



Derek Jarman's .
Caravaggio

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

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Caravaggio is probably the closest Derek Jarman ever came to making a mainstream film. As it reveals the seventeenth-century painter's complex life—his brilliant, nearly blasphemous paintings and flirtations with the underworld—it is also a uniquely complex and lucid treatment of Jarman's major concerns: violence, history, homosexuality, and the relationship between film and painting. **Caravaggio** incorporates the painter's precise aesthetic into the movie's own visuals and uses the style and mood of his paintings to reflect his life. The result is Jarman's most profound, unsettling and astonishing reflection on art, sexuality and identity.

SYNOPSIS

Painter MICHELANGELO MERISI (Nigel Terry), born at Caravaggio near Milan in 1571, lies on his deathbed in a simple room in Porto Ercole, Tuscany. He is in his fortieth year; his face bears savage scars. He has been on the run for years and is dying far from home. It is a miserable death for an artist of stature. What has brought him here?

After serving an apprenticeship to a painter as a boy, the young MICHELE CARAVAGGIO (Dexter Fletcher) moves to Rome, where he struggles to live by selling his paintings on the streets. Ill from poverty, Caravaggio paints himself as Bacchus. He is visited in hospital by CARDINAL DEL MONTE (Michael Gough), an art lover who is intrigued by this painting. The Cardinal gives him room and board in his palace in return for his services. Under Del Monte's patronage he continues his education and wins his first major public commission for the French church of St. Louis in Rome: *The Calling of St. Matthew* and *The Saint's Martyrdom*.

Executing the work is causing Caravaggio great trouble until, in a tavern he frequents, his attention is drawn to RANUCCIO THOMASONI (Sean Bean), a young gambler on the make. Ranuccio, to whom Caravaggio is attracted, joins the painter's band of low-life models as *St. Matthew's killer*, and the paintings progress. Caravaggio also paints Ranuccio's woman, the beautiful prostitute LENA (Tilda Swinton). A knife fight erupts between Caravaggio and Ranuccio over a bet and Caravaggio is wounded. The developing triangular relationship between the two men and Lena deepens.

MARCHESE VINCENZO GIUSTINIANI (Nigel Davenport), a prominent banker who has rescued Caravaggio from the outcry caused by one of his *St. Matthew* paintings by taking it for himself, commissions Caravaggio to paint *Eros* (or *Profane Love*) from life. Caravaggio invites both Ranuccio and Lena to Giustiniani's fashionable unveiling party. Amid the decadent glitterati of Rome, Lena is introduced to CARDINAL SCIPIONE BORGHESE (Robbie Coltrane), nephew of the Pope and the most powerful political figure in Rome. Borghese is impressed. Away from the crowd, BAGLIONE (Jonathon Hyde), a rival painter, concocts slander about Caravaggio's depravity.

Tragedy looms when Caravaggio paints Lena as the Magdalen. While posing, she reveals the extent of her scheming to ensnare Borghese and leaves Ranuccio and Caravaggio to each other. Later Lena is found drowned in the Tiber. Ranuccio is arrested for her murder and, protesting his own innocence, blames Borghese. While Ranuccio is in jail, Caravaggio drinks in the tavern. On his release, Ranuccio greets Caravaggio with a terrible revelation of guilt and is stabbed by his lover.

Caravaggio and **DEREK JARMAN**

In some ways, Jarman's CARAVAGGIO is as much about the artist Derek Jarman as the early seventeenth century painter who was so influential yet so scandalized his contemporaries with both the controversial nature of his art and his resistance to the social mores of his time. Having worked on various draft scripts for several years together with Nicholas Ward-Jackson, friend and art dealer, whose idea the project had originally been, Jarman found that he had begun to work elements of his own life into the script. At the same time, his interest and experience in filmmaking had been developing during this period and Caravaggio's revolutionary use of light and dark ('chiaroscuro') made him a highly appropriate subject for a film. Caravaggio could indeed be described in retrospect as the inventor of cinematic lighting. It was the first time that dramatic lighting had been used in painting although now, of course, it is a central concern of every cameraman and filmmaker.

Marginalized by the society in which he lived, the story of an artist whose life has only really been 'rehabilitated' over the past twenty to thirty years (through the ability to talk openly about his probably homosexuality) held an irresistible fascination for Jarman. On the evidence of his paintings alone, most modern critics would agree that Caravaggio's homosexuality, with its accompanying sense of guilt and isolation, was central to his life and art. His life was more akin to Genet and Pasolini than to a picaresque Renaissance painter such as Cellini.

Caravaggio was a poet of the low-life. While his paintings reflected an increasingly profound and original religious awareness, his private life was fraught with brawls, duels, arrests and even a libel case, culminating in 1606 in murder. This polarity was paralleled particularly in his religious paintings by the depiction of sacred figures using prostitutes, pimps and street urchins as models. Several altarpieces originally commissioned by the clergy were rejected on the grounds of impropriety. The tradition of the time was to paint abstracted and idealized figures and Caravaggio's dynamic 'realism' was considered scandalous. Yet, ironically, these paintings were eagerly snapped up by the most influential Italian patrons. Once he had been accepted into their world, he was fiercely protected, even after being found guilty of murder, by the most powerful figures of our time.

Caravaggio (1571-1610)

*M*ichaelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, born in 1571 the son of a mason, is now considered to be the last great artist of the Italian Renaissance. He was taught by a minor Milanese painter, Peterzano, and when he was about nineteen made for Rome. Assistant to the artist Cavaliere Cesare d'Arpino, his first patron was the Cardinal del Monte who employed him to paint genre pieces like "The Lute Player", and later won him the commission for his first large public religious paintings.

Pioneer of a painting style using theatrical light, known as chiaroscuro, his style influenced artists as far afield as Rubens, Rembrandt and Velasquez. In 1606 he murdered a friend in a knife-fight and fled to Naples and Malta. He eventually settled in Naples and powerful friends, having obtained a pardon for the murder he had committed, made plans for him to return to Rome. However, the boat left without him as he was arrested, mistaken for a bandit. Destitute and despairing, he ran along the beach at Porto Ercole after his belongings which had sailed in the boat while he was in jail. He collapsed and died of a raging fever, brought on by heat and hunger, in 1610, when he was forty.

Paintings referred to and/or re-created in the film:

BOY WITH A BASKET OF FRUIT, Galleria Borghese

THE SICK BACCHUS, Galleria Borghese

THE LUTE PLAYER, Hermitage, Leningrad

CONCERT OF YOUTHS, Metropolitan Museum, New York

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. MATTHEW, Contarelli Chapel, S. Luigi dei Francesi

THE REPENTANT MAGDALEN, Galleria Doria-Pamphilj

DEATH OF THE VIRGIN, Louvre, Paris

THE DEPOSITION, Vatican Museum

HEAD OF MEDUSA, Uffizi, Florence

NARCISSUS (attributed), Galleria Corsini

DAVID WITH THE HEAD OF GOLIATH, Galleria Borghese

ST. JEROME IN HIS STUDY, Galleria Borghese

PROFANE LOVE, Berlin, Staatliche Museum

DOUBTING THOMAS, Potsdam, Staatliche Schloesser und Garten

DEREK JARMAN (1942-1994)

Derek Jarman, arguably Britain's most visionary filmmaker since Michael Powell, reinvented himself as often as Picasso. Equally at home making slyly subversive costume dramas or dreamy experimental cine-poems, Jarman was a bracing antidote to the Masterpiece Theaterization of British cinema, and, as the world's leading gay filmmaker of his day, was an inspiration to a generation.

Born in 1942, Jarman studied painting at the Slade School in London. His interest in costume and set design took him first to the Royal Ballet and then to the Coliseum in 1968 to work on a production of DON GIOVANNI. His first work in film was as the production designer on Ken Russell's THE DEVILS in 1970.

Derek Jarman's first feature, SEBASTIANE, was made in 1975 and was followed by JUBILEE, which was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1977. His third film, an idiosyncratic adaptation of Shakespeare's THE TEMPEST, was shown at the Berlin Film Festival in 1979. In 1980 he made several short films including his first pop promo, with Marianne Faithful. In 1984 the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London held a retrospective of Jarman's paintings and in the same year he made a short film inspired by a trip to the Soviet Union entitled IMAGINING OCTOBER. He also completed designs for a ballet by Michael Berges and published his first book, the autobiographical DANCING LEDGE.

In 1986 CARAVAGGIO premiered at the Berlin Film Festival. This was a project which had taken Jarman seven years to realize but which finally was to gain him major recognition in the United States as a major innovative filmmaker. In the following year THE LAST OF ENGLAND was realized with a book of the same name. The film won an L.A. Critics Award. In 1988 Jarman directed WAR REQUIEM, based on Benjamin Britten's work and featuring the last screen appearance of Laurence Olivier.

Jarman directed the stage show of The Pet Shop Boys World Tour in 1989. The following year saw the production of THE GARDEN, the making of which is chronicled in MODERN NATURE, a collection of Jarman's journals which also begins to record his personal struggle against the effects of the AIDS virus. However, this was not to hinder his work and, in an astounding burst of energy, Jarman made three more films in the next three years: EDWARD II (1991), WITTGENSTEIN (1992), and BLUE (1993). His final, and most challenging cinematic statement, BLUE screened at the 1993 New York Film Festival in November where Jarman received a standing ovation.

Derek Jarman died of complications from AIDS on February 19, 1994.

Feature Filmography

1976	SEBASTIANE	1989	THE WAR REQUIEM
1977	JUBILEE	1990	THE GARDEN
1979	THE TEMPEST	1991	EDWARD II
1985	THE ANGELIC CONVERSATION	1992	WITTGENSTEIN
1986	CARAVAGGIO	1993	BLUE
1987	THE LAST OF ENGLAND		



Nigel Terry (*Caravaggio*)

This actor of stage and screen has devoted himself largely to period roles. He has appeared in his native England with the Royal Shakespearean Company, the Round House Theatre and the Royal Court Theatre. He made his film debut as Prince John in *THE LION IN WINTER* (1968) but did not appear onscreen again for thirteen years. His comeback was as King Arthur in John Boorman's *EXCALIBUR* (1981). Terry teamed up with Derek Jarman for the first time in *CARAVAGGIO*, and subsequently in *THE LAST OF ENGLAND*, *WAR REQUIEM*, *EDWARD II* and *BLUE*. Terry is a familiar face on British TV and is best-known in the U. S. for starring in the Thames Television series *COVINGTON CROSS*, which was shown on ABC in 1992. Terry played Sir Thomas Gray, a widowed knight in medieval England.



Sean Bean (*Ranuccio*)

Bean's professional acting debut was as Tybalt in *ROMEO AND JULIET* in 1983. He subsequently appeared on stage in London's West End in a number of productions, including *THE FAIR MAID OF THE WEST*, *ROMEO AND JULIET* and *A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHT'S DREAM* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Although best known for his bad guy roles in *PATRIOT GAMES* (1992) and *GOLDENEYE* (1995), Bean has been a romantic lead in Ken Russell's BBC adaptation of *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER* (1992). His most recent films are *RONIN* (1998), *DON'T SAY A WORD* (2001), and *THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING* (2001). In November 2002 Bean will be appearing onstage in the UK as Macbeth.



Tilda Swinton (*Lena*)

One of Britain's most remarkable contemporary actresses, Tilda Swinton had a long and close collaboration with Derek Jarman in the last eight years of his life. Not long after graduating from Cambridge in 1983 Tilda Swinton joined the Royal Shakespeare Company to play Juliet in Adrian Noble's *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* (1984). In 1985 she appeared in *ZASTROZZI*, a Channel Four series and was then cast as Lena in *CARAVAGGIO*. This began her regular collaboration with Derek Jarman, during which she appeared in all his subsequent films, *ARIA*, *THE LAST OF ENGLAND*, *WAR REQUIEM*, *THE GARDEN*, *EDWARD II*, *WITTGENSTEIN* and *BLUE*. In the early '90s Swinton was widely acclaimed for two breakout starring roles: as the title character in Sally Potter's adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *ORLANDO* (1992), and for her one woman on-stage tour-de-force in Manfred Karge's *MAN TO MAN*, a role which was repeated for the 1992 film version directed by John Maybury.

After Derek Jarman's death Swinton appeared in Susan Streitfeld's *FEMALE PERVERSIONS* (1996), John Maybury's *LOVE IS THE DEVIL* (1998) and Lynn Hershman's *CONCEIVING ADA* (1997). After a break due to her pregnancy and the birth of twins she returned to the screen, working with Tim Roth in his directorial debut *THE WAR ZONE* (1999) and appeared in Danny Boyle's *THE BEACH* (2000) with Leonardo DiCaprio. She received major attention in the USA for her starring role in the thriller *THE DEEP END* (2001). She also had a cameo appearance in *VANILLA SKY* (2001). Up coming films include Lynn Hershman's *STEKNOLUST*, Spike Jonze's *ADAPTATION* and Mike Mills' *THUMBSUCKER*.



Dexter Fletcher (*Young Caravaggio*)

As a child performer with both stage and screen credits, Fletcher made a notable impression as Babyface in Alan Parker's *BUGSY MALONE* (1976). The dark-haired, quirky-looking actor graduated to adult parts as the young incarnation of the title role in Derek Jarman's *CARAVAGGIO* (1986). Fletcher landed his first real lead as a youth determined to lose his virginity in *THE RACHEL PAPERS* (1989). In the 90s he emerged as a colorful character player, playing a priest in *JUDE* (1996) and a chef who becomes embroiled in a crime spree in Guy Ritchie's *LOCK, STOCK AND TWO SMOKING BARRELS* (1998).



Michael Gough (*Cardinal Del Monte*)

Born to British parents in Malaya, Michael Gough received classical training at the Old Vic Theatre, where he made his stage debut in 1936. He acted on Broadway the following year, inaugurating a distinguished career on both sides of the Atlantic. Gough did not enter films until after World War II and for the next decade his appearances were intermittent and primarily in historical drama, ranging from *ANNA KARENINA* (1948) to Laurence Olivier's adaptation of *RICHARD III* (1956). His many Hammer film roles began in 1958 when he supported Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee in *THE HORROR OF DRACULA*. Gough has frequently played villains in melodrama, or austere British aristocrats or bureaucrats in contemporary dramas or farces. His most famous roles include those in *THE GO-BETWEEN* (1971), *THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL* (1978), *CARAVAGGIO* (1986) and *WITTGENSTEIN* (1993). Contemporary filmgoers are likely to best know the venerable Gough for his role as Alfred the butler in the *BATMAN* series (1989-97).

Nigel Davenport (*Giustiniani*)

Veteran British character actor who, by his own estimate, has played "two kings, two dukes, a lot of lords and the odd private soldier." Best known as the Duke of Norfolk opposite Paul Scofield's Sir Thomas More in *A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS* (1966) and the explorer Hernando De Soto in *THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN* (1969). Davenport began his film career in the 1950s in *LOOK BACK IN ANGER* (1959) and continued to work through the 1980s in such films as *CHARIOTS OF FIRE* (1981) and *CARAVAGGIO* (1986).

Robbie Coltrane (*Scipione Borghese*)

Robbie Coltrane is one of the U.K.'s most prolific and respected film and television actors with a multi-award winning career spanning 20 years. His illustrious film career to date boasts 26 films including the James Bond films *THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH* (1999) and *GOLDENEYE* (1995). Coltrane won numerous awards for his portrayal of the tough, wise-cracking police psychologist Fitz on the U.K.'s hugely popular television series *CRACKER*. He won the BAFTA Award for Best Television Actor for three years in a row and a Cable Ace Award for Best Actor in a Movie or Mini Series.

The British Film Institute presents
in association with Nicholas Ward-Jackson
presents

Caravaggio

a film by Derek Jarman

Caravaggio Nigel Terry
Ranuccio Sean Bean
Davide Garry Cooper
Young Caravaggio Dexter Fletcher
Jerusalem Spencer Leigh
Lena Tilda Swinton
Giustiniani Nigel Davenport
Scipione Borghese Robbie Coltrane
Cardinal Del Monte Michael Gough

Boy Caravaggio Noam Almaz
Pipo Dawn Archibald
Pope Jack Birkett
Weeping Woman Una Brandon-Jones
Lady with the Jewels Imogen Claire
Princess Collona Sadie Corre
Old Priest Lol Coxhill
Art Lover Vernon Dobtcheff

Bodyguard Terry Downes
Baglione Jonathon Hyde
Young Jerusalem Emil Nicolaou
Model peeling fruit Gene October
Lady Elizabeth Cindy Oswin
Vatican Official John Rogan
Jerusalem's g'mother Zohra Segal
Boy with guitar Lucien Taylor

Fra Fillipo Simon Turner

Directed by Derek Jarman
Producer: Sarah Radclyffe
Production Designer: Christopher Hobbs
Photography: Gabriel Beristain
Costume Designer: Sandy Powell
Film Editor: George Akers
Original Music: Simon Fisher Turner
Assisted by: Mary Phillips

Script by Derek Jarman,
based on an original idea by Nicholas Ward-Jackson

A BFI Production
in Association with Channel Four Television

1986 | Color | 35mm | 93 minutes | 1:1.85

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