

THE SALESMAN

Monday, April 10, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by A. O. Scott / NYT *Rated PG-13* *125 Mins.*

At the beginning of "The Salesman," Emad (Shahab Hosseini) and Rana (Taraneh Alidoosti) must evacuate their Tehran apartment. There are cracks in the walls, and the high-rise building is in danger of collapsing. That flawed edifice might stand as a kind of inverse metaphor for the film itself, which is a marvel of meticulous construction. With exquisite patience and attention to detail, Asghar Farhadi, the writer and director, builds a solid and suspenseful plot out of ordinary incidents, and packs it with rich and resonant ideas.

Admirers of his earlier films — including "About Elly," "The Past" and "A Separation," a foreign-language Oscar winner in 2012 — will not be surprised. Mr. Farhadi has distinguished himself in his generation of Iranian filmmakers as an astute psychological realist and a fastidious storyteller. Although his films take place in a thoroughly modern, urban environment, there is something satisfyingly old-fashioned about his approach to contemporary life, an understated belief in the ethical value of addressing the complexities of experience through the clarity and subtlety of narrative art.

Rana and Emad, a childless married couple who look to be in their mid-30s, are both actors, members of a theater company engaged in a production of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman." Onstage, they play the Lomans, Willy and Linda, whose lower-middle-class American world is made to look both familiar and exotic. Some of the play's sexual frankness has been blunted by Iranian government censors — in a pivotal scene, Willy's mistress shows up in his hotel room wearing a hat and a belted red raincoat, rather than a nightgown — and its themes of striving and sacrifice seem distant from Rana and Emad's life. Though they are not wealthy, the fact that they "work in culture" gives them a certain cachet, and they sometimes radiate a quiet sense of superiority in interactions with neighbors and acquaintances.

The ghost of Willy Loman nonetheless hovers over "The Salesman," suggesting an interpretive puzzle. The choice of this particular play-within-the-film can't be arbitrary, but its meaning is not immediately apparent. For most of its running time, the movie seems occupied with its own dramatic issues, principally the aftermath of a shocking and apparently inexplicable act of violence.

The apartment that Emad and Rana move into — thanks to the generosity of a colleague — isn't actually haunted, but like many films about real estate "The Salesman" is to some extent a horror movie. The previous tenant was a single woman with a young child, and the stuff she left behind is more than just annoying clutter. It's a collection of clues to an unacknowledged mystery, haunting traces of an invisible life.

That life invades the couple's household with shocking force. Rana is assaulted in the shower, and her attacker vanishes, leaving behind his pickup truck. The crime reveals tensions and fissures within her marriage, and also beyond it. Rana, whose head was injured in the attack — other possible traumas are left implicit — is terrified and distraught, but Emad seems more concerned with the injury to his own manhood. The absence of the police suggests a lack of trust in official authority so complete that it is scarcely worth mentioning. Emad's search for answers, and for something like justice, turns him into a reluctant vigilante, and "The Salesman" is unsparing in its portrayal of the moral emptiness of personal vengeance.

It is in the midst of this painful tale of crime and punishment that the spirit of Willy Loman makes its improbable, powerful and surprisingly literal return. "The Salesman" is about trust and honor, about violence against women in a patriarchal society, about the woe that is in marriage, but it is also about death, a salesman and the hidden brutality of class. Not since Pedro Almodóvar's "All About My Mother," which brilliantly re-engineered "A Streetcar Named Desire," has a classic of the American stage been put to such ingenious cinematic use. Mr. Farhadi's control is astonishing, as is the discipline of the actors. Their final scenes are at once riveting and hard to watch. Attention, as someone once said, must be paid. In Persian, with English subtitles.



Monday, April 24, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Sheila O'Malley / RogerEbert.com *NR* *80 Mins.*

The people interviewed for "Kedi," Ceyda Torun's documentary about the teeming street cat population in Istanbul, are not experts, or talking heads, or academics. They are citizens, moving through their lives, interacting with the cats in their neighborhoods, and their comments are casually contemplative, off-the-cuff and profound. The human beings take it upon themselves to care for the cats, feed them, and—even more tellingly—just enjoy observing them. They note each cat's personality quirks, likes and dislikes. They freely admit what these cats bring to their own lives. I am a cat owner, I admit, but even I was surprised at the power of "Kedi." Where did all that emotion come from? It's because what Torun really captures in her unexpectedly powerful film is kindness in its purest form.

The cats of Istanbul are everywhere. They curl up on stoops, car hoods, and cafe benches, they sit on piers and in doorways. They sneak beneath tables at flea markets and leap on scraps outside the fish markets. Torun's film profiles seven individual cats, each with its own distinct life, routine and personality. Considering the sneaky crepuscular habits of cats, following these beasts must have been quite a feat. The footage is astonishing. The film opens with a tabby cat stalking with purpose down a crowded city street, looking for food to bring back to her litter of kittens (stashed in a stairwell). Torun's camera is low to the ground, on the cat's level, following the tabby's determined progress. Watching "Kedi" is like

TIVOLI THEATRE

5021 Highland Avenue | Downers Grove, IL
630-968-0219 | www.classiccinemas.com
\$6 After Hours Members | \$10 Non-Members

lying down on a quickly-moving skateboard. Cats are wily creatures, and when they don't want to be found, they are not found. But Torun finds them!

There's one cat who hangs out at a restaurant by the water, taking care of the mice. (There's a hilarious night-vision section showing the cat creeping through a drain pipe, eyes ablaze.) There's a cat who dominates the area in front of a busy cafe, fighting off interlopers, harassing her "husband" (pushing him out of the way so she can eat first), and chasing off the floozy cats vying for her man's attention. ("She's the neighborhood psychopath," says a neighborhood resident.) One woman spends a day cooking fresh chicken and then wanders her neighborhood, leaving food for the cats, who swarm around her. She says that she has a lot of pain and the cats are helping her heal. There's one cat who sits outside a bakery, and bats on the windows frantically when it gets hungry. There's a freeform style of communication between cats and humans. They share space. Some cats adore being petted. Others can't abide it. A man who owns a textile store demonstrates that the cat who hangs out in his shop likes pats only when they're rough. Gentle pats drive her crazy. "She gets so much pleasure she almost passes out," he says, and then there's footage of her sprawled on the floor, lost in the sensations. One cat shows up at a woman's window every day for a visit. She lets him in, he strolls around, he eats, and then he clambers back down the tree.

The focus is on the cats, but "Kedi" is really a portrait of community. Torun gives a sense of life in Istanbul, its diversity and beauty, its storefronts and waterfronts, its people. Why there are so many cats in Istanbul, and how they all came to be there, is not explained (except for a casual comment from an interview subject). Political upheaval and turmoil is not addressed at all, although there are disturbing signs everywhere, thrumming underneath the everyday routines. One woman says that it is very difficult to be a woman in Turkey, and that the cats in her neighborhood remind her of what is good in being feminine. There is a lot of concern expressed about the brutal knocking down of old neighborhoods to make way for high-rises. Gentrification disrupts entire ways of life, and the residents worry about that but they also worry about the cats. Where will they go? What will become of them? It can be a heartless world. Caring for one another and caring for animals may seem like a small thing, but Torun's affectionate portrait of these cats—and the people who love them—makes it seem like the most important thing in the world. A restaurant owner keeps a tip jar on the counter, and the money goes into a fund for vet visits for the cats who hang around outside. Imagine that. Torun combines her up-close-and-personal footage of the cats with transcendent drone shots of Istanbul in all its moods and weather.

What is the fascination with cats? I wonder if it's because cats carry an inherent distance from us within them. They are not balls of unconditional love like dogs. They seem serious and dignified. They withhold themselves. They don't trust right away. Maybe it's that withholding aura that makes people draw closer. Maybe it's because cats don't wear their Need on their sleeves, like dogs do. If a cat trusts you enough to show you its belly for a pat, you know you've done something right. If a cat shows up one day for food, that's random. If it returns the next day? The cat has chosen you. The residents of Istanbul interviewed in "Kedi" know this, and feel blessed by it.

18th century English poet Christopher Smart's most famous poem "Jubilate Agno" was written during his time (1759-63) locked up in the lunatic asylum St. Luke's Hospital for religious mania. One section of the poem is a long "consideration" of his cat Joffrey. The poem is beloved of cat owners for its insightful observations on cat behavior, but also for its pure appreciation of Joffrey's cat-ness, Joffrey's "self," his cat needs and ways. I thought of it often as I watched the incredible footage of "Kedi," a film that shares Smart's wonder, fascination, and love.

From "Jubilate Agno":

For by stroking of him I have found out electricity.

For I perceived God's light about him both wax and fire.

For the Electrical fire is the spiritual substance, which God sends from heaven to sustain the bodies both of man and beast.

For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.

For, tho he cannot fly, he is an excellent clamberer.

For his motions upon the face of the earth are more than any other quadruped.

For he can tread to all the measures upon the music.

For he can swim for life.

For he can creep.

In Turkish with English subtitles.



BONUS: Monday, May 8, 7:30 pm **Screening at Ogden 6 / 1227 E. Ogden, Naperville**

Reviewed Kenneth Turan/ LA Times Not Rated 142 Mins.

"The Red Turtle" is a visually stunning poetic fable, but there's more on its mind than simply beauty.

The first full-length work by Oscar-winning Dutch filmmaker Michael Dudok de Wit and a prize-winner at Cannes, this is an immersive, meditative animated feature that is concerned with the rhythms of the natural world and the mysteries and wonders of ordinary life.

With a simple, uncluttered visual look that manages to be realistic as well as gorgeous, "The Red Turtle's" story of a nameless man shipwrecked on an uninhabited island has no lack of dramatic adventures and threatening events.

But, as befits a dialogueless work that mixes Laurent Perez del Mar's fluid score with the ambient sounds of the physical world, "The Red Turtle" intends to enlarge our spirit as well as dazzle us, and in this it succeeds.

Dudok De Wit, who won the best animated short Oscar in 2000 for the lovely and moving "Father and Daughter," was in fact perfectly content to avoid features altogether until he received an offer he couldn't refuse, an email so unexpected he initially wondered if it was a prank.

As he related in an interview at Cannes, the animator got an out-of-the-blue message from Studio Ghibli co-founder and legendary Japanese director Isao Takahata ("The Tale of Princess Kaguya," "Grave of the Fireflies") offering him the chance to be the first non-Japanese animator to make a film for the revered studio. "His participation," Dudok de Wit said simply, "meant I must make a feature."

Someone who prefers to work slowly with a small team, Dudok de Wit spent nine years on "The Red Turtle," at one point bringing in top French screenwriter Pascale Ferran (who shares adaptation credit with the director) to fine tune the story.

Though "The Red Turtle" has strong parable elements, dealing finally with the very nature of existence, Dudok de Wit has taken care to make the film's presentation as vividly real as it is symbolic.

The director even went so far as to live on one of the smaller Seychelles islands, taking literally thousands of photos that proved invaluable to the team of animators working on "Red Turtle's" look and feel.

The film opens with an unnamed man being tossed and turned on a stormy sea, the lone survivor, presumably, of an unseen shipwreck. He washes ashore, Robinson Crusoe-style, on a deserted island in the middle of nowhere.

Happy to be alive, the man gradually explores his refuge, climbing its highest point, swimming in its coastal pools, discovering plentiful food and water but realizing, except for a Greek chorus of curious sand crabs, that he is completely alone.

Determined to leave the island and rejoin the world's humanity, the man painstakingly builds a raft, slowly joining bamboo stalk to bamboo stalk and even fashioning a serviceable sail.

But he doesn't account for an enormous ocean-going red turtle, which gives the man a baleful reptilian look and definitely has ideas of its own, which is about all anyone should know plot-wise about how this singular endeavor plays out.

What should be known is that the beauty of "The Red Turtle's" images holds us and pulls us in. Though that turtle itself was so huge it had to be computer animated, everything else was done by hand using Cintiq, a digital pen that allows you to draw on a tablet that is also a monitor.

The island's lush forests and expansive open spaces, the ocean's superb turquoise immensity, they're all depicted with the kind of visual grace that makes it clear why Studio Ghibli knew Dudok de Wit's work would be a good fit.

It is the gift of "The Red Turtle" to simply unfold as it's experienced by its nameless protagonist. It is less the adventure of a lifetime than the adventure of life, with all the wonder that implies.



Monday, May 15, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Ann Hornaday / Washington Post Rated R 98 Mins.

Awash in color, feminine psychodrama and heightened emotion, "Julieta" is a classic Pedro Almodóvar film — or, more accurately, a classicized version of the Almodóvar films his fans have come to adore.

Adapted from three short stories from Alice Munro's "Runaway" collection, this mother-daughter head trip revisits familiar terrain from the filmmaker who gave us the ecstatically lurid melodramas

"Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" and "All About My Mother." But adapting his temperament to match Munro's signature restraint, Almodóvar tones down his usual over-the-topness in "Julieta," which owes as much to the sleek, moody thrillers of Alfred Hitchcock as it does to the supersaturated extravagance of Douglas Sirk.

The film begins as the title character — a chic middle-aged classics professor living in Madrid — is preparing to move to Portugal with her dashing husband, Lorenzo (Darío Grandinetti). When Julieta encounters a friend of her daughter Antía, from whom she has been estranged for several years, she makes the instinctive decision to stay put in the city. Julieta moves back to the apartment where she and Antía lived together, recapitulating the past as a way of understanding how their lives grew apart and embarking on a mission to knit them back together.

Nodding to the movies and telenovelas that he's always loved, Almodóvar tells the ensuing story — much of it told in flashback — with well-calibrated suspense and captivating brio, interrogating notions of time, doppelgängers and fate with his characteristically fastidious attention to color and detail. With a palette dominated by shades of red and blue, partly filmed on the romantic seaside of Galicia, where Julieta and Antía's early life was spent, "Julieta" is a nonstop visual feast, its design elements alone providing welcome escape from the dreary world. Almodóvar has even assembled some familiar faces from his informal repertory company of actors, most notably Rossy de Palma, here donning a frizzy wig to play a housekeeper who bears more than a passing resemblance to the forbidding Mrs. Danvers in "Rebecca."

Hitchcock and novelist Patricia Highsmith — who is explicitly referenced here — may provide the most obvious inspirational subtext for "Julieta," but Almodóvar makes their most familiar conventions his own, most notably in his ideas for casting the doubles who populate his film. The moment when Julieta, alternately played by Emma Suárez in middle age and Adriana Ugarte as her younger self, transforms from a young woman to an older one is just one of many masterstrokes in a story whose own identity slips from the slow burn of an erotic thriller to a far deeper, more wrenching study of parental loss, self-recrimination and grief.

Suárez is particularly affecting as a woman on the verge, not of a breakdown, but of being engulfed by absence. At its most superficially enjoyable, "Julieta" is a mystery story propelled by the kinds of coincidence and catastrophe that Almodóvar might have once mined for maximum camp value. Whether by dint of his source material or his own maturity, the filmmaker has invested the surface sheen with tenderness and emotional depth. It's no surprise that "Julieta" is marvelous to look at, but it possesses just as much substance as style.

In Spanish with English subtitles.

Please join us for our thought provoking post screening discussions!

Please enroll me as a member of **THE AFTER HOURS FILM SOCIETY**. This annual membership entitles me to mailings, discounted admissions, and special group benefits.

\$25 Individual \$45 Family \$75 Sponsor \$200 Corporate \$500 Founder

Make check payable to **THE AFTER HOURS FILM SOCIETY** and send to P.O. Box 5266, Wheaton, Illinois 60189.

Name: _____ New Member Renewal
Address: _____ Apt. # _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: Preferred: _____ Other: _____
E-Mail: _____ E-Mail Newsletter as a PDF

THE AFTER HOURS FILM SOCIETY is a not-for-profit organization. Thank you for your support!



Post Office Box 5266
Wheaton, IL 60189
Phone: 630.534.4528
Info@afterhoursfilmsociety.com
www.afterhoursfilmsociety.com

AFTER HOURS GOES GREEN!

Now you can receive the latest information
about AHFS events in your email!

If interested, just send an email
with your name and email address to:

info@afterhoursfilmsociety.com

and say, "Sign me up!"

THE SALESMAN

"Smart, ambitious...well-crafted drama"

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

Monday, April 10 at 7:30 pm

"A splendidly graceful and quietly magical documentary."

Joe Leydon - Variety

Monday, April 24 at 7:30 pm



"Grade A+! A touching animated ode to the cycle of life.
A masterpiece of images."

Eric Kohn - Indiewire

Monday, May 8 at 7:30 pm

**SCREENING AT OGDEN 6 THEATER
1227 E. OGDEN AVE., NAPERVILLE**

"Almodovar's best film in a decade. Sumptuous and
heartbreaking."

Mark Kermode, The Guardian

Monday, May 15 at 7:30 pm

