



**Monday, January 9, 7:30 pm**

*Reviewed by Manohla Dargis / NYT*    *Not Rated*    *106 Mins.*

Love, death, cinema — they're all there in "Mia Madre," bumping up against one another beautifully. It's the story of a movie director, Margherita (Margherita Buy), who, while shooting a difficult movie about labor strife, learns that her mother, Ada (Giulia Lazzarini), may be dying. Yet even as tragedy surges, flooding scenes and tear ducts, Margherita's featured performer, an outsize American star named Barry (John Turturro), enters laughing, bellowing, acting. The Italian director Nanni Moretti knows how to turn on the waterworks, but he also knows about that burlesque called life.

Mr. Moretti, whose films include "Dear Diary" and "We Have a Pope," doesn't draw a line between laughter and sorrow. Instead, he moves between registers and layers of emotion, slipping heavy moments into playful encounters and revealing the tender humor in an otherwise melancholic scene. In "Mia Madre," he complicates the picture further by taking you on the set with Margherita while she's shooting, and then mixing her production follies with her off-set experiences, memories and dreams. One moment, she is at a news conference, absent-mindedly gazing off; the next, she's moving her hand across a shelf of her mother's books only to shift abruptly back to the present.

Ada is already in the hospital when the story begins. (Movingly played by Ms. Lazzarini, the character is based on Mr. Moretti's own mother.) Initially, Margherita seems more concerned about her movie than about Ada's health — or so it seems. Mr. Moretti isn't a flashy visual stylist, but he's a canny storyteller. "Mia Madre" opens on a tense scene of a group of striking workers squaring off against the riot police outside a factory gate. At that point, it isn't clear that this is the movie Margherita is shooting, which serves Mr. Moretti's meaning. Here, life and art blur, and, for better or worse, Margherita lives in that blur.

The first time Margherita appears, she's running over to the clashing protesters and police officers, a mass of churning action — truncheons, limbs, water hoses — that evokes one of those giant canvases depicting the massacre of the innocents. She calls cut and then calls out a camera operator, critiquing his approach. She doesn't like the way he shot the riot; he insists that his way allows viewers to get "into" the scene. "I don't want them into it," Margherita replies, neatly delivering the first volley in Mr. Moretti's enduring argument about leftism and representation. Later, she wonders of the camera operator, "Would he rather bash or get bashed?"

That Mr. Moretti even asks what side do you want to be on — basher or bashed — raises that fundamental question, makes it

evident what he thinks, how he himself answers it. Margherita may be increasingly plagued with doubts about her work — during that news conference, her voice-over gently mocks her own familiar pronouncements on "the task of cinema" — but Mr. Moretti frames her uncertainty as essential to both to creating art and to living life. It's when Margherita is at her most arrogantly confident and dictatorial (directorial) that she's at her absolute worse. That's the case whether she's yelling at her crew or, in a painful flashback, angrily ripping up her mother's driver's license, a gesture that is as sensible as it is cruel and humiliating.

Mr. Moretti shifts among Margherita's different states of consciousness — reveries and reminiscences — as fluidly as he peels back layers of emotion. He doesn't announce these shifts; there are no mysterious fade-ins, no portentously twirling camerawork. Instead, Mr. Moretti bluntly cuts from states of awareness to something else, which means that you don't immediately know if it's a new day, a dream or a memory. In one such interlude, when Margherita walks along a line of people waiting to see Wim Wenders's "Wings of Desire," the crowd snaking around the block, it looks like an ordinary night until Margherita sees her mother and then sees her own younger self.



Mr. Moretti, who has a supporting role as Margherita's brother, plays with different performance styles throughout "Mia Madre," with Ms. Lazzarini delivering a minimalist, naturalistic turn that pulls you in and Mr. Turturro going gloriously large and loud in a performance that seems calibrated to remind you that you're watching a movie. Mr. Moretti's visuals here tend to be matter-of-fact, borderline utilitarian, and so even when Margherita dreams, she remains tethered to the world. Her life, her mother and her movie are falling apart, but Margherita holds on, whether it's that hand gently touching her mother's books in the past or a chair, now empty, in the present.

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# ELLE

**Monday, January 23, 7:30 pm**

Reviewed by A.O. Scott / NYT

Rated R

130 Mins.

The opening scene of "Elle" is a shocker: a brutal sexual assault witnessed by a house cat and filmed with pitiless detachment. "The opposite of a trigger warning," as a friend of mine said. Everything that follows is, in some ways, even more shocking, as the movie — a masterpiece of suave perversity, directed by Paul Verhoeven — leads its audience through a meticulously constructed maze of ambiguity, scrambling our assumptions and expectations at every turn, dispensing discomfort and delight and daring us to distinguish one from the other.

After it's over, you may find yourself in an argument about just what kind of movie you saw. A nasty, exploitative spectacle of a woman's victimization, or the celebration of her resistance? A feminist tale of rape and revenge, or an exercise in chic, cynical misogyny? It may be worth noting that both the director and the author of the source material are men. ("Elle" is based on the novel "Oh ...," by Philippe Djian, the author of "Betty Blue.") These gender-political talking points commingle with basic questions of genre, since the film continually changes register from one moment to the next. It's a psychological thriller, a strangely dry-eyed melodrama, a kinky sex farce and, perhaps most provocatively, a savage comedy of bourgeois manners.

Mostly, though — inarguably, I would say — it is a platform for the astonishing, almost terrifying talent of Isabelle Huppert. Ms. Huppert, onscreen for virtually every second, gives "Elle" much of its fascination and most of its coherence. In the pages of David Birke's script or Mr. Djian's novel, her character, Michèle Leblanc, may or may not be a stable literary construct, but as embodied by Ms. Huppert, she possesses the sublime credibility of a classic film heroine. Ms. Huppert has the unrivaled ability to fuse contradictory traits and actions into a singular, complex and endlessly interesting personality. The movie's title is succinct and comprehensive. It's all about her.

But, of course, Michèle is not alone. Her masked assailant will return, in flashback and fantasy and also in the flesh, but more of "Elle" is devoted to Michèle's interactions with the other people in her life, who are reliable sources of vexation, inconvenience and distraction. She is a competent, confident woman surrounded by fools, with the sole (and partial) exception of Anna (Anne Consigny), her best friend and business partner.

The two of them run a small, successful video-game company where a few of the male employees seem to have trouble working for a female boss. Michèle knows how to handle them, though. An awful lot of her time and attention is devoted to handling the insecurities and emotional needs of men, a fact that counts as one of the film's principal feminist insights.

There is her ex-husband, Richard (Charles Berling), a semi-successful novelist; their son, Vincent (Jonas Bloquet), a man-child with a dubious work ethic; and Robert (Christian Berkel), Anna's husband, with whom Michèle has been having an affair. Casting a shadow over all of them is Michèle's father, a truly monstrous patriarch guilty of a crime that is at once the movie's Rosebud and its MacGuffin.

There is also a handsome neighbor named Patrick (Laurent Lafitte), who appears to be an exception to the general rule of male inadequacy. (Appearances can be deceiving, though.) But men hardly hold a monopoly on awfulness. Michèle also has to deal with her mother (Judith Magre), a comic-opera narcissist who offends all of her daughter's principles of etiquette and taste, and with Vincent's selfish, abusive girlfriend (Alice Isaaz).

Not that Michèle is a paragon of innocence, or even of decency. As her mother points out, she has a mean streak, and at times she seems to revel in her own cruelty. Her subtle smiles and eye rolls are signals to the audience, but also warnings. We are drawn to her side, but we may also, at some point, be subject to her judgment and her mockery.

Or, perhaps, to Mr. Verhoeven's. He is a bit of a sadist, in a grand tradition of movie control freaks that goes back to Alfred Hitchcock by way of Brian De Palma and Claude Chabrol. Michèle's prurient, inscrutable cat is his alter ego, and we are the mice, batted from indignation to dread to uneasy amusement, according to his predatory whims.

This may not be everyone's idea of fun, but there is something exciting about watching "Elle" as a duet for director and star. In the American phase of his career, Mr. Verhoeven, who started out in the Netherlands, was a blockbuster sleight-of-hand artist, disguising pungent, politically tinged satires as noisy sci-fi action movies and overheated potboilers. Much of his work from the '80s and '90s — "RoboCop," "Starship Troopers," "Basic Instinct" and, yes, "Showgirls" — is still worth watching, and still misunderstood. These are Hollywood movies with "Hollywood" in italics and quotation marks, combining lurid overstatement with subtle, even subliminal irony.



"Elle" works in much the same way, with "French" in place of "Hollywood." France's official selection for the foreign-language Oscar, it is both an impeccably Gallic delicacy and a gleeful parody of Frenchness, in particular the kind of decorous, exquisitely decorated Parisian lifestyle voyeurism that contributes so much to the national cinematic brand. The film's episodes of violence erupt into a milieu defined by elegant dinners and vigorous verbal fencing matches, a world that keeps going in the aftermath of mayhem, its essential sang-froid undisturbed. Which may be the biggest shock of all, and also a perverse source of comfort. Michèle's composure never falters, and neither does Ms. Huppert's conviction. You can have your doubts about "Elle," but you can't help believing in her.

In French with English Subtitles.

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post screening discussions!*



## Monday, February 13, 7:30 pm

Reviewed Kenneth Turan / LA Times Rated G 87 Mins.

As unlikely as it is enchanting, "The Eagle Huntress" tells its documentary story with such sureness that falling under its sway is all but inevitable.

A major crowd pleaser at Sundance, this portrait of a 13-year-old girl from Asia's Altai Mountains who defied eons of tradition by learning to hunt with fierce golden eagles is so satisfying it makes you feel good about feeling good.

The girl's name is Aisholpan and the eagles in question are formidable beasts, some 3 feet tall with impressive wings that can span more than 6 feet. To see them grandly soar in flight and land flawlessly on the forearm of this fearless young woman would be a knockout, even without the gender-based story involved.



For among Mongolia's Kazakh people the tradition has always been to allow only men to hunt with these raptors, with Aisholpan's father Nurgaiv, for example, being the 12th male generation of his family to do so.

But when Aisholpan, a bold young person with an open, expressive face, told him she wanted to be trained as well in the ancient art of hunting foxes and other small animals with the massive birds, he did not hesitate to agree. "It's not a choice, it's a calling that has to be in your blood," someone says, and that is very true with her.

"Eagle Huntress" is set entirely in a starkly beautiful region of Mongolia so remote that director Otto Bell, in an interview at

Sundance, said, "it's not the end of the world, but you can see it from there."

This is Bell's first documentary feature, but he has spent nearly a decade directing shorter, branded content pieces in remote corners of the world, so the film's back-of-the-beyond location did not faze him.

More than that, Bell knew just which colleagues to call on to help, starting with veteran cinematographer Simon Niblett, who brought a self-made drone to capture the film's stunning aerial shots as well as a 30-foot crane that packs away in a case suitable for a snowboard.

Another key collaborator was filmmaker Martina Radwan, who shot some of the more personal moments with Aisholpan, including talking to her friends at school about what this eagle hunting business was all about. Having a more intimate sense of this young woman as someone who both beats the boys at wrestling and paints her younger sister's nails is essential.

Key as well was editor Pierre Takal, who makes it look like Aisholpan's story is telling itself while at the same time blending footage from a whole variety of sources.

This includes, as Bell related at Sundance, scenes that were grabbed with random cameras the first day he met father Nurgaiv, who told the director through a translator, "'Today we're going to steal an eagle chick for Aisholpan to train. Is this the kind of thing you'd be interested in filming?' I said, 'God, yes.'"

No sooner is the chick snared — in a hazardous, heart-in-mouth operation that involves tricky maneuvering down mountain cliffs — than training begins in earnest.

Aisholpan's goal is to be the first woman to take part in the annual Golden Eagle Festival in the Mongolian provincial capital of Olgi, an event that her father has won twice and in which she and her bird, who she names Akkatnat (or White Wings), will compete against some 70 older, more experienced men.

A key segment of "Eagle Huntress" takes place at that contest, which includes the stirring vision of eagles hurtling down from a mountaintop as fast as they can to respond to their master's call.

One of "Eagle Huntress" more amusing aspects is its use of a kind of Greek chorus of grumpy Kazakh elders who feel that eagle hunting is not something "fragile" women would be advised to take on.

Because these men insist that pursuing foxes in the dead of winter is the ultimate test of who is an eagle hunter and who is not, the film ends by following Aisholpan and her father as they do just that in Mongolia's frigid minus-40-degree weather.

The most impressive thing about "The Eagle Huntress," however, is not Aisholpan's accomplishments, but who she is. Hardworking, intrepid, cheerful, uncomplaining and excited by new challenges, she is not only a role model for young girls, but an exemplar for all of us, whether we plan on hunting with eagles or not.

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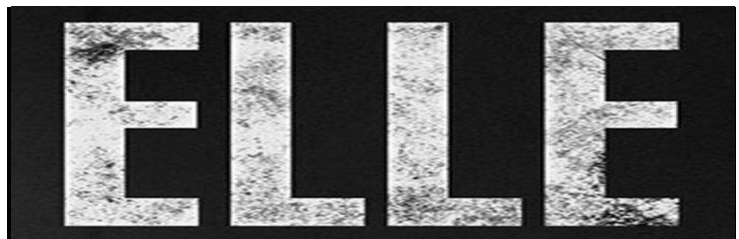
*Peter Bradshaw - The Guardian*

Monday, January 9 at 7:30 pm

"Breathtakingly elegant and continually  
surprising. Isabelle Huppert gives an arguably  
career best performance in Paul Verhoeven's  
marvelously deft thriller."

*Justin Chang - Los Angeles Times*

Monday, January 23 at 7:30 pm



"One of the most enchanting movies I have ever  
seen."

*Melissa Silverman - IndieWire*

Monday, February 13 at 7:30 pm

