

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

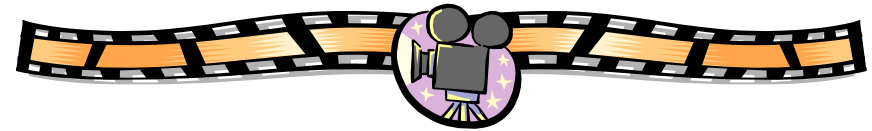
What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

Some facts about the film

- *Heaven* was the first instalment of a planned trilogy by writer-director Krzysztof Kieslowski and his writing partner, Krzysztof Piesiewicz. Inspired by Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, the trilogy was to be entitled *Heaven, Hell* and *Purgatory*. The project was cut short by Kieslowski's untimely death, with the script for *Heaven* being nearest to completion.
- The second instalment, *Hell*, was completed posthumously by Piesiewicz and made into a film in 2005 (under its French title: *L'enfer*). The third instalment, about a photographer killed in the Bosnian war, exists only as a thirty-page treatment and remains unproduced.
- Krzysztof Kieslowski is better known for his Three Colours trilogy (*Red, White* and *Blue* and very loosely based on the three political ideals: liberty, equality and fraternity), and for *The Decalogue*, ten short films which each look at one of the ten commandments.
- Kieslowski was raised a Catholic and retained what he called a "personal and private" relationship with God.



**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

5th Sep Doubt
10th Oct The Soloist
7th Nov The Reader
5th Dec Heaven
9th Jan Inception (2.30pm with FEATURES @ Tackley)
6th Feb Departures

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
Islip**

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Heaven

Tonight's film, made in 2002 from a posthumous script by Krzysztof Kieslowski, picks up on one of the traditional themes of Advent, that of heaven. However, it is not a story set on a cloud with angels and harps. Instead, it is a story about love, retribution and redemption, telling, as it does, the story of one woman's struggle to bring a drug dealer to justice and who ends up herself being on the run.

At one point, one of the character says: "My father said that at the right moment you have to do what nobody expects." The same can be said of the film. Although not a commercial success and, to some, a film with a rather implausible plot, *Heaven* nonetheless is an original, hauntingly beautiful film that dares to do "what nobody expects."

Consequences

There is a moment early on in the film when Philippa, played by Cate Blanchett, hears something she did not expect to hear. The news piles grief upon unbearable grief, and she cries out in pain. She sees herself as a good woman—indeed, one who is prepared to sacrifice her own life to stand up against evil—but, through the fickleness of chance (or fate—call it what you will), she ends up doing a great evil herself.

Kieslowski was fascinated by moral paradoxes, by good leading to evil and back again. In his work "The Decalogue," a child's brilliance at the computer leads to a drowning. A woman wants to know if her husband will die, because if he will not, she will have her lover's baby aborted. A wife breaks it off with her lover, but her husband tarnishes her decision by spying on it. To do good is sometimes to cause evil. We can make plans, but we can't count on the consequences. Here, it is Philippa who, while on her own crusade against evil, herself commits a great evil. Meanwhile, Filippo, a policeman and thus a law enforcer, finds himself plotting Philippa's escape from prison and agreeing to be an accomplice to murder.

How do we deal with the consequences of our actions? If our intention was good, does that mitigate what happens? But what if we have been careless and failed to think things through? How much should the risk of failure, or collateral damage, or possible unforeseen consequences, affect what we do, particularly our attempts to change things for the better?

Making amends

Having been taken into custody, Philippa then agrees to go along with Filippo's plan to escape. However, she does this not to escape justice but because she wants to kill the man behind the drugs—the man she was trying to kill in the first place. If she can only succeed in carrying out her original plan, she will perhaps at least have made amends, however inadequately, for the innocent people who died. Do you agree? What would you have done?

A visual language

Kieslowski is a very visual director. Nothing is done by accident and key points are often portrayed with great subtlety. Here, for example, character transformation can

Memorable Quotes

- Filippo** My father said that at the right moment you have to do what nobody expects.
- Philippa** I don't want to escape punishment. I've killed four innocent people and I want to answer for that. But, before I do, I want to kill him.
- Pilot** You know in a helicopter you can't go up forever?
Filippo How high can you go?
- Filippo** ...then we will think what to do next, because I believe there will be something and it will be beautiful.

be seen in the gradual change of appearance Phillipa and Filippo undergo. They pass through several stages of undressing, a gradual peeling away of layers of inauthenticity, until they are shown shaven, naked and completely vulnerable. Standing by a huge tree and silhouetted against a stunning sunset, Phillipa and Filippo have been transformed into present-day incarnations of Adam and Eve in an Eden revisited. Nor is it a coincidence their names are so similar, as they become more and more a single unit.

And then there is the typical Kieslowski preoccupation with the theme of love's transformative power. Filippo's unconditional love for Philippa saves the latter in a profound way and ushers in a return to innocence.

The Ending—* Spoiler Alert *****

What do you think of the ending? Innocence regained? Or as a cop out? After all, they were both fully prepared to take the consequences of their actions and the "tough ending" might have had them do so. Is this a case of "cheap grace"? Or is this what heaven is all about?

One possible interpretation of the ending is to see *Heaven* as the biblical Creation-Fall account told in reverse. Pursued by the police, Phillipa and Filippo escape in a helicopter which flies vertically and disappears as a dot in the sky. The conceptual allusion to heaven, however, had already come earlier, at a delicate turn when Filippo does the unexpected. Phillipa confesses to him inside an empty church, "Four people died because of me and I can't live with that..." The young man replies, "I love you." This might be construed as an arbitrary romantic contrivance. Then again, you might see what this exquisitely profound film of rare beauty had been trying to propose - to be the recipient of pure, unmerited love is a glimpse of *Heaven*.

Heaven

How do you picture heaven? Is it a future state or a present reality, or both? Why do you think the film has the title it does?