and no small amount of dark comedy.

Of late she has picked up the distribution rights for the French film *La Haine*, which was released last year. Jodie recently completed filming of the movie *Contact*, a sci-fi flick based on the Carl Sagan book of the same name. Her academic kudos now include an Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts from Yale, (May 27 1997) for breaking new ground for women in film. Egg Pictures has also picked up the film rights for Margaret Atwood's best selling novel *Alias Grace*.

Perhaps the lines that would best sum up all that Jodie Foster is today would be the poem penned by Robert Frost.

*'I shall be telling this with a sigh.
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged and I-
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.'*

Written by Alastair Rosie Monday, 16 June 1997©.

Quotes courtesy of Jodie Foster. (Biography)

By Phillipa Kennedy Pan Books 1995©.

THE QUEST CONTINUES

“Imagination, industry, and intelligence—”the three I’s- are all indispensable to the actress, but of these three the greatest is, without doubt, imagination.”

Ellen Terry (1848–1928), English actor. The Story of My Life, ch. 2 (1908).

Dame Ellie Alicia Terry was a Shakespearean actress during the closing decades of the nineteenth century yet her words possess a timeliness today especially in the climate that is modern filmmaking. Jodie Foster has certainly practiced the three I’s during her thirty-something years as an actress. She is not the only artist who has exhibited all three qualities but as an actress she possesses an abundance of talent and seems to keep on coming up with the goods on a regular basis in spite of infrequent stints behind the camera. Foster is about stability and longevity, a refreshing change amongst stage struck celebrities. She is an artist who has had her fair share of controversy over the years and the slanderous rumours struck again when her brother Buddy Foster published his memoirs where he practically accused his sister and mother of lesbian tendencies. This was a far cry from his interview of two years previously when issued the following statement to *USA Today*.

“The truth is Jodie is not a lesbian. From all that I’ve observed in a lifetime of being very close to my sister I’ve never seen anything that would lead me to believe she is gay. To the contrary, she has always acted very heterosexual and interested in having loving relationships with men.”

His sudden turnaround did nothing to endear him to the press corps who saw it as a cry for attention bearing in mind that his own career took a fatal dive in his late teens. Jodie reacted strongly to the book in one of her few outbursts calling it an ‘unauthorized biography.’

“It (the biography) consists simply of hazy recollections, fantasies, and borrowed press excerpts... I feel sad for him.”

The book and the allegations disappeared into obscurity shortly afterwards when Jodie signed on to star in Zemickis’ *Contact*. This sci- fi flick was an epic movie that left some people disappointed and others breathless. It was an unusual movie in many ways, based on Carl Sagan’s novel of the same name. Sagan was a revolutionary thinker who saw beyond the brief span of history that humankind calls its own. Perhaps it is no surprise that Jodie jumped at the chance to play Elly, the ‘oh so serious astronomer who spends her life searching for little green men. Based on the real life work of SETI, the movie was surprisingly close to the truth and resulted in a flood of volunteers for SETI, who required computer users to help process information.

The role saw Jodie gain nominations as best actress in both the Academy Awards and Golden Globes. The nominations failed to gain the necessary votes but Foster still picked up two other awards. The Academy of Science Fiction, Horror, and Fantasy Films awarded her the Saturn Award and in the Rembrandt Awards, she won the Audience Award for Best Actress. The role of Elly was one that Jodie, true to form spent months studying for as she revealed in an interview with ‘Mr. Showbiz.

“Because I’m kind of a science illiterate, I had to spend six months reading all the baby books. And when it came to the more esoteric parts of astronomical science, that took me a really long time. I’d read half of a book and go, Wait, what’d I just read? And I’d have to go back to the beginning and kind of start again.”

The role of a searcher was one that appealed to Jodie as she commented later on in the same interview.

“I think there are questions I have about myself, about who I might have been. I love this idea of a scientist who’s a prodigy, a searcher, who looks into space and says, “I want to know where I come from.” And who believes in that so passionately she’s willing to leave everything behind to pursue her search.”

The movie as we know posed fundamental questions about God, the universe and as Palmer Joss puts it, *“I’m not against technology, doctor. I’m against the men who deify it at the expense of human truth.”* Jodie herself spends a lot of time studying religious texts according to her interview with Mr. Showbiz but has more questions than answers.

“I believe that faith, the need to question where we come from, the concept of a God, are as instinctual in humans as having to eat and sleep.”

1997 proved to be a bumper year for Jodie Foster when she returned to her old stamping ground at Yale University in May 29 to receive an honorary doctorate in fine arts. Yale President Richard Levin lauded her in glowing terms. *“In your acting and directing, you reveal yourself as a deep moral intelligence, exploring the outer bounds of life, helping us to understand what we can and cannot tolerate.”* Later in the year, (October 5) she was whisked away to the Santa Barbara International Film Festival to receive yet another award, the ‘Modern Master Award.

December brought rumours that Jodie was seriously ill when she dropped out of filming the thriller *Double Jeopardy* and the rumour mill began again. Thankfully it was merely a pregnancy. Jodie dropped the news to a stunned Liz Smith at the 75th Time Magazine celebratory dinner she attended on March 3. Jodie was typically noncommittal about the good news.

“I do think that every woman deserves to have a blissful first trimester in peace. Don’t you agree?”

It was to set the tone for what has been a Foster trademark, the intense desire to safeguard her private life. Having grown up in full view of the camera, she has been at great pains to preserve her private life from the paparazzi. Her seeming obsession has been the root of many of the rumours about her sexuality and mental condition, something the paparazzi constantly play on relentlessly.

The year had already seen Foster produce three films for her fledgling company Egg Productions, *Flora Plum*, *Alias Grace* and the aptly named *Babydance*. 1998 was time to take a year off prior to the arrival of Charles Foster. Jodie was unaware of the sex of her newborn however, preferring to leave that to fate. Charles Foster was born on July 21, 1998 at Cedar-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles. He weighed in at 7 ½ pounds and was 20 ½ inches long. The rumours had been floating as to who the father was but once again Jodie kept her peace, preferring to keep the information to herself.

1999 saw Jodie Foster pick up the role of Anna Leonowens in *Anna and the King*, a remake of *The King and I*. It was a case of life imitating art as Jodie travelled thousands of miles to a foreign country with her young son in tow. She is reportedly anxious that Charles should experience other cultures. The film opened late in 1999 and received favourable reviews around the world. The Thai Film Commission however banned the filmmakers from filming in Thailand, objecting to the portrayal of the King as a philanderer and frivolous. For this role, Foster spent months immersing herself in Victorian accents and managed to come up with an almost flawless British accent. She was ably matched by her co-star Chow Yun-Fat who studied Siamese, including the five different levels of Siamese used in Mongkut's court.

An initial agreement to appear in a sequel to *Silence of the Lambs* was turned down late last year (1999) when Foster read the final script and discovers that Clarice becomes one of Lecter's converts and celebrates their nuptials with a supper of human brains. It was a role that Foster found disgusting and her refusal to sign has rankled the noses of a few Hollywood heavyweights.

It shows however, that Jodie Foster takes her roles seriously enough to stay true to them. It remains to be seen whether Jodie picks up another Oscar for her role as Anna but she will not stray far from controversy with her portrayal of Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler's filmmaker who was responsible for the propaganda films that helped him attain to the reins of power. Foster is as passionate about this role as she was about Anna as she recently confided in an E Online! interview.

"It'll be the great challenge of my life, but it is a life worth telling. She made desperately wrong choices, and it is a great, cautionary moral tale that tells you about all the things you should never do. And yet, at the same time, she is probably the most talented female filmmaker of the century. What a shame." Her upcoming role is bold, daring and forthright and there is little doubt that Jodie Foster will put in a sterling performance.

[E Online! Interview](#)

Written by Alastair Rosie, ©, early 2000. Published on the [Australian Jodie Foster Site](#)

CONTACT

Published on the [Australian Jodie Foster Web Site](#) September 1997

“I am OK to go... ”

What if an incredibly life altering event happened to you... and nobody believed it had actually happened... ?

This is a question that strikes at the very soul of humanity, especially in the wake of the technological explosion that began with the industrial revolution and the Enlightenment, and continues to haunt us in the Computer Age. Mankind’s search for meaning has taken us on a wondrous and terrifying journey. In his book ‘Humanism: The wreck of Western Culture,’ author John Carrol makes the following harrowing statement.

“What should be there to hold our hands is not. Our culture is gone. It has left us terribly alone. In its devastation it cannot even mock us anymore, sneer at the lost child whimpering for its mother.”

His book chronicled the excitement of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment that ultimately gave way to nihilism and the insanity of Auschwitz. *Contact* chronicles the hopes of an orphaned world that reaches out for the stars in its search for a home.

I must admit that I have always smiled at the little green men syndrome but in *Contact*, I found a movie totally unlike any sci- fi flick I have ever seen. I have never been a Trekkie,’ and usually stifle a yawn at the next galaxy to be explored by the filmmakers in Hollywood. But I could not help but marvel at this new world in *Contact*. Not so much the spectacular deep space footage, but for the vision of a planet called Earth spinning silently on its axis. There is a sense of wonder when we look at our world from outer space. Yet Ellie (Jodie Foster) sees the stars and the planets and wonders what other worlds are like. She listens for hours on end for that one message issuing from the vast ocean of space that will signal to the world that we are not alone.

Her views are evocatively put forward.

“If it’s just us... it seems like an awful waste of space.”

The story of Ellie includes flashbacks to her childhood and her fascination with the timelessness of the universe. She communicates with other beings (human beings) via shortwave radio, in a sense it is her lifeline to a troubled world. The death of her father leaves her alone and sets her on a path that will ultimately lead to the unexplored ocean of deep space. Ellie is an explorer in the true sense of the word. She seeks the answers not only to the eternal question, ‘are we alone?’ but also the inner longings of her own heart. Ellie’s inner space is as mysterious and unfathomable to her, as the trackless wilderness of space.

Ellie is posted to an installation in the western desert where the search for extraterrestrial life is carried on in earnest. She quite frankly admits that she is searching for “little green men,” and carries on with her work for SETI. A romantic fling with a disenchanted theologian Palmer Joss, (Matthew McConaughey) ends prematurely when Dr. David Drumlin (Tom Skerritt) cuts funding for the project. Ellie’s lifelong passion takes her on a mission to obtain the necessary funding to keep the project alive. An eccentric billionaire, S.R Haddon, (John Hurt) comes to the rescue and SETI is saved from

an untimely death. Haddon's faith in Ellie bears fruit when she finally picks up the signals beamed from Vega, a star cluster twenty-six light years from Earth.

Going public with her findings brings Ellie into conflict with the universal bogeyman of the silver screen; the 'State Department.' She has compromised national security in the opinion of Michael Kitz, (James Woods) but there is little the US government can do to prevent the story from gathering momentum. Among the most memorable images of *Contact*; were the scenes where we see people's reactions to the discovery of intelligent life. There were similar scenes in *Independence Day* but not on the same scale. There is a magnificent panoramic shot of thousands of people camped out in the desert awaiting further developments. There are the believers, the cynics and the 'used car salesmen' who are selling alien memorabilia. Zemeckis has captured a cross section of modern American society, just as he did with *Forest Gump*.

Contact is essentially a two-hour manifestation of American culture. There is the greed and double-dealing, the fanaticism and the tragic heroes. However, overriding the seeming madness there is an abiding hope and a desire to travel uncharted waters.

The signals beamed back to Earth are eventually decoded and put together by Haddon to form the blueprint for a spaceship, Haddon in this story is very much Ellie's mentor. Nevertheless, when she communicates this hypothesis to the US government and consequently the world, a dilemma is reached. Should we build a craft, the purpose of which we are totally unaware? And who will pilot this craft? Is there anyone here on Earth capable of representing billions of people to an otherworldly civilisation?

The struggle begins in earnest as she meets up again with Palmer who is now attached to the White House as a spiritual advisor. He is faced with knowledge contrary to all he has been taught, that there is life out there somewhere. Is it a power greater than the power to which he prays? His feelings for Ellie are patently obvious, it is this that moves him to destroy Ellie's hopes that she will be chosen to represent Earth. Ellie's superior; Drumlin, is selected from among a field of scientists and VIPs to represent the human race to the Vegans.

The human race however seems cursed by an Achilles heel, a fatal flaw and right when mankind is on the brink of its most amazing encounter of all, tragedy strikes. A deranged cult leader, who has managed to infiltrate the ground crew, succeeds in his attempt to blow up the transport. The suicide bomber not only kills himself but Drumlin and the rest of the ground crew. It is another moment that goes down in history; when the hopes of the world were shattered by an act of mindless stupidity.

But Haddon, (Ellie's mentor) who has taken to living out his remaining days on a space station, reveals to Ellie the existence of another spaceship that was built at the same time as the first one. It is on an island off the coast of Japan and within twenty-three hours Ellie finds herself strapped into the new transport ready to make her debut into history.

The flight itself (along with the opening sequences of the film) would have to go down in history as the most breathtaking images of space since Kubrick's *2001*. It is a journey into another dimension, a voyage that Ellie records with a video camera strapped to her head. Her final destination gives us a glimpse of the universe such as we have never seen, a pristine world untouched by mankind, ever present, ever evolving and omnipotent in the face of human evolution. Ellie's encounter with the aliens will leave many viewers wondering if this is not some relapse into romanticism. It is Ellie coming home to those she

had once known on Earth, a culmination of her earliest longings as a child, following the death of her father.

Ellie's eventual return to Earth eighteen hours later however does not convince the scientists that she actually left the earth. It is up to Ellie to convince a Congressional Board of Inquiry that alien life was indeed encountered. The boundaries between rational science and religious faith are blurred when in the face of scientific evidence to the contrary, Ellie holds to her belief that she did meet alien life. And in the closing sequence we see the evidence for ourselves, when her story is confirmed by the fact that the video camera didn't stop recording for eighteen hours; in spite of the government claims that she was only in the spaceship for five minutes. The transport itself was recorded falling through the rings and into the sea; Ellie was pulled out of the ship barely five minutes after she had entered it. This is space travel heavily flavoured with time travel and the complexities of it are explained to the viewer without falling prey to scientific mumbo jumbo.

Contact is not in itself a sci- fi flick in the classic sense of the word. It is an attempt to explore the reaction by the human race if alien life was to be encountered. What would we do?

Would we, could we, have the courage to look beyond our own petty tribal differences and ourselves and ponder the big picture? There are three frontiers as yet unexplored; the inner space of the human psyche, the subterranean world of the sea and the uncharted ocean of deep space. Moreover, in whatever form it comes, space and time know no boundaries, are not subject to the laws and conventions of Earth... and will remain forever the final frontier.

*"They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars—on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places."*

Robert Frost (1874–1963), U.S. poet. Desert Places.

Written by

Alastair.Rosie. © 1997.

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ANNA AND THE KING

"I want to make changes for the better, not worse."
Jodie Foster in a recent interview with Nui Te Koha

Jodie's remark in a recent interview with Nui Te Koha for the Herald Sun sums up the essence of *Anna and the King*, a movie about making a difference in the world in which we live, as Bono sang in *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, "I can't change the world, but I can change the world in me."

The world of the 1860s was a frightening one and at times a brutal one. Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* would later write (speaking of colonialism).

"It was robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a grand scale and men going about it blindly, as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness."

Director, Andy Tennant's retelling of the classic tale *The King and I* is a refreshing departure from traditional colonial movies. Foster was impressed with the script as she recently stated.

"I didn't want to do another coloniser movie, like the ones about India where people drink tea and have affairs with each other."

Anna Leonowens, was the schoolteacher to King Mongkut of Siam and her diaries have formed the basis for any retelling of this traditional love story. It was the 'inaccuracies' in her diaries that prompted the Thai Film Commission to ban the filming in Thailand. They objected to the inference that the King was somehow attracted to a 'white' woman. The Malaysian government however opened its arms to the production crew and the filming went on in spite of Thai objections. The making of the set was an epic adventure in itself says Andy Tennant.

"Many times we were working in 120 degree heat, with bugs, elephants, horses, multiple cameras, helicopters. I can do it for a week, but for six months? That took some getting used to."

The result was an actual city within a city, faithfully recreated using CGI images and utilising Thai advisors who were treated like royalty by the crew. The stage was the largest built since *Cleopatra* and remains one of the wonders of the cinematic world.

Anna (Jodie Foster) arrives in Siam with her son Louis (Tom Felton) to discover that her 'Britishness' does not protect her from a climate where women are mere chattels and slavery is encouraged. Mongkut's (Chow Yun-Fat) cold dismissive attitude rankles Anna's Victorian sensibilities and she eventually demands an audience with the 'ruler of the world.' It is a meeting that has almost disastrous effects and which in contemporary Siamese society would have seen her beheaded. Mongkut however introduces Anna to her charge(s). She is shocked to discover that she will not be tutoring one son, but all fifty-eight of his children.

Anna's troubles continue when Louis is involved in a schoolyard brawl with Mongkut's firstborn, Prince Chulalongkorn. In true British tradition, Anna forces them both to write lines. Mongkut is amused to find Anna still sitting there late at night waiting for

Chulalongkorn to begin writing. The prince is determined that this British upstart will not get the better of him. Mongkut has other ideas however and lays out food for Anna while making it clear that Chulalongkorn will not eat until he has obeyed the directions of his tutor; his son wastes no time in writing his lines.

This scene was one of the defining moments, depicting Anna's refusal to differentiate between people of colour and class. Both boys are punished and the fact that one is her son says a lot to Mongkut who sees Anna with new eyes. In the colonialism of the nineteenth century, such an act would have been roundly condemned by British society.

Prince Chulalongkorn requests reading material and Anna gives him the controversial *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a poignant rebuttal of slavery in America. Mongkut is incensed with this flagrant disregard for the honourable institution of slavery and responds later by offering Louis a cigar, much to Anna's horror. The two parents come to an agreement to respect the others' beliefs, peculiar as they may be. The prince is not put off from reading banned literature however and Louis is not discouraged from sneaking a cigar, discovering as most of us did at that age, that smoking makes you sick.

The machinations of Siamese court come to the fore when Burmese rebels step up their campaign of terror in an attempt to overthrow Mongkut. General Alak (Randall Duk) has his eyes on the throne and will stop at nothing to gain the throne. Anna's relationship with Mongkut's newest wife, Tuptim (Bai Ling) is on shaky ground when she vainly tries to prevent her from being beheaded. Tuptim's love affair with her former lover is a subplot of epic proportions weaving its way heroically through the plot. You are vaguely aware of the tragedy about to unfold but like Anna are powerless to stop it. The scenes of violence are reminiscent of *Shocking Asia* and leave little room for doubt that this is a barbarous society struggling to come to terms with the modern world. The insurrection led by General Alak provides high drama amidst spectacular scenery and Anna's 'interference' in the showdown is classic drama. It shows a king unafraid to look death in the eye for the sake of his family, Anna, and his country. The subplot here demonstrates a surprising sympathy for Asian politics, a far cry from other movies that take a more paternalistic view. In spite of the Asian perspective however, the Thai National Film Board objected to Mongkut being portrayed as someone who danced with a white woman. Jodie however was enthusiastic about the love story.

"It's mature, it's interesting, it's noble and in many ways it's about the sacrifices people have to make in order to love each other."

Stories of impossible loves are infinitely more riveting, as *Titanic* proved once again. We know that Mongkut's relationship with Anna was never consummated but it holds the viewer's attention admirably. Anna warms to the king and helps him stage a reception for British government officials and merchants. Mongkut seems more the awkward bachelor than the most powerful man in the country. At the reception, she dances with the king, a scandalous act, in view of British protocol at the time. It was a scene that Foster played convincingly without sacrificing artistic merit. Her decision to stay by the king's side when he faced a rebel army led by one of his former generals sets the relationship in stone. Tenderness is undoubtedly one of the major selling points of the movie. Anna's relationship with Mongkut's little princess is touching, as is the famous dance that outraged not only Siamese society but British sensibilities. This is a movie about two

people dedicated to their own beliefs, trying to make the best of what they have; in that respect, *Anna and the King* is on the same par as *Titanic* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Classic tales of unrequited love and doomed 'never to be consummated affairs' make for blistering sexuality that far eclipses the steamy love scenes of today.

The movie is nothing like the original, *The King and I* but that is to be expected, this is the nineties and we have technology at our disposal that wasn't available years ago when Yul Brynner danced across the screen. Unlike the former versions, this is no frivolous flight of fancy. The death and poverty are real, as is the king's commitment to bring his kingdom into the modern world without selling out to British rule. Leonowen's diaries may not have been exactly correct but she was to have an influence on the king's firstborn who was the first Asian monarch to abolish slavery and institute rights for women.

Foster herself has commented that she liked the movie for that reason.

"I think they (movies) can change things. I think they have the opportunity to inspire, help people to grow or think about things differently. I want to be a part of these kinds of films."

Anna and the King remains a testament to one woman's determination to finish the task she was given and poignant evidence that love conquers all, even a king's heart.

Written by Alastair Rosie

08/01/2000

The screenplay was based on diaries written by Anna Leonowens

SOURCES

'Jodie Foster: Crown Jewel'

Interviewed by Nui Te Koha *Herald Sun*

December 16 1999

The Internet Movie Database (Search for *Anna and the King*)

NELL

“You don't look into each other's eyes... and you are hungry for quietness...”

Such are the lines spoken by Nell (Jodie Foster) and translated to the listener, by Dr Jerome Lovell (Liam Neeson) they are words that ring true to our own sense of isolation and loneliness. This heartwarming film has an endearing quality about it that stirs the imagination at the expense of your credibility. It has been criticised by previous reviewers as being unrealistic in its portrayal of a hermit girl lost in the backwoods of North Carolina. With all due respect to previous reviewers however, the film was never intended to be an accurate portrayal of a 'wild child.' Jodie Foster was quoted as saying in regards to Nell.

“She represents something, a secret nature we've all lost somewhere along the line. She's this extraordinary vulnerable innocent who doesn't know that when you're in pain you don't cry, and who doesn't know you're supposed to be ashamed or that you're supposed to cover up your body.”

Jodie Foster plays the part of a vulnerable young woman with a degree of sophistication that leaves the viewer spellbound, and the movie is well worth the watch purely for this reason. Liam Neeson and Natasha Richardson who in real life are married bring romance to the big screen in a way that few films can match. And it is here, with this relationship that the movie comes startlingly close to reality.

The opening scenes concern the discovery of a body in a remote mountain cabin by a delivery boy. The local sheriff enlists the aid of Dr Lovell to ascertain the cause of death. Nell is discovered by accident hiding in a cul de sac by Lovell and so begins the extraordinary adventure into the heart of innocence. Gerry is naturally drawn to the wild natural beauty all around, and there are some breathtaking views of the Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina, where the movie was shot.

It is this scenery that adds to the mystery that is *Nell*; Gerry enlists the aid of a psychologist Dr Paula Olsen (Natasha Richardson) to help in his diagnosis. Nell's strange dialect is what puzzles them. She picked up her language from her mother who had been paralysed by an apparent stroke. The absence of a narrator with this film has the effect of drawing us ever closer to the characters in an attempt to decipher her language. Apted aids us in our investigation with a series of flashbacks to witness the world as Nell sees it; the flashbacks are cleverly spaced throughout the film so as to give us the barest of hints as to Nell's past.

The two doctors lock horns over Nell early on in the film, Olsen wants to hospitalise her and put her under the microscope. Gerry wants to leave her as she is; the two are given three months to examine Nell on her territory before a decision will be made. Up until this point in the movie, the action is fairly swift and to the point, with brief shots of Nell overlaying the courtroom scene.

After that however, the film slows down, as if Apted wished to show the magic that is Nell. Olsens's technique involves a luxury houseboat and video technology. Lovell prefers camping out in the woods and when not with Paula, he is to be found sitting in the cabin with Nell learning her language. Nell has her own hidden agenda though, Gerry becomes Gayanga Jay (Guardian Angel Gerry) in the end the two doctors become almost guardian angels to Nell. The subtext of the movie also involves the fusion of hearts and minds

between Gerry and Paula. There is almost a relaxed fluidity between the two, the light-hearted banter that comes to us as professional jealousy. There is a point in the movie when the two are head to head in a blazing row that is interrupted by the unexpected appearance of Nell. She takes centre stage as she grasps their heads and puts them together with the order "Tawk." Gerry and Paula are forced to apologise as Paula says. "Mommy loves Daddy, really." The scenes that stole the heart of many was the nude bathing scenes, there is a mystical innocence as Nell swims in the lake, a hearkening back to our primal roots when guilt and shame were nonexistent. We also discover in time the remains of Nell's sister, apparently killed whilst jumping from a hillside. The two sisters were born as the result of the rape of their mother, who then succeeded in shutting herself, and her daughters away from 'civilised' society.

The trip into town in order to introduce Nell to 'civilised' society goes badly. The scene in the pool hall has faint overtones of *The Accused*. With the encroaching press eager to thrust Nell into the limelight, the decision is taken to hospitalise her. The result is a near disaster as Nell begins to fade away. Gerry's kidnapping of his patient with a resigned Paula looking on, eventually results in a touching scene in a motel room. In the end however, it is Nell who must speak for herself. Is she able to avoid the gaze of the microscope? This she does with Gerry acting as interpreter. This scene came in for some unfair criticism as being too simple and cliché.

But we are dealing with a representation of a wild child; which in reality would be far removed from Nell's childlike innocence. Nell has something to say to all of us in an age of global communications, mass media and the heartache and trauma of interpersonal relationships gone sour. 'We don't look into each other's eyes, and we are all hungry for quietness.' Nell has found the quiet places of the heart where she can retreat when the pain of her past seems to overwhelm her. To remove her from her past is to cut her off from the life giving soil that is her source of inspiration. She has no fear of looking into another's eyes because she has no fear or shame, without these two monkeys on our backs; we are free to see the other as somehow more human. There are lessons to be learned from *Nell*, but they are to be learned from watching the movie, a single showing will leave us wondering. A second showing will steal your heart from under you leaving the viewer only faintly aware of the simple deception.

Written by A.Rosie. © June 1997

Quote from Jodie Foster courtesy of

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THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

Clarice; "You see a lot doctor...but are you strong enough to point that high powered perception at yourself... what about it? Why don't you...why don't you look at yourself and write down what you see... or maybe you're afraid."

Dr Lecter; "A census taker once tried to test me... I ate his liver with some Fava beans and a nice Chianti..."

So ends Clarice's introduction to Dr Hannibal Lecter, (Anthony Hopkins) the famed psychiatrist and serial killer. In *Silence of the Lambs* the screen adaptation of Thomas Harris' book of the same name, Lecter is pure malevolent evil. He hisses and mocks her, smelling out her perfume and her fears. His eyes miss nothing about Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) a young FBI agent in training. There is the West Virginian accent that Starling tries so desperately to hide, the carefully tailored suit that attempts to portray a quiet confidence, but is a mask for her inner trepidation. She seems to have successfully mastered the cultured professional attitude of an FBI agent. *Silence of the Lambs'* appeal lies primarily in the interaction between imprisoned psychiatrist Dr Hannibal Lecter, and FBI agent Clarice Starling; in a verbal duel she tries desperately to find clues as to the whereabouts of a vicious serial killer known only as Buffalo Bill.' (Ted Levine) The FBI agent in charge of the case, Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn), sends Starling to Lecter in the hopes that she can convince him to provide clues as to the murderer's identity. In a sense, Clarice becomes a kind of psychic sacrificial lamb, offered up by Crawford. She is exposed to the hideous horror of all that Lecter represents. Foster commented on her character, saying.

"... the truth is she's a hero because she has tragic flaws. She faces things about herself that are ugly and while facing them she solves the crime. This is hero mythology and that has never been applied to a female character in film, ever..."

Dr Frederick Chilton (Anthony Heald) issues a chilling warning to her, before she goes down into the dungeon like atmosphere that has been Lecter's natural habitat for years. He shows her pictures of what happened to a previous woman who got too close to the Doctor as he explains to her.

"They were able to reset her jaw and reinsert one of her eyes..."

She is then left alone in the dark with a man who personifies evil incarnate, and whilst a thick Plexiglas screen protects her physically, mentally and emotionally she is at his mercy. And Clarice is certainly mauled in her first encounter with Lecter. He smells out her innermost fears and insecurities, looks disdainfully at her tailored suit and pronounces his judgment of her, eliciting a West Virginian accent similar to hers.'

"Who was your father? Was he a coal miner? A farmer? Oh how quickly the boys found you, all those tedious sticky fumbings in the back seats of cars while you could only dream of getting out, getting anywhere, getting all the way to the F.B.I..."

He dismisses her disdainfully shortly after that, leaving her to brave the abuse of the other prisoners in the cellblock. Miggs, who has the cell next to Lecter's, manages to ejaculate over her, and all self control that Starling has been able to muster vanishes. Lecter seizes the advantage and calls her back. Is he trying to get to her? Or has she aroused some

long buried humanity within his dark soul? Clarice is given her first clue as to the identity of a being who deals out horrifying deaths to his victims.

And so begins a grotesque journey into the heart of horror. Jodie Foster brings an element of realism to the part as Clarice answers Hannibal's quid pro quo. Jodie applied herself with meticulous devotion to the part. She spent two weeks at the FBI training academy in Quantico, where she met Special Agent Mary Ann Kraus she was later to base part of Clarice's character on her. She also spent four hours in a morgue getting used to the sight of dead bodies and even went as far as to attend an actual autopsy. It was this devotion to her craft that brought an element of realism to her part. Speaking of the autopsy scene she states:

"... the more my character gets into the work, she experiences a kind of exhilaration. She's excited. She wants to get inside the skull of the man who did this. Once Clarice sees the first corpse, she's so immersed in it that nothing else is possible. She can't think of anything else. So it's almost something she has to free herself of..."

It is also a pilgrimage into Clarice's childhood, where we meet a father who was killed in the line of duty he too was a police officer. The fact that the first body was found in West Virginia brings the story uncomfortably close to home for Clarice. It is something that Hannibal knows only too well, his excursions into her mind and soul uncover elements of her past she has managed thus far to keep hidden.

When Buffalo Bill snatches his next victim Catherine Martin (Brooke Smith) the chase suddenly takes a deadly turn for the worse. Clarice embarks on a one-woman crusade to save the Senator's daughter before she becomes Bill's next victim. The unfortunate girl's mother eventually comes face to face with Lecter himself who is by now suspected of knowing the killer's identity. There is betrayal in the night air as they face each other, she has what Lecter wants but it is not within her power to grant. He has what she wants but chooses in the end to hold his tongue, he is waiting for Starling to reappear, she must appear or Catherine dies and Clarice's soul will not find release.

Clarice approaches with his paintings just as Chilton bursts through the door. She barely has time to lay them down before she is dragged away. Lecter is calling out for her, holding out the information she had left him regarding the case. Impulsively she breaks free and runs towards him pursued by Chilton, but Starling reaches the cage and manages to get the precious evidence that will ultimately lead to the whereabouts of Bill.

The story gathers momentum as she deciphers the so-called random killings with Lecter's handwriting scrawled across the map. *'Isn't this a little too random?'* Clarice begins stalking the stalker as Lecter finally affects his escape under horrifying circumstances. Clarice finally stumbles upon the macabre reasoning behind Buffalo Bill's obsession with skinning his victims. She frantically tells Crawford over the phone that Bill is making himself a woman suit.

The climax of the movie is of course the scene at Buffalo Bill's house of horrors, just as FBI agents are stumbling through an empty house on a bungled raid. Catherine has taken matters into her own hands, as she manages to kidnap her intended killer's poodle. The tide has turned and Bill is frantically concerned for the safety of his dog, Starling is knocking at the door and so the final hunt is played out.

Aided by night vision goggles he stalks her through the house. In the pitch-blackness Starling is stumbling blindly in the darkness aware of the danger breathing down her neck.

There is a dry click, a blaze of gunfire, and Bill's reign of terror is over, the maiden is rescued and Clarice has gone through her rites of passage.

Clarice represents that part of us that tries desperately to fit in with the world about us, an image that is held up at all costs, a wall that keeps out the demons of the night. Lecter and ultimately Bill seem to represent the darkness within our souls that we must face up to if we are ultimately to as Thomas Harris puts it in the closing lines of his book. '... to sleep deeply, sweetly in the silence of the lambs.' Jodie was to speak about the substance of the role she played in *Silence of the Lambs* as.

"She's such a complex character-somebody who's all about what she's not admitting. She's a rural person who's trying desperately to become an urban person or someone who has a fear of the mediocre, fear of being average. It's a complicated pattern, and a problem that isn't addressed very often. It's the responsibility of the studios in some ways to start developing female heroes and educating the audiences about them."

Written by

Alastair.Rosie. © August 1997.

LITTLE MAN TATE

“People are people through other people.”

Xhosa proverb.

A child looks up from a book and blinks nervously as he stares out at the world around him; a world that has chosen for the most part to either ridicule or ignore him. Fred Tate as played by Adam Hann Bryd, is an archetype of the frightened child we so often encounter, whether within ourselves or in others around us.

Little Man Tate was Jodie Foster’s first serious venture into the world of directing and the end result was a movie that mirrored her careful devotion and dedication to her craft.

“... the minute I read Little Man Tate, I knew that I could spend my whole life making this movie.”

Jodie plays the character Dede, a single mother who juggles her time between waitressing and spending time with her son Fred. Hers is a cluttered life spiced with copious doses of affection and laughter. She is very much his mother/father and his best friend all rolled into one. Early in the movie, we see Dede dancing around the living room with her ‘little partner’, an image that is familiar to single parent households. The almost carefree abandon with which Dede throws herself into life, is as much a comfort to Fred as a disturbance. He reads with a passion, solves complicated mathematical problems in his head and plays the piano like a virtuoso. Fred is a child prodigy, an intensely serious child who worries more about the state of the world around him, than silly childhood games. He is very much a loner, a shy retiring child who desperately needs friendship and to feel that he too is a part of society, and yet finds himself ostracised by his peers because of his remarkable intellect.

Fred is soon exposed to Jane Grierson (Dianne Wiest) who runs the Grierson Institute, a school for gifted children. Both Jane and Dede are protective of Fred’s mind and heart respectively. Jane is more concerned that Dede will unwittingly smother his potential, whilst Dede simply wants her little boy to grow up normally without being subjected to Jane’s analysis.

The institute however hooks Fred; he is after all a serious young man whose mind is so far advanced as to leave both Jane and Garth (David Pierce) astounded, as Garth states early on in the film.

“It’s not so much what he knows, but what he understands.”

Dede initially resists Jane’s advances, Fred is all she has and like a lioness with her cubs she is not about to let another human come between her and Fred. She relents however after a disastrous birthday party where none of Fred’s so-called friends turn up. In desperation she turns to the only person in whom Fred has shown any interest. Jane takes to the challenge and Fred is soon whisked away from his mother and all he has known. His destination is a national competition called ‘Odyssey of the Mind,’ a sort of mental Olympics where gifted children participate in mental gymnastics.

For Fred it is the adventure of a lifetime, a two-week summer vacation where he is free to explore the unlimited world of the mind. Animated numbers flash in his head as he observes a math competition, in breathless excitement he blurts out the answer, bringing

him into conflict with one of the participants Damon Wells (P.J Oclan). Damon's character is particularly endearing. He is a brilliant mathemagician complete with a magician's cape, whose biting sarcasm instantly comes to the fore as he lashes out at Fred. The two become friends shortly afterwards and Damon confesses to Fred that if it wasn't for Jane and the institute he'd be, *"just another asshole in a cape."* He comes out with little pearls of wisdom in the same breath nonetheless. *"It's not the size of a guy's IQ that matters, it's how he uses it."*

The story gathers momentum after his return. Jane wants to enroll him into college over the summer where he will study Quantum physics. Dede would rather take him to Orlando, Florida where he will have a real holiday. In the end however, it is Jane's offer that wins and Dede reluctantly allows him to go.

One of the more poignant moments of the movie is when Jane, who is having Fred stay at her place, tries to lay down the ground rules. Being a trained child psychologist she does this in a very methodical way.

"These are my glasses, these are your glasses. These are my pens, these are your pens. These are my pencils, these are your pencils."

It becomes patently clear from that moment on that whilst Jane knows all the rules in regards to childrearing she has none of the practical experience. Fred's mind is her abiding passion. She seeks rightly or wrongly to utilise his hidden potential and harness his energies.

It is a time of learning for Fred as he finds himself in a university lecture theatre studying Quantum Physics and getting involved in faculty life, which has near disastrous results when he is knocked out by a flying globe thrown by Eddy. (Harry Connick Jr.)

The relationship between Eddy and Fred is an interesting one. It illustrates that for all of Fred's genius and wisdom, he is at heart just another little boy who desires the companionship of his peers. Eddy takes him out to a pool hall and introduces him to his friends. Fred's hopes are raised by the encounter for, unlike Jane, who talks only of school, Eddy jokes around and acts the fool. It is this awakening of the child within that stirs Fred's soul. However the friendship has near disastrous results for Fred when he unexpectedly walks in on Eddy and his girlfriend in bed. And once again Fred finds himself alone in the world.

Dede meanwhile is having the time of her life down at Orlando and calls her son to let him know she is still there. The unconscious yearning between mother and son reaches out across the miles, as he hangs on the phone in a house that has become suddenly cold and sterile. His frustrations finally find voice as Jane is preparing him for a t.v appearance and it is Fred who has to remind her that he needs a belt, a fact of which she is strangely unaware. Jane is too busy asking him the answers to complicated physics questions. But it is Fred who takes centre stage as he replies with his own questions.

"How come you always ask me about school... how come you don't have any kids of your own... how come nobody ever comes over... what's wrong with you?"

Jane is rendered speechless by the torrent of questions and the movie moves to its inevitable conclusion. Dede sees her son on t.v and her only comment comes from a mother's heart. *"God kid you look like hell."*

She misses the rest of his debut on t.v when she is called away to rescue a child who is drowning and by the time she has resuscitated him Fred's poetry recital is over. The imagery contained within this scene was particularly potent, for Fred is drowning in an ocean of intellectualism, only a mother's love can provide the necessary survival skills he desperately needs. The closing sequences show Fred back at home having bought a bus ticket and finding his mother not at home, proceeds to destroy the phone, which was his lifeline to Dede whilst he was at college. Dede's protecting arms enfold him and whilst she cannot answer the questions of his mind, she knows the way to Fred's heart, he is after all her son.

Fred's birthday party is our last glimpse of a little man who has wormed his way into our hearts and minds. Jane's present is simple and evocative of the personal journey on which she has embarked. She gives him a toy truck. Fred's voice follows us as we leave...

"I remember when we played stupid games... it was the best birthday."

The simple message behind *Little Man Tate* is that in spite of what the child psychologists with their PhDs and BAs tell us, children are still children and must be treated as such. To do otherwise is to rob them of their humanity. In the end there is a little bit of Fred Tate within us all, just another human being reaching out to the world around him seeking love and understanding.

Written by Alastair Rosie. 10/26/97 ©

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Foster, Jodie

Jodie Foster Goes 'Home' for her Second Holidays.

By Stevens Jon. Director's Guild of America.

<http://www.dga.org/magazine/v20-60-6/foster.html>

Downloaded 25/09/97.

JODIE FOSTER

PRODUCER / DIRECTOR

“The Greatest terrain for me is to go find out what I'm really afraid of, then go play it !”

*“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.
Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.
Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.
Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”*

Those words hang above my computer as I sit down to write about Jodie Foster the Director/Producer. Looking at them now, the words could well have been written about Jodie Foster. She is an artist who has been twice accorded the highest accolade that any artist can hope to receive and one of only eleven actresses to receive multiple Academy Awards since its inception in 1927. At the age of thirty- four she stands alongside such screen greats as; Katharine Hepburn, Sally Field, Jane Fonda, Ingrid Bergman and Vivien Leigh, to name just a few.

She was born and raised in a town that has seen a multitude of stars come and go, some faded out gracefully whilst others crashed and burned. Jodie Foster was just one of the many child stars who graced the screen in the sixties, cute, fresh faced and with their own brand of childlike innocence. Few survived into their adult years with any modicum of success; those who did were often scarred by the knowledge that their own childhood had been stolen and marketed for the benefit of an ever- fickle public.

Perhaps with this in mind it was no small surprise that Jodie's first attempt at a feature film was *Little Man Tate*. She had been only fourteen when she completed a short visual film set to music. (The name of which I have been unable to obtain) *Little Man Tate* was thought by many in the industry to be strongly autobiographical in terms of its portrayal of a gifted child. There were comparisons between the character played by Adam Hann Bryd, and a younger Jodie. The film itself was a strong character driven visual piece Jodie's words echo her dedication to her art;

“My films will always be about somebody trying desperately to make sense of this world.”

It is a movie that finds fertile seed within one's heart and grows there nourished by our own insecurities and feelings of alienation. It is the 'heart and soul' that are the unmistakable trademarks of a Foster film; there is of course, the meticulous planning for which she is well known in the industry. *Little Man Tate* succeeded in terms of plot structure, being a movie that relied not so much on an exciting climax but upon a resolution of hearts and minds. Known not for its stunning special effects or high drama; but for the haunting vision of a little boy trying to make sense of the world around him and his mother, who only wants the best for her child.

The result was a carefully structured piece that reflected the thoughtfulness of a director who had considered and weighed up the consequences of her choices. There was enough spontaneity to keep the viewer guessing until the end, and ultimately the movie reflected real life situations.

There was no heart-stopping climax, simply a little boy enjoying his birthday party. Jodie brought an element of child- likeness to *Little Man Tate*, spending long hours working through each scene with him. She had not forgotten her own experiences as a child actor.

“The one thing I never did was I was never dishonest about what I was trying to do. I would never say to him, ‘Your teddy bear is dead!’ to solicit a reaction... so I’d just say, ‘Stand there and move your face when I say this line...’ I guess I prefer kids more than anyone else because they have a certain purity. If a kid says, ‘I can’t do that,’ you can’t bribe him with an Oscar or more money...”

And how did she feel after it was all over?

“I found I’d never been so happy. When I got back from a day on set, I’d cook soups and I’d watch the news and I’d actually read books. By the time it was finished I was tired but I could have gone on and done another movie three weeks later. I think it has a lot to do with being at the controls. Acting is all about being in the hands of someone else.”

In 1992 Jodie signed a deal with Polygram to fund Egg Picture's projects. Jodie was given the choice of whether or not she acted or directed in them. She also had the power to choose her own distributor. It was an unparalleled move at the time for Hollywood, and was a reflection of the high degree of respect Jodie has earned over the years. Polygram President; Michael Kuhn, expressed his opinion of Jodie's venture in glowing terms.

“There is no doubt that Ms Foster is one of the most formidable talents working in the motion picture industry, with an international stature accorded to few.”

Prior to this when artists formed their own companies, the studios had the power of veto in terms of creative decisions. Stuart Kleinman and Julie Bergman jointly control the company and their goal is to work with filmmakers of vision, as Kleinman later stated.

“It is not a vanity production company to develop pictures for Jodie to act in. We’re an alternative to the studio system. We want to work with filmmakers of vision.”

It was a quantum leap for Hollywood, representing a break from the old studio system and was without a doubt Jodie Foster's pièce de résistance. Egg Picture's aim at the time, was to make six films in three years. In 1994 production finally began on *Nell*, directed by Michael Apted, with Jodie Foster and René Missel as co-producers. Foster starred in the picture, and walked away with an Academy nomination for her haunting portrayal of the young hermit girl, Nell.

Home for the Holidays on the other hand was an entirely different movie; a satirical look at that great American tradition, going home for the holidays. Set around the annual Thanksgiving holiday, it was totally unlike anything I have seen. There was almost a sense of normality about the characters in the film. Foster has since stated that it was very much a team effort.

“... Home for the Holidays is really an extraordinary example, I think of how to make an actor’s film and get the most out of actors that love what they are doing and love each other. It was a truly magnificent thing to watch them come up with stuff and surprise me, to watch us work together.”

It was remarkable for its portrayal of a slice of American life, without the Brady Bunch smiles and false morality. These are real people going through real situations and who don’t always cope the way we expect them to. It had that familiar appeal where we feel as if we know these people, as screwed up as they appear to be.

The accolades were well deserved, she has been a consistent performer who routinely brings a special magic to the screen; an experienced artist can bring life to a dead script and shoddy directing. And yet bad directing can turn a star-studded line and a brilliant script into a recipe for disaster. Jodie's craftsmanship came to the fore in *Home for the Holidays*, once again it was a character driven piece that relied as much on the strength of its acting, as well as the skills of the Director. There was very much a feeling that this was a team effort from both cast and crew.

As with *Little Man Tate* there was no climax but more of a union of hearts and minds, of a father who grudgingly accepts his gay son's partner, his daughter's loss of employment, his senile sister in law and stuck up daughter. And in the end there is that sense of déjà vu wherein we have been there before, maybe not with our own families but with someone else's.

Jodie's own opinion of what constitutes a good performance was eloquently put in an interview she did with Jon Stevens for the Director's Guild of America.

“An excellent film performance for me as an audience member, is feeling like I am inside that actor’s face. I know that’s a silly thing to say, but sometimes I get this experience when I feel like I’m inside their face and I’m experiencing what they are experiencing. When that happens for me, that’s really an amazing performance.”

Last year she picked up the distribution rights for the dark and brooding French film *La Haine* (Hate) and has recently agreed to produce the screen adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s novel *Alias Grace*. She has also signed to produce and possibly direct *Flora Plum* for Disney's Touchstone Pictures.

In this age where mass entertainment is the norm and we are deluged with a constant barrage of Hollywood sequels with monotonous regularity, it is comforting to see that there are filmmakers out there with heart and soul who can see into our private worlds and not condemn.

*“The Hollywood community looks at her and they don’t just see an actress.
They see momentum.”*

A studio executive speaking of Jodie Foster.

Written by

Alastair.Rosie. © 1997.

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