

Deep end (1970) Skolimowski

P Michell, 2023

Deep End is a 1970 *romantic drama film* directed by *Jerzy Skolimowski* and starring *Jane Asher* and *John Moulder Brown*. Set in London, the film focuses on the relationship between two young colleagues at a suburban bath house and swimming pool.

Deep End is included in British Cinema Selections 2023 for two important reasons: Film is significant for Australia as it was one of two films (McCabe and Mrs Miller) that were screened after the R certificated was introduced in 1970.

Secondly it is an early work by the very talented Polish filmmaker Skolimowski who settled in London for some time. He worked on early films of Andrez Wajda as well as Polanski, and thus represents import of new cinematic ideas into the UK. [Some films in the series will be about the export of ideas.]

Restored in 2009 and re-released in 2011 for 40th anniversary.

Censorship in Australia and its reception

Hard to remember but before 1971 things were changing in heavily censored Australia. My mother (like many) had a copy of banned Lady Chatterley's Lover in a brown paper bag. In 1970 The Melbourne Film Festival was in uproar when the Swedish film I am Curious Yellow was to be edited by the censors for mostly frontal nudity. MIFF director Irwin Rado famously quipped that he would not show a 'cut' film and pulled the film. Very controversial at the time attracting much publicity. It was replaced by a very good British film – The Bedsitting Room (1969) a black comic-dystopian story. However, the controversy this created led in no small part to the relaxation of censorship Australia wide. Think around this time 'God Save the Queen' was not shown in cinemas any more.

Deep End was made in about six months from conception to completion. It was shot largely in Munich, and some exterior scenes were shot in London's [Soho](#) and [Leytonstone](#). The cast members could improvise and were told to remain in character even when a scene was not going as planned. (Good example being snow scene with lost diamond.)

"The consensus when it premiered at the [Venice Film Festival](#) in September 1970 was that it would have been assured of winning the Golden Lion, if only the prize-giving hadn't been suspended the previous year."

Gene Siskel of the *Chicago Tribune* gave the film three-and-a-half stars out of four and declared it "a stunning introduction to a talented film maker," praising the "delicious humour and eroticism" as Skolimowski "plays with the audience much in the same way that Miss Asher entices Brown."^[9]

Creative Talent

Jerry Skolimowski – Director / Actor / Screenwriter / Dramatist / Painter. (19 credits)

Polish collaborated with Polanski on a number of projects including writing script for *Knife in the Water* (1962). (see below for continuing collaboration)

Deep End (1970) was Skolimowski's second non-Polish feature to be based on his own original screenplay. The movie with a coming of age storyline bears distinctive thematic similarities to *Le Départ*. His films *The Shout* (1978) and *Moonlighting* (1982) became critical successes, with *Moonlighting*, made in the UK and starring Jeremy Irons, the fifth of his Polish sextet, being critically and commercially his most successful film.

Andrzej Wajda (film director) made an eloquent speech for Skolimowski's painting exhibition during the 2009 Berlin International Film Festival.

In July 2016, at the Venice International Film Festival, Skolimowski was honoured with the Golden Lion for "lifetime achievement".

Cameo as a tube passenger reading Polish newspaper.

“As a poet my mind is trained along the path of poetic associations - I'm not afraid to wander away from direct narrative - I feel safe with a story that tempts you to believe or disbelieve.”

*[To assembled critics at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival screening of *Four Nights With Anna* after his 17 year hiatus from directing]: “To those who like me - I'm back. And to those who don't like me - I'm back.”*

His film EO premiered at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival where it won the Jury Prize. The Polish-Italian co-production is a contemporary interpretation of the 1966 drama film *Au Hasard Balthazar* directed by Robert Bresson. Submitted by Poland, EO is nominated for the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film for the 95th Academy Awards. In 2022, he co-wrote Roman Polański's upcoming drama film *The Palace*.

Jane Asher - Susan (111 credits)

Known for Masque of Red Death (1964), Alfie (1966), Death at a Funeral (2007), An American in Paris (2018).

Extensive work in film and television. Talented family with interesting connections.

By the time she was fifteen, had appeared in 8 films, made 9 television appearances, over 100 radio appearances and was in five plays.

Family Trivia - Her father, Dr. Richard Asher, was the first to identify Munchausen's syndrome, naming it after Baron Munchausen instead of himself (which she commented was typical of him).

Younger sister of Peter Asher who was one of the members of the singing duo Peter and Gordon and later became a record producer.

George Martin (6th Beatle ?, record producer, was a student of Asher's musically talented mother. He later established world famous Air (Recording) Studios in London. Lots of film music recorded there.)

Was Paul McCartney's muse – specifically 'Here, There and Everywhere' song named in her honour.

A key figure of 1960s show-business society as the fiancée of Paul McCartney. Asher met the illustrator Gerald Scarfe in 1971, and they married ten years later. They have three children.

Many years after the film's release, Jane Asher denied suggestions that she had used a body double for some of her scenes: "I certainly didn't! ... And, looking back, I like the way it's done."

John Moulder-Brown – Mike (70 credits)

Child actor, much theatre and TV work. Uncredited child in A Night to Remember (1958), Carve Her Name with Pride (1958). Founded The Academy of Creative Training, a drama school in Brighton, Sussex, in 1997

Known mainly for this film, Devil in the Fog (1968) Agatha Christie's Miss Marple: Sleeping Murder (1987).

Was considered for the role of Tadzio in Visconti's Death in Venice (1971), but was later deemed to be too mature for the part.

Diana Dors – Lady Client (103 credits)

'Siren of Swindon' / 'English Marilyn Monroe' / Blonde Bombshell. Sexy British star. Later did cabaret and wrote books – two number one best sellers.

The film was one of a series of supporting performances by Diana Dors that helped re-establish her career.^[5]

She dismissed most of the films she appeared in as rubbish but cherished A Kid for Two Farthings (1955), Yield to the Night (1956) and Deep End (1970).

At age 20, she was the youngest registered owner of a Rolls Royce in the country.

She had millions of dollars stashed in secret that was never uncovered after she died.

"I said to this priest "Am I expected to believe that if I went out and had an affair that God was really going to be upset? Okay, thou shalt not kill... steal... but thou shalt not commit adultery? If no one is any the wiser, what the hell difference does it make?". He was lovely. He told me the Commandments were laid down for a lot of guys living in the desert."

"I was the first home-grown sex symbol, rather like Britain's naughty seaside postcards. When Marilyn Monroe's first film was shown here [The Asphalt Jungle (1950)], a columnist actually wrote "How much like our Diana Dors she is."."

Burt Kwouk – Hot Dog Salesman (155 credits)

British actor, was known for his role as Cato in the Peter Sellers Pink Panther films. Some James Bond films inc Goldfinger (1964), You Only Live Twice (1967). Born in Manchester (!) returned to Shanghai for almost 17 years.

“They can call me anything they like, as I long as I get paid and my name is spelled correctly.”

Trivia

The story is set in the UK but only seven days of filming were done in the UK. The bulk of the movie was shot in Munich.

In an interview with NME in 1982, [David Lynch](#) said of *Deep End* "I don't like colour movies and I can hardly think about colour. It really cheapens things for me and there's never been a colour movie I've freaked out over except one, this thing called *Deep End*, which had really great art direction."^[13]

Many voices of the German support cast were dubbed.

Reviews

Great Unique Sleeper
jlabine, 2000 (imdb.com)

I had been searching for this gem for nearly 15 years, until I found it. When I did, it was as good as I imagined! The film follows the adolescent obsession of a 15 year old (John Moulder Brown) seedy (Newford) Bath House attendant. He falls under the romantic spell of a red haired tease (brilliantly played by Jane Asher), that toys with his emotions to the brink of taking him over the mental "deep end". Director Jerzy Skolimowski's film is so unique that it deals with the mindset of a sexually inexperienced youth in a way that is comedic, sensitive, and yet totally insane. Parts of the character reminded me of a darker Max Fletcher (the child character in "Rushmore") and a less calculating Tom Ripley (see "The Talented Mr. Ripley"), but totally immersed in a Mod London environment that is saturated in sex and seediness. What strikes me as interesting, is that you can never tell if London was meant to be represented in such a sexual red light, or if this is all just how the protagonist views London with sexually curious eyes of puberty? My one criticism towards John Moulder Brown is his English accent tends to sound more proper rather than lower class Cockney, which would have suited the story's angle. Jane Asher's performance however is truly amazing! Her use of the dialog, is completely naturalistic in approach. I always feel as an eavesdropper to someone's private conversation. Check out the scene in which her and John Moulder Brown are trying to retrieve a diamond from a pile of snow, and sprinkled in the dialog are comments of her being hungry (it would seem strange to see those lines written in the script, which leaves me to think it may be improvised?). And when she tells

off the Gym Teacher (one of her lovers) and then continues to work on finding her diamond. Totally improvised and naturalistic!!! As a person like myself who studies acting, I was quite impressed by her acting, and am saddened that she has not appeared in more films (she seems to be mostly known for being the ex-girlfriend of Paul McCartney).

The music soundtrack to the film is of great interest as well. It contains the song "But I Might Die Tonight" by Cat Stevens as the title track, and different variations of that theme supplied by either Cat Stevens or (Kraut rock group) Can. It also contains one of Can's most amazing tracks "Mother's Sky" in a great scene where the boy stalks his obsession to a London Club, then to a seedy Nude Girl joint which contains a cardboard cut out of her, then to an out-of-commision prostitute, and then finally to the London Underground where he confronts Jane Asher. All done with the surreal mind, of what only a 15 year old could conjure up. The film contains many surreal moments, in which the boy sinks to the bottom of a pool and eyes a naked woman swimming underneath him. Or when the boy jumps off a diving board and lands on top of the cardboard cut-out in a pool. He again sinks to the bottom holding the cut out as if it was her. This film captures the complete frustration of that age, and the yearning to be a part of the sexually grownup world that is just out of reach, but keeps getting dipped towards your hands by a taller, more mature (?) tease. Unfortunately, teasing an imature boy can also have very horrible consequences. Highly recommended!!! One of my all time favourite films!!! I give it a 10!!

Sex as Manipulation

Ryan Errington, 2014, Theartifice.com

Deep End is a tale of obsession turned violent, when naive adolescent Mike becomes attracted to his co-worker Susan. Mike's obsession leads from deranged emotions to violent actions, due to Susan's sexual manipulation. *Deep End's* sub-plots consists of other aspects portraying sexual behavior as abusing others. *Deep End* described by Adam Scovell shows sexual behavior as harrowing, 'its highly sexualised, sometimes seedy narrative' [1]. Scovell's analysis reflects *Deep End's* ability to reveal sex as evoking destructive behavior. *Deep End's* use of characterisation, along with symbolic use of color, has an enormous emotional and visual power in representing sex as manipulation.

Mike's and Susan's Relations with Others and Themselves

Deep End's opening scene shows Susan's and Mike's different personalities, as Susan makes Mike familiar with his new duties at the public swimming baths. Whereas Susan presents herself with confidence by calling Mike 'handsome', Mike is introverted and lacks experience. Mike was practically still a child and unaware of those who want to sexually exploit him. Mike is sexually exploited by an older female client, who dismantles sex for Mike into a destructive aspect. She makes Mike rub oil over her body before forcing his head onto her breasts. There are specific close-ups of Mike's

expressions throughout this scene, as he becomes increasingly uncomfortable. Mike's youthful naivety is manipulated by others' sexual desires. As a result, Mike becomes cautious with future female clients even after Susan tells him to 'go along with the gag', which is to say Mike should simply accept sexual manipulation.

Mike's encounters with female clients makes him unaware of sincerity. Mike is visited by Cathy, a past acquaintance from school. Cathy is attracted to Mike, revealing her breasts and wanting Mike to sleep with her. However, Mike's previous sexual experiences makes him reluctant to engage Cathy's advances. Mike's reluctance over Cathy's sincerity reflects the impact of Susan's sexual manipulation. This reveals *Deep End's* representation of sex as manipulation because Susan has destructively warped Mike's mindset.

Susan's previous comment for Mike, to 'go along with the gag', indicates her promiscuous character. Susan is not a victim like Mike, but a victimiser. Susan understands Mike's growing attraction for her, using Mike's emotions to manipulate him. Susan allows men to become attracted to her and use her body, such as her affair with the male swimming teacher. Susan is not discreet during their affair, as she has sex with the male swimming teacher at work. Mike is well aware of their affair, which can be seen as Susan sexually manipulating him to play upon his emotions. Susan continues to play with Mike's emotions when his mother visits the public swimming baths.

Mike's mother as a client sparks his boyish immaturity towards Susan, who responds by referring to Mike's mother with derogatory remarks. Susan uses Mike's emotions to further his obsession. Susan lets Mike follow her and her fiancé into a cinema, to ignite Mike's obsession. Susan acts ignorant to Mike feeling her breasts, which she enjoys. However, Susan slaps Mike to manipulate him and tells her fiancé to have Mike removed by security. Yet Susan engages Mike in a passionate kiss before he is removed from the cinema, continuing Susan's sexual manipulation. This is a pivotal scene which portrays Susan's character not only as sexually manipulative, but also sexually promiscuous. Susan makes her fiancé believe he is the only one, yet there is also Mike and the male swimming teacher, adding to Susan's sexual promiscuity.

Susan's behaviour, which increases Mike's obsession, eventually leads to *Deep End's* tragic climax. Following an alternation where Susan loses the diamond in her engagement ring, she and Mike attempt to recover it. When Mike recovers the diamond, he hides it from Susan to manipulate her for sex. Mike's extreme approach to sleep with Susan results from his obsession over Susan, due to her sexual manipulation. Susan is initially reluctant, however she gives into Mike and sleeps with him. Their sexual encounter is awkward as Mike tries to live his fantasy, while Susan is emotionally unconnected. The consequences for Susan's sexual manipulation become violent, as Mike is angry at Susan's indifference following their sexual encounter. Mike in a moment of rage hits Susan over the head, resulting in her death. Mike, still obsessed by Susan even after her death, embraces her lifeless body completing the horrific cycle of Susan's sexual manipulation.

Deep End's Symbolic Qualities

Deep End has the visual capability to embody its themes for great effect. The use of color within cinema has been defined as an 'integral element of the production and circulation of film texts' [2]. Colour within *Deep End* is integral and extremely effective in symbolising its themes. The colour red is a recurring motif, which has various uses in *Deep End*. Red appears in the opening scene as Mike paints his bike. It is of great significance as Mike uses his bike to stalk Susan when his obsession over her grows. Red has connotations with desire and lust, which Mike's bike represents. Red also has connotations with anger and danger, which are emotions Susan stirred in others. When Susan exchanges derogatory remarks with the receptionist, a maintenance worker begins to paint the wall red. The wall painted red symbolically reveals Susan's destructive behaviour. Susan's destructive behaviour acts as symbolism in her death scene as her collapse into the water is juxtapositioned with red paint falling into the swimming pool. The red paint falling into the swimming pool adds an eerie atmosphere of Susan's death, which is caused by destructive emotions.

Deep End's use of colours is also used to the characters' advantage. Susan uses colour to entice Mike by regularly wearing a yellow coat. Yellow is a colour Susan uses to deliberately make herself stand out. Susan wears her yellow coat when Mike follows her to the cinema, leading to the pivotal scene. Susan wears her yellow coat again when meeting the male swimming teacher, during a time when Mike's obsession becomes increasingly deranged. As a result, Mike follows Susan again with disastrous results. Susan continues to orchestrate these disastrous results by wearing a black bikini while having lunch with Mike. Susan's black bikini makes her stand out, enticing Mike and other teenage boys nearby. The teenage boys making their attraction known to Susan is exactly her intention, igniting Mike's angry response as she enjoys manipulating him.

Deep End representing sex as manipulation through characterisation and symbolic use of color contains enormously emotional and visual power. *Deep End's* use of characterisation in contrasting Susan's deceitful cunning to Mike's naivety, along with their individual experiences, evokes sexual behaviour as destructive. Mike's personality becoming increasingly deranged to the point of murder is a predictable consequence for Susan's manipulation of sexual behaviour. *Deep End's* central theme extends into its symbolic use of colour, where a character's emotions or metaphorical implications is visually provocative. *Deep End* should be seen as a cautionary tale of sexual manipulating behaviour which leads to tragic consequences, which is conveyed with contextual and symbolic power.

Works Cited

1. Scovell., A. 2014. 'Deep End (1970) and the Musical Emphasising of Narrative (Jerzy Skolimowski)'. *Celluloidwickerman.com*. [Online][Accessed From] – <http://celluloidwickerman.com/2014/01/16/deep-end-1970-and-the-musical-emphasising-of-narrative-jerzy-skolimowski/>

2. Brown., S., Street., S. and Watkins., L. 2013. *Color and the Moving Image: History, Theory, Aesthetics, Archive*. Routledge.