



DOUBLE TROUBLE: The two versions of *Grace of Monaco* have popped out of a single script. In the end, it is all a question of how one interprets an icon.

Welcome to Cannes

The festival opens with a cocktail of controversy, celebrity and cinema. **By Gautaman Bhaskaran**

The Cannes Film Festival opens today with a controversy. And nothing new about this. The Festival on the French Riviera has seldom been without some hullabaloo or the other.

French director Oliver Dahan's biopic, *Grace of Monaco*, will open the 12-day cinematic event, but the celebrated Hollywood actress, the late Grace Kelly, is not going to be amused by the unpleasant debate around the movie.

If Kelly's children, part of the Monaco royalty, have been displeased with the biopic on their mother, describing it as an exaggerated and inaccurate account, Dahan is peeved as well — though not quite with the royal displeasure as he is with the American distributor Harvey Weinstein's decision to re-edit *Grace of Monaco*.

"The movie that I am in the process of finishing is complicated to finalise although actually for me it is finished," Dahan said in an interview with French newspaper, *Liberation*, some time ago, when Weinstein announced the re-edit.

"What's complicated at the moment is ensuring that you, the critics, can review my version of the film and not that of somebody else".

Weinstein is known for cutting its acquisitions to suit American audiences. And going by media reports, this has now been done. There are two versions of the Nicole Kidman-Tim Roth starrer — one

that tells the story of a Hollywood star's disillusionment with life in Monaco, albeit in a lighter vein for the US audiences, and the other, cut by the movie's French producer, Pierre-Ange Le Pogan, and helmer Dahan, which will be darker.

This is the rendering which Cannes will screen on May 14 — with an all-exclusive show for journalists in the morning followed by a gala black-tie show in the evening for celebrities and others.

The two versions came after Weinstein and Dahan fired salvos at each other, and these also reportedly led to a standoff between the company and the Indian financier, Yash Raj Films, over an agreement to release it in America.

What has emerged from these developments is that the Americans and the French view Grace in entirely different ways. In US, many view her as happy woman who raised three children and who led a fantasy life, a life that was as fantastic in Monaco as it earlier was in Hollywood.

But the French — with a history of complicated relationship with Monaco, an independent principality within France and just at nodding distance from Cannes — see Kelly as one who suffered privately even as her royal family remained indifferent to her.

Interestingly, the two versions have popped out of a single script. In the end, it is all a question of how one interprets an icon.

Post the inaugural evening,

Cannes will unspool many, many films — both in Competition and other sections like A Certain Regard — that will let us peep into a mindboggling array of cultures and issues that exercise the world today.

The lineup is heavy on movies featuring Hollywood stars, but not quite so on American directors. Women helmers have a strong presence.

The Competition titles include Mike Leigh's *Mr Turner* about the classic painter, Ken Loach's *Jimmy Hall*, Bertrand Bonello's *Saint Laurent*, *Two Days, One Night* from Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Canadian director Atom Egoyan's *The Captive*, Japanese director Naomi Kawase's *Still the Water* and *Timbuktu* from Abderrahmane Sissako. The living French legend, Jean-Luc Godard, will return with *Goodbye to Language*.

Some of the stars who will be seen in these competing movies are Meryl Streep, Hilary Swank, Hailee Steinfeld and James Spader (*The Homesman*), Steve Carell, Mark Ruffalo and Channing Tatum (*Foxcatcher*), Robert Pattinson, John Cusack and Julianne Moore (*Maps to the Stars*), Ryan Reynolds and Rosario Dawson (*The Captive*), Berenice Bejo and Annette Bening (*The Search*), Juliette Binoche and Kristen Stewart (*Clouds of Sils Maria*), Marion Cotillard (*Two Days, One Night*) and Lea Seydoux (*The Blue Room*).

In A Certain Regard, Ryan Gosling will directorially debut with *Lost River*. Out of competition

works include Chinese director Zhang Yimou's *Coming Home*, starring Gong Li, and DreamWorks Animation's *How to Train Your Dragon 2* (which Festival Director Thierry Fremaux said would help celebrate the 20th anniversary of the animation studio in the presence of long-term supporter Jeffrey Katzenberg).

Also of great interest will be the competition between two British cinema giants, Loach and Leigh. Loach had said some weeks ago that his 29th feature, *Jimmy's Hall*, would be his last. But it now appears that the work will not be the helmer's swan song.

Loach told the media that he had talked about retirement (though only from features, not documentaries) "in the heat of a harrowing preproduction battle for the Irish drama, *Jimmy's Hall*. I kind of thought I wouldn't get through another one just as we were beginning *Jimmy's Hall*, because it's a moment of maximum pressure when you haven't shot a thing but you're knackered from all the prep, and you've been away from home for a long time and you still have to get through the shoot."

Loach said: "It's quite a daunting prospect, the effort you've got to find from somewhere and the nervous and emotional energy and all that. But now having come out the other side, while I'm not sure we'll get another of that size away, we'll at least get a little movie together of some sort (with longtime writing partner Paul Laverty) more akin to a documentary scale."

A known Communist sympathiser, Loach's career began with television before it moved on to the big screen in 1967 with

Poor Cow. It was two years later that his Kes attracted international attention.

Jimmy's Hall is a drama set in 1932 and talks about Communist leader James Gralton, who comes to Ireland after a decade in New York, and he tries to reopen a dance place he had built in 1921.

Loach won the top Palm d'Or in 2006 for his extraordinarily poignant Irish historical piece, *The Wind That Shakes The Barley*. In 2012, his *Angel's Share* got him the Jury Prize at Cannes.

This May, as Cannes zips by from May 14 to 25, Loach will be pitted against many world greats in Competition, but the battle between him and Leigh, with his biopic, *Mr Turner*, will be keenly followed by critics and others. And it has been two decades since they first sparred for the prestigious Palm at Cannes — one of the most sought after in the world. They vied in 1993 — when Loach won the Jury Prize for *Raining Stones* and Leigh got the Best Director's Award for *Naked*. In 1996, his *Secrets and Lies* won him the Cannes crown, which he described as a landmark in his career.

Leigh's fifth title at the Festival, *Mr Turner*, traces the life of artist JMW Turner. The auteur averred that Turner "is so complex and there's so much of him to get your head around. Turner was a compulsive artist. Turner had to paint, had to draw, all the time ... It was an absolute obsession."

● Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered the Cannes Film Festival for well over two decades and is back there this year, and he may be e-mailed at gautamanb@hotmail.com