

CINEMA

Slavery, idealism and dust storms in Alabama

After the brilliant "Dogville", Lars Von Trier takes on humanity in "Manderlay"

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● Midway through *Manderlay*, the second part of Lars Von Trier's "America" trilogy, a dust storm threatens to wipe out a southern plantation's cotton harvest. Timothy, a former slave, jumps on a horse and rides into the swelling storm. Wherever he sees dust gathering he breaks it up with the horse's hooves. Soon he is swallowed up by the red dust.

This metaphor best sums up the idealism of Grace, the returning anti-heroine. She is back from exacting her revenge on the wretched citizens of Dogville and is itching for action. Next stop, Manderlay, a plantation in Alabama where slavery still exists 70 years after the civil war. Grace may now be a full-fledged gangster, but she is still a spunky kid with ideals. The fact that slavery exists at Manderlay is intolerable to her.

She feels it is her duty to help the slaves because of the injustices they suffered at the hands of white people. Even after a pragmatic lecture by her mob boss father (Willem Dafoe), Grace takes half his gang and single-handedly tries to right all the wrongs at Manderlay.



Brice Dallas Howard is Grace, with big shoes to fill after Kidman in "Dogville"

When the camera swoops in from a map of America, Manderlay's characters, as in *Dogville* (part 1 of the trilogy), become archetypes of humanity within a bare bones "anywhere" type

setting. Though *Manderlay* deals with slavery in the American south, calling it a critique of America is too simplistic. Within the folk-tale structure nationality becomes irrelevant; the

players represent everyday personalities. No one is left unscrutinised, even Manderlay's former slaves (look for a great performance by Danny Glover, especially near the end).

Dogville was a brilliant film about abuse of power and vengeance, and *Manderlay* continues the misanthropic tone with a deconstruction of idealism, freedom, and treachery, but the story stretches a bit thin after two hours. Nicole Kidman as Grace is sorely missed. Her replacement, Brice Dallas Howard, has difficult shoes to fill, and she's not nearly as intense—alternately throwing us out of the story and making us all too aware of its contrivances. A result is a narration by John Hurt that is overbearing at times, and some sloppy continuity errors that might not have been noticed otherwise.

What's more, right after a brilliant twist near the end of the movie, the director breaks form and slips into comedy with a sarcastic voice over. Unfortunately, *Manderlay* is not as well made as *Dogville*, partly due to inferior acting, and partly due to a story that tried to accomplish too much at once.

Lee's "Brokeback Mountain" gets eight Oscars nominations

CATALONIA TODAY
● The nominations for the Oscar Awards, which will take place in Los Angeles at the Kodak Theatre on March 5, were announced earlier this week in Beverly Hills, California. Ang Lee's cowboy love story *Brokeback Mountain* led the field for the Academy Awards with eight nominations, including those for best picture, best actor and best director.

Also nominated for best picture were Bennet Miller's *Capote*, about the life of US writer Truman Capote, the racial drama *Crash*, George Clooney's *Good Night, and Good Luck*, about the US broadcaster Edward R. Mu-

row, and Steven Spielberg's *Munich*. Best director nominees are Ang Lee for *Brokeback Mountain*, Clooney for *Good Night...*, Spielberg for *Munich*, and first-time directors Paul Haggis for *Crash* and Bennett Miller for *Capote*.

Actresses Dame Judi Dench and Keira Knightley will compete for the best actress Oscar, for *Mrs. Henderson Presents* and *Pride and Prejudice* respectively, as will Charlize Theron (mining drama *North Country*), Reese Witherspoon (*Walk the Line*) and Felicity Huffman (*Transamerica*).

Best actor will go to Phillip Seymour Hoffman (*Capote*), Heath Ledger (*Brokeback*



After winning a Golden Globe, "Brokeback Mountain" may sweep the Oscars

Mountain), Joaquin Phoenix (*Walk the Line*), David Strathairn (*Good Night...*) or Terrence Howard (*Hustle and Flow*).

Spain will be represented by Alberto Iglesias, who was nominated for his soundtrack

in *The Constant Gardener*. Montxo Armandáriz' *Obaba*, a tale set in the Basque region of Spain, which was the big loser at the recent Goya awards (it was nominated for 10 categories and won only for sound) did not make it in any category.

Jordi Soler attends Luxembourg's Catalan film fest

● Film lovers in Luxembourg are queuing up to see movies with names like *Sorrol*, *Tapas* and *Amor idiota*, as the film festival at the Centre Català de Luxemburg gets rolling. The *Festival de Cinema Català de Luxemburg*, which runs until February 13, has programmed a variety of Catalan-made movies, including the ones cited above, as well as Jordi Solers *El taxista ful*, which won the special jury prize in San Sebastian. Director Soler, known as Jo Sol, will attend the event, which will hold screenings in Utopia cineplex theatres. This festival is in its 13th year, thanks to the efforts of the "Catalan Films" organisation, which, with the backing of the Generalitat's department of culture, puts on Catalan film festivals in international cities such as Sao Paulo, Los Angeles and Paris.

In Barcelona, cinema gets political

● The *Second Festival de Cinema Polític* in Barcelona starts on September 26, and it has already begun receiving submissions from many aspiring film-makers who wish to see their movies on the big screen at the festival's new venue, the well-known Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). With Poland as the invited country, the festival will consist of five official sections: the international competition, "Images of the World", the guest country, a political short films competition and "films in homage to"—the latter two sections being new additions. This month the festival's committee began to accept applications to participate in the international competition; the deadline is September 8.

All the necessary forms, requirements and useful details can be found on the new festival's website: www.cinemapolitic.com. / S.S.