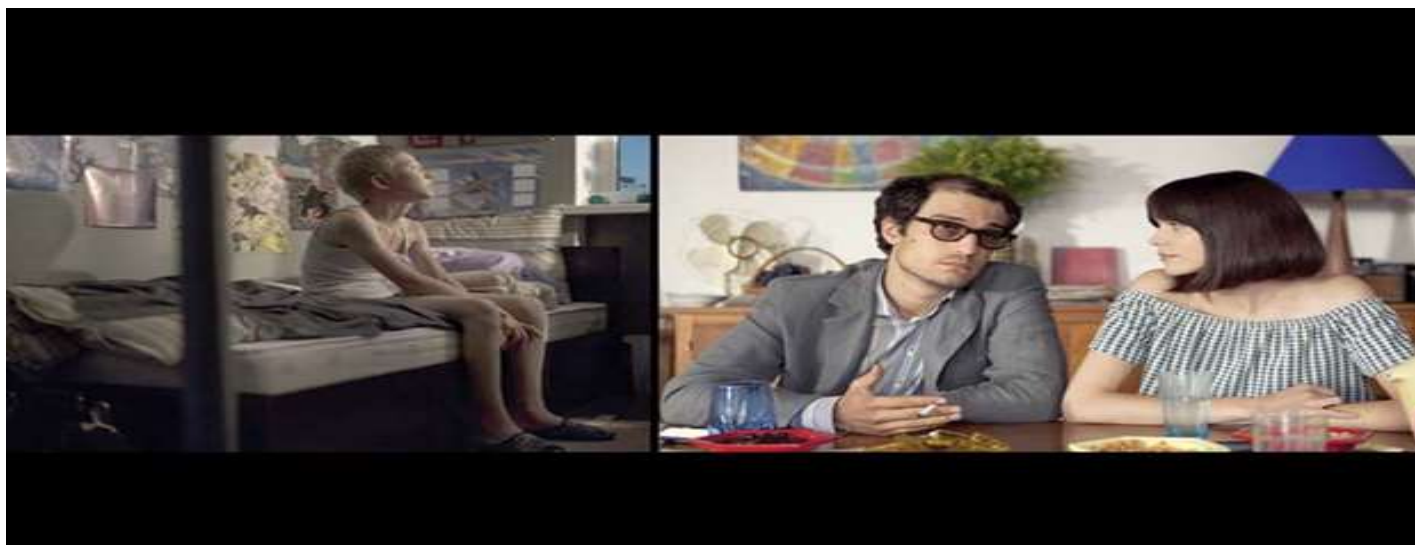


A famine of good films at Cannes

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LEFT: *Loveless* deals with parental selfishness and how it shatters, even destroys, the lives of their children. RIGHT: Scene from *Redoubtable*.



By **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

Somehow the Cannes Film Festival, now unrolling its milestone 70th edition, has been largely disappointing for me. Even the much anticipated Michael Haneke's *Happy End* did not leave me with any sense of satisfaction. And mind you, this Austrian director has given us some of the most powerful, gut-wrenching works like *Funny Games*, *The White Ribbon* and *Amor* – each a powerful document on societal ills.

For the world of me, I could not understand what Yorgos Lanthimos was trying to say in his Nicole Kidman-starrer *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*. Was he talking about science? Was he talking about religion? Was he talking about superstition and black magic? In the end the movie seemed like a jigsaw puzzle, and no celluloid work should play around with the patience of a viewer. It can evoke a debate. It can provoke the thought process. But it cannot play silly games. And the South Korean entry, *The Day After*, in black and white, looked like a juvenile attempt at capturing the dilemma of a cheating husband. Come on, I had expected something meaningful from Cannes. And, all these works are competing for the prestigious Palm d'Or!

Okay, on Day 6, I found that after watching cinema for many, many hours – pushing my way through an unruly crowd of anxious men and women all desperate to get into a screening through several layers of security – I could find just a couple of titles that pleased me.

An unforgiving image of Russia, Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Loveless*, deals with parental selfishness and how it shatters, even destroys, the lives of their children. This is a story that an increasingly self-centred Indian community can easily identify with, given the shooting number of marital rifts and divorces, *Loveless* is a powerful indictment of an unfeeling society from a helmer who earlier gave us a masterful *Leviathan*.

A constantly bickering couple on the verge of separating find their 12-year-old son missing, a son they were trying to push on to the other. There is one scene which is virtually heart-rending: we see the little boy shutting himself in a room and crying after he hears his parents loudly disagreeing on his custody. This is no case of each wanting to keep the boy, but one where neither wants to have anything to do with him.

Maybe a trifle too long, the film has a much smaller canvas than *Leviathan*, but I found *Loveless* much more engaging. Zhenia (Maryana Spivak) and Boris (Alexey Rozin) are fed up of each other. Both want to start a new life, and their son, Alyosha (Matvei Novikov), seems like a huge obstacle to this. Zhenia has found a new lover, an older but rich man. Boris has a young girlfriend, who is already pregnant. Will the new partners be willing to accept Alyosha. In any case, both Zhenia and Boris do not want their son. Unbelievably cruel, but true.

Loveless though gets into another track once the boy disappears with the police and a voluntary organisation getting into action without any success. Alyosha's one good schoolfriend cannot offer any valuable clue. And it is here that one sees a trace of parental anxiety.

One may argue that *Loveless* does not have much of a plot, though it cannot be run down on predictability. The end was quite a surprise. However, the helmer infuses useful frills in the form of images on television, and they touch upon just about every subject in Russia. At times, these images appear like a parallel track complementing the main narrative.

I remember French director Michael Hazanavicius's *The Artist*, a beautiful black and white portrait of the silent Hollywood. He has now returned to the Cannes – six years later that is – with his yet another gripping work, *Redoubtable*. A wonderful tribute to Jean-Luc Godard, *Redoubtable* has been adapted from a biography of the celebrated auteur penned by his former wife, Anne Wiazemsky.

Hazanavicius' film revolves around the time when Godard was helming what is famously known as his revolutionary work, *La Chinoise*. The time was 1967, a turbulent period in French history, which saw a workers' unrest followed by a serious student unrest.

What is the story all about? Godard's short but passionate marriage to an actress – who later became a fiction writer – Anne Wiazemsky. She was almost 20 years younger than Godard, and was everything that the man was not. He was brooding, critical, restrictively

conservative when it came to her (there is a scene where he asks Anne not to do a movie because every scene has a nude shot of her's and well, the poor director changes his script to have only the hero strip – a hilarious take that it then becomes) and so damn difficult when it came to other aspects of life and living.

Godard was 37, and Anne barely 19, and the auteur was passing through a troublesome phase in his career. He was making *La Chinoise*, a movie influenced by Mao. She was acting in it, but when the film runs into rough weather critically, Godard gets moody and irritable and argumentative. "Nobody can win an argument with you" says one of his friends.

All this has been pictured most realistically – with a touch of wit and sarcasm (one often felt that the film was also an indictment of all things wrong with the French society then). We clearly see Godard's fear of ageing, his nagging doubts about his own creative ability and his narcissistic tendencies. All these rob his life and marriage of peace – the political storm outside his home adding to his own disquiet.

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