

# Venice Film Festival: Kore-eda's 'The Truth' puts director in uncertain world



VENICE: Master moviemakers flounder when they step into the unfamiliar. Iranian Asghar Farhadi produced “A Separation in Farsi,” but when he travelled to Paris to helm “The Past in French,” he slipped. Satyajit Ray’s only work in Hindi, “Shatranj Ke Khilari,” was panned. None of his other creations in his native Bengali received such a hostile reception. It is not surprising then that Hirokazu Kore-eda — who made memorable movies in Japanese, including last year’s Palme d’Or clincher “Shoplifters” — seems uncomfortable with his latest outing in Paris, “The Truth,” or “La Verite” in French.

Competing for the Golden Lion award and commencing the Venice Film Festival, “The Truth” was a break from the event’s tradition of opening with a Hollywood blockbuster. This was received positively, though the film is certainly not one of Kore-eda’s best. Handsomely mounted and set in a plush Parisian villa with one of France’s most celebrated actresses, Catherine Deneuve, the film had all the ingredients to get it flying. That it did not can probably be traced to the director’s unfamiliarity with the city and its language.

The plot is uncomplicated with Deneuve playing a screen diva, Fabienne, and Juliette Binoche as the critical daughter, Lumir, with Ethan Hawke as her husband, Hank. Gloating over the success of her newly published memoirs, Fabienne is not happy to see her visiting daughter pick holes in the book. When Lumir says that she cannot find any truth in it, she is not far off the mark. Fabienne lies to survive. But the older woman brushes off the criticism by quipping “I’d prefer to be a bad mother, a bad friend, but a great actress.”

Deneuve is remarkable as a woman totally in control of all that she surveys with a daughter who has been forced to live in her mother’s shadow. Lumir’s husband can only whine, and his recent rehab trip does not help him to establish some cordiality with his actress mother-in-law. Truce can be an option here, perhaps the only option. The movie has a sprinkling of Kore-eda magic, but also Hollywood cliches. Though some plot surprises lift the work, “The Truth” lacks the radiance of “Shoplifters,” and all of its novelty.

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