

Hollywood and the well-hung Jedi

By

Theresa O'Shea

Collin Farrell's a good-looking Irish lad who has done a fair amount of cinematic denuding in the last couple of years. In *Alexander the Great* we caught his bare backside in both heterosexual and homosexual action, while in *A Home at the End of the World* he romped around in semi-nude sex scenes with Robin Wright Penn and Dallas Roberts. We might have seen even more of him, but alas, his well-hungness ended up on the cutting-room floor. Test audiences for *A Home at the End of the World* apparently found Collin's full frontal appearance just too distracting for words. Said a source to the Sun newspaper: "All you could hear were gasps The women were over-excited and the men looked really uncomfortable." And we can't have that, can we?

Well, why the hell not? Apart from the fact that reactions to Farrell's manhood were widely exaggerated, the film is about a bisexual love triangle, and you just might expect to see some occasional male nudity. In an interview for www.iofilm.co.uk the actor said he agreed with director Michael Mayer about the scene being "distracting". "I know why it was cut, it wasn't right. it's a beautiful, gentle moment and a f***ing large cock with huge balls, is just f***ing jarring." Well, sorry, Colin, sorry Michael, I think I could have handled it. He was only walking out of the bathroom for goodness sake! Perhaps the censors couldn't though, and the film would have landed an N-17 (over 17's only) rating, as opposed to the broader R (under 17's hand held by an adult) rating.

You don't have to be dyed-in-the-dungarees feminist to realise why. It's all about, what film theory calls, the male gaze. The film industry is male dominated, most directors are male, and the target audience of the average Hollywood blockbuster is a 14-year old boy. Women are so used to seeing themselves through the male viewfinder that they will tolerate female nudity and love scenes between women. Men (especially 14-year old boys), on the other hand, squirm when faced with dangly bits and homoerotic content. With the symbol of their manhood exposed – in its "weak", flaccid state - they will, the feminist theory goes, feel defenceless and threatened (and they won't buy the film).

Perhaps Oliver Reed and Alan Bates, they of the legendary naked wrestling scene in *Women in Love* (1969), felt a little of that - as apparently they compared their tackle before agreeing to roll around in the nude together. Hats off, though. They did it. The censors allowed it. The shots may have been long and the lighting low but for the first time in a mainstream film, the camera offered lingering images of two well-known actors totally in the nude. How many major actors have appeared bollock-naked since then? As one writer comments on www.msnbc.com: "..... scenes with full-frontal male nudity usually can be timed with a stopwatch while those with nude women can be measured with a sundial"

Buttocks are another story and have been a common enough sight ever since the rigid censorship of the Production Code years started to relax during the 60's. The number of scenes featuring near-naked men reached a high in the early 70's not equalled until the mid 80's. But don't get excited: most of these showed male buffness neither as natural nor erotic, instead confirming the stereotype of man without clothes as weak and defenceless, or just plain laughable.

Comedy cuts were easy to get past the censor. With any hint of eroticism, however, it was back to

undressed woman, covered-up man. In *The Sailor Who Fell From Grace* (1976) the camera obsessed upon Sarah Miles' breasts, while Kris Kristofferson's, surely delectable, buttock was flashed for the shortest of nano-seconds. Ten years on in *Nine ½ Weeks*, a mostly fully-clothed Mickey Rourke played around with a mostly naked Kim Basinger. The film got an R rating, but then so did Steven Soderbergh's arty science fiction flick, *Solaris* (2002). Cuts were made in an attempt to get a more wholesome PG-13 rating, but George Clooney's beautiful bare bottom (glimpsed briefly and not even in a sex scene) was deemed too much for America's unaccompanied youth.

If naked butts can cause such a furore, how on earth has even the occasional full frontal ever made it past the censors? a) The director was female b) The director was art-house, gay, or both c) The director was European d) The film starred Ewan McGregor or e) The shot was so fleeting that one blink and you missed it.

Thanks to the work of Jane Campion we can now start to talk of the female gaze in cinema. Love her or loathe her, this New Zealand director did something extraordinary in *The Piano* (1993): she let the camera linger on a fully naked Harvey Keitel as he polished his lover's piano. Keitel is neither youthful, nor slender, nor Hollywood handsome (he's real!). But the woman behind the camera films him with a lover's gaze and the scene is a rare treat for female viewers. I

Ewan McGregor (whose manhood has fathered the phrase "hung like a Jedi") has revealed all in just about every film he's made (*Trainspotting*, *Velvet Goldmine*, *Young Adam*, *The Pillow Book*). When asked why, he said: "There was this trend in the 80's of gratuitous sex scenes where women were always naked and men never were. So I just thought I was doing it for the sisters..... I like to even it up." Thanks Ewan. Especially for *The Pillow Book* (1994) in which director Peter Greenaway lets us admire McGregor's unabashed nakedness at length. The female protagonist, played by Vivian Wu, shaves her lovers and uses their bodies as a slate upon which to write the chapters of her book. The film remains unrated in the US - but then it's minority interest, art house, who cares?

European directors have, of course, always been less hung up about nakedness and sex. In the early 90's during my first years in Spain I was frequently shocked and thrilled when I went to my local *cineclub*. I was amazed by films like *The Canterbury Tales* (1972) and *Decameron* (1971), in which Pier Pasolini celebrates sexuality and the naked body with joyful and full-frontal abandon; excited by films with a homoerotic gaze, like Amodóvar's *Law of Desire* (1987), featuring Antonio Banderas and the delectable Javier Poncela; shocked by *The Ages of Lulu* (1990, Bigas Luna) and its pile up of bondage scenes, pubic shaving, and transsexual nudity; amused and delighted by *Jamón, Jamón* (1993, Bigas Luna in lighter mode), in which the then unknown Javier Bardem models gun-in-pocket style underpants.

During the 90's, Hollywood did break the penile taboo on a few occasions, but to sneak past the censor most cocks got the chop. You need to be a dab hand with the pause button to catch what was left of Bruce Willis's manhood in *The Colour of Night*. But brief is better than nothing. We saw snatches of Edward Norton in *American History*, John Malkovitch in *The Sheltering Sky*, Sean Penn in *21 Grams*, and Jude Law in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Geoffrey Rush was frequently naked in *Quills*, in which he played the Marquis of Sade. And in Oliver Stone's *Any Given Sunday*, we enjoyed Cameron Diaz's forays into a changing room full of footballers baring all.

Theoretically, as more women get behind the camera and as moviemakers pay more attention to the female viewer, the imbalance between male and female nudity on screen will be redressed. In the meantime, naked male flesh continues to hit the headlines. As Ewan McGregor says: "..... We're happy to watch actual incredible graphic violence and gore, but as soon as somebody's naked it seems like the public goes bit bananas about the whole thing. Especially, it has to be said, if you are hung like a Jedi.

Some favourite scenes

Women in Love (1969, Ken Russell) – Alan Bates and Oliver Reed wrestle in the nude to sublimate their attraction for one another.

The Pillow Book (1994, Peter Greenaway) – Long, lingering shots of Ewan McGregor's calligraphy-covered body “doing it for the sisters”.

Solaris (2002 Steven Soderbergh) - A blink and his bare bottom is gone, but, hey, it's George Clooney.

The Piano (1993) – Jane Campion takes her time to film a naked Harvey Keitel polishing his lover's piano.

Y Tu Mama Tambien (2001, Alfonso Cuarón) - The gorgeous Gael Garcia Bernal runs around naked and indulges an erotic love triangle with Maribel Verdu and Diego Luna

Any Given Sunday (2001 Oliver Stone) – Not erotic, but nice to look at. Lots of naked muscle-bound footballers in the locker room.

©Theresa O’Shea

For permission to reproduce this article in full or in part, please contact info@inthegarlic.com. For news, updates and links about In the Garlic, Your Informative, Fun Guide to Spain, visit [www.inthegarlic.com/word press/](http://www.inthegarlic.com/word%20press/)