

# VIFFE Vancouver International Film Festival

## 2019 Reviews

### Atlantique

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Construction whirs and dust blows in the opening minutes of Mati Diop's feature debut, *Atlantique*. But soon it is Senegal's coastline that transfixes, its waves an unrelenting presence for those that live in Dakar. Returning to themes first addressed ten years prior in her documentary short of the same name, Diop dreams in the liminal space between social realism and the supernatural. Her protagonist Ada (Mame Bineta Sane) faces these tensions personally, pulled between the magic of first love and the reality of being betrothed to an older, richer man. As the narrative submerges genre boundaries, the camera moors us to the tender and material—the roaring ocean, sun-strewn curtains, touch. The result is a spellbinding study of atmosphere that is both melancholy and hopeful. With a historic Grand Prix win at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, Diop presents with *Atlantique* a transportive and hypnotic experience that powerfully reinterprets the horizon.

Review By Jemma Dashkewytch

### Parasite

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Arguably the most discussed film of the year following its historic 'Best Picture' Oscar win, *Parasite* is a powerful addition to the contemporary South Korean cinema canon. A natural progression from director Bong Joon-ho's previous films like *The Host* (2006) and *Snowpiercer* (2013), this global sensation oscillates effortlessly between moments of calculated absurdist humour and vocal indictments of income disparity. Through these components characteristic of Bong's work, *Parasite* expresses the duality inherent to a globalized Millennial generation. From Park So-dam's instantly iconic "Jessica Jingle" set to the tune of "Dokdo is Our Land," to the Kim family's *banjiha* or semi-basement dwelling, *Parasite* is rife with decidedly South Korean attributes. Even the massive economic imbalance central to the film is indicative of the 1997 IMF Crisis which ravaged South Korea's economic landscape. While Bong expertly weaves explicitly South Korean elements into the film's narrative, *Parasite's* themes remain accessible to any group touched by capitalism. Even viewers unfamiliar with South Korean culture can easily tap into the frustration and resentment lingering just below the surface. Balancing a universal cautionary tale with a specifically South Korean societal critique, *Parasite* is a text sure to be referenced—whether it be for memes or social change—for years to come.

Review by Kate Wise

## I Was At Home, But...

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At the beginning of Angela Schanelec's *I Was at Home, But...*, thirteen-year-old Phillip walks out of the woods at sunrise covered in dirt. His shoes are caked with mud. Then, he's clean and waiting with a teacher at his school. Seen through a window, Astrid (Maren Eggert) cuts over an empty schoolyard spotted with fall leaves and collapses at her son's feet. Phillip has been missing for a week, but this information is only obliquely given, if at all. A clue as to why comes later, when Astrid collapses in the dirt at the foot of her husband's grave or, at the end of the film, when she's again resting on the ground, in the palm of a stone in a river. Schanelec's films are always oblique, working around an event without necessarily voicing it. Or, you could say they're attentive to the mundane. If this film moves around grief, it's about other things: Astrid buying then returning a used bike; talking with a filmmaker about the difference between illness and acting; sleeping, sometimes, with her younger daughter's tennis coach; balancing reciprocal support and independence from her children. Phillip's class is performing Hamlet, in the same dry and measured style the film uses to draw attention to the materiality of passing moments. This coolness exaggerates any outbursts—M. Ward's cover of David Bowie's "Let's Dance" and Eggert's shouts and caresses. *I Was at Home, But...* is a rare case of generous cinema. Stories can offer ways of practicing grief.

*Review by Harrison Wade*

## The Lighthouse

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Following a slow and anguished pace reminiscent of his 2015 predecessor *The Witch*, Robert Eggers' *The Lighthouse* teems with more psychological unease. Shot in black and white and at a 1.19:1.6 ratio, the almost entirely squared frame thrusts viewers into a hypnotic realm that privileges the formal perplexity of symmetrical composition and a highly contrasted, exquisite play of light and shadows. Spatially and narratively, we are confined to a small island off the coast of New England, forced to closely confront the harsh tendencies of Ephraim Winslow (Robert Pattinson) and Thomas Wake (Willem Dafoe) while they tend to a lighthouse for four weeks. As the film progressively unravels their tumultuous and oppressive relationship to each other and their own selves, Eggers' psychoanalytic exploration is coupled with, if not dwarfed by the brilliant cinematography of Jarin Blaschke, whose work in this film was rightfully nominated for an Academy Award. Emphasizing a complex intimacy with twisting lines and shapes, the abstracted forms of the limited "things" on this small island become visually and conceptually linked to the ultimate and forbidden attainment of light, an unconscious drive toward ecstasy and the unknown made uncomfortably palpable by a consistently entrancing aesthetic program. While the logical development of events remains uncertain, seemingly magnified by pure affect, Eggers innovatively represents character motive as wavering indistinguishably between demented desire and cruel reality. *The Lighthouse* consequently foregrounds a gritty yet polished thesis on the human spirit under strain, desperation, and mania, confronting viewers with new limits of abjection and unmitigated drive.

*Review by Marcus Prasad*