

## The Naked Kiss (1964) Fuller

P Michell, 2020

### Synopsis

*Follows a [prostitute](#), Kelly, who attempts to assimilate, (after giving up her profession) in suburbia after attacking and fleeing her [pimp](#), but finds that the small town to which she has relocated is not as picturesque as she had believed. Meets Griff, the police captain of the town, with whom she spends a romantic afternoon. Kelly finds a job as a nurse in a hospital for handicapped children. The work helps her find her sensitive side in the caring and helping of her young patients. Kelly's path towards happiness, with J L Grant, is takes a crooked turn, when she witnesses a shocking event.*

The film received some critical acclaim: Eugene Archer of *The New York Times* commented on the film, saying: "Patently absurd as the plot may be, Mr. Fuller has filmed it with flair, and he has drawn a richly amusing performance from Miss Towers. Between his stylish handling of sensational nonsense and Mr. Marton's turgid floundering around a serious theme, Mr. Fuller's wild little movie has a decided edge."

### Creative Personnel

Mostly same behind camera as Shock Corridor.

**Prod Co:** Allied Artists/F & F Productions **Prod, Dir, Scr:** Samuel Fuller **Phot:** Stanley Cortez **Ed:** Jerome Thoms **Art Dir:** Eugene Lourie **Mus:** Paul Dunlap

**Cast:** Constance Towers, Anthony Eisley, Michael Dante, Virginia Grey, Patsy Kelly, Betty Bronson, Marie Devereux, Karen Conrad

Constance Towers - Kelly (68 credits – mostly TV)

Interesting career. Limited number of films. Appeared in two Fuller films – other being ... Shock Corridor. In John Ford's Horse Soldiers (1959), then Sargeant Rutledge (1960). From 1965 was in theatre. Good singing voice – sings in both Fuller films. Was in King and I revival on Broadway with Yul Bryner. Also Show Boat and TV work inc General Hospital, Rockford Files. Married to John Gavin who was President of Screen Actor's Guild and US Ambassador to Mexico. Gwyneth Paltrow's mother in the film A Perfect Murder (1998).

Here's a link to an interview with her re the presentation of this film last year in Los Angeles by American Cinematheque at the Egyptian theatre:

<http://americancinematheque.blogspot.com/2019/01/remembering-samuel-fuller-john-houston.html>

Anthony Eisley - Griff

Probably his most famous role as Griff. Known for work on Hawaiian Eye.

Virginia Grey - Candy - (100 films) -

Appeared in many Ross Hunter / Douglas Sirk films inc All that Heaven Allows, Madame X. Interrupted affair with Clark Gable (never married hoping he would to her ...).

Marie Devereux - Buff

Popular nude model. Limited career in films (1958-1964) but with notable directors. Elizabeth Taylor's stand-in on Cleopatra. Then made *Shock Corridor* and *Naked Kiss*, after which she retired from cinema to raise a family.

Michael Dante – J L Grant [Ralph Vitti] (30 films, 150 TV)

Frequent extra on original *Star Trek* series. Friendly with John Wayne from the 1970s. Notable films inc *Apache Rifle* (1964), *Willard* (1971).

## Trivia

When Griff and Kelly are talking on the park bench just after her arrival in town, she is reading "The Dark Page", a 1944 novel by [Samuel Fuller](#) that was the basis for [Scandal Sheet](#) (1952).

Trademark: Charlie the mannequin has a pith helmet with a 1st Infantry Div.--aka "The Big Red One"--insignia. Director [Samuel Fuller](#) served in the Big Red 1 during the Second World War and later made a film by the same name ([The Big Red One](#) (1980)) based on his experiences.

When Kelly arrives in Grantville, a movie marquee displays the title of the film [Shock Corridor](#).

Final films of Karen Conrad (Dusty) and Marie Deveraux. Second last film for decades of Constance Towers.

'Charlie' listed in credits 'played by himself'.

## Reception ex Wikipedia:

The staff at [Variety](#) magazine gave the film and acting a positive review, writing, "Good Samuel Fuller programmer about a prostie trying the straight route, *The Naked Kiss* is primarily a vehicle for Constance Towers. Hooker angles and sex perversion plot windup are handled with care, alternating with handicapped children 'good works' theme...Towers' overall effect is good, director Fuller overcoming his routine script in displaying blonde looker's acting range."

Critic Jerry Renshaw liked the film and wrote, "*The Naked Kiss* finds Sam Fuller's tabloid sensibilities boiling to the surface, as it dwells on the uncomfortable and taboo subjects of deviancy, prostitution, and small-town sanctimony. In typical Fuller style, it's a hard look at a nightmarish world, lurid and absorbing enough to demand that the viewer watch. It's part melodrama, part sensationalism, and part surreal, but above all it's absolutely, positively 100% Sam Fuller, with all the nuance and subtlety of a swift kick in the butt."

Eugene Archer, writing in [The New York Times](#), wrote that *The Naked Kiss* "has style to burn" and shows that Fuller is "one of the liveliest, most visual-minded and cinematically knowledgeable filmmakers now working in the low-budget Hollywood grist mill", but denounced the plot as "patently absurd" and "sensational nonsense", judging the whole as a "wild little movie".

## Reviews

Senses of Cinema, No 47, Feb 2007, Adrian Reeves

Sam Fuller has always been difficult to deal with. His films, in turns tough, hysterical and maudlin, don't allow passive viewing. Fuller demands engagement and *The Naked Kiss* is one of his strongest works because our engagement is rewarded with a unique and thorough treatment of a very good idea. Fuller's background as a journalist and pulp fiction writer is clearly evident, as is his awareness of the sensibilities of European cinema.

*The Naked Kiss* was not very commercially successful at the time of its release. The depiction of violence, pedophilia and prostitution was too shocking for an audience largely weaned on sanitised entertainment (1). The heroine, Kelly (Constance Towers), is a prostitute who tries to escape a life of exploitation and drudgery only to find a much more insidious form of corruption in respectable society. That hypocrisy can lurk behind even the most venerable of institutions is hardly a new idea, but Fuller provides a new take on it by making us complicit in the violence needed to uncover the truth. The opening scene has Kelly viciously beating her drunken pimp to retrieve money he owes her. During the beating Kelly's wig is torn off to reveal her baldness. After she has retrieved her money Kelly reattaches her wig in front of a mirror, through which we view her as the opening titles roll. Here she is assuring herself, and us, that she has "only got what's coming to her" and that she can leave proud and justified. It is a bitter assurance which is reprised at the end of the film.

Kelly eventually relocates to Grantville, an upright town whose contradictions are immediately apparent in the local cop, Griff (Anthony Eisley). Griff is happy to be Kelly's client as long as she plies her trade out of town. He even offers her an entrée to a brothel "over the river". When Kelly gets a job at the local home for disabled children Griff tries to talk her into leaving. Griff can talk the bold but vapid argot of the streets, a language Kelly understands intuitively and Fuller obviously enjoys writing. When Griff confronts Kelly and talks nonsensically about her body as a passport she can't hide, Kelly agrees with him. Griff is the voice of a paternalistic authority that sorts out "social problems" away from the public eye. He is ultimately the one who Kelly has to convince of her integrity, even if his own integrity is hardly intact.

*The Naked Kiss* has the trademark Fullerisms, including plot holes you could fall into, chunks of exposition delivered as dialogue (try that in a screenwriting class and see how far you get), heavy-handed metonymy and a penchant for delivering key points as visual "headlines". Fuller's recurring motifs are obvious and yet rather than being corny there is something strangely satisfying about them. This is a filmmaker who is in control. The damnably infectious song, "Bluebird of Happiness" is cloying in its first incarnation but exquisite the second time around when used to great ironic effect. The repeated refrains of "Moonlight Sonata" rise above the level of cultural cliché as they symbolise Kelly's efforts to better herself and help cement her relationship with the town's leading citizen, Grant (Michael Dante).

What is most striking in *The Naked Kiss* is a series of surreal scenes where the characters almost appear to step into another film altogether. Kelly exhorts the children in the home to pretend they can run and there's a dissolve to a misty park into which they all gradually run as they join the fantasy. On cutting back to the home the children are in ecstatic raptures as if they had actually been running. This is mirrored when Grant shows Kelly silent 16mm footage of his trip to Venice and the voice of a gondolier singing fades in. Grant says if you pretend hard enough you can be there and Kelly visualises herself and Grant on cushions in a gondola, but it looks like a stylised set that in no way matches the footage (it's more like something out of Godard's *Le Mépris/Contempt*, 1963). Finally the most dizzying example is where Kelly is alone and tipsy, trying to decide whether or not to accept Grant's marriage proposal. Grant's voice is heard as a voiceover and Kelly talks to herself aloud. Kelly's voice is then heard as a voiceover and she replies aloud, having a bizarre conversation with herself ("That makes me a woman of two worlds, which isn't good... or is it?"). These sequences are all hopeful, joyous reveries, however unreal. They mark a shift from earlier films like *Shock Corridor* (1963), where the fantasy scenes depicting a feverish slide into insanity are more integral to the story.

Fuller is self-referential at many levels in *The Naked Kiss*. Kelly walks past a cinema in the town which is playing *Shock Corridor*. Images and associations from earlier films are repeated and

embellished. There is a scene in *Underworld U.S.A.* where Tolly's surrogate mother is shown with a seamstress' model and revealed to be unable to have children. In *The Naked Kiss* a similar connection is made with the dressmaking model of the "town virgin" Miss Josephine, a seamstress from whom Kelly rents a room. This time, however, the model is given an identity, "Charlie", and becomes a character in itself.

Beyond the frenetic violence, giddy fantasy and tough talk of *The Naked Kiss* there is also a complex and subtle visual lyricism. After Kelly's first encounter with Griff she stands under the venetian blinds that divide his bedroom from the living area, illustrating the choice she has to make between confinement and freedom. This dichotomy between private and public is played on throughout the film. Many of the interiors in the film are made sinister by weird angles and stark, expressionistic lighting, in contrast to the plain, open outdoor shots. This schema reaches its apogee when Kelly visits Grant to show him her wedding dress. On the way to Grant's house Kelly skips past kids playing on the footpath; the scene is sun drenched and radiant. But once Kelly enters the house she is in a mausoleum, eerie and foreboding. The scene finishes with a montage of still shots within the house that poignantly present the culture to which Kelly aspires as both beautiful and hollow. This montage is a succinct and affecting projection of Fuller's acknowledgement of, and ambivalence to, European tradition. It is also perhaps an indication of the substance of his great influence on filmmakers ranging from Godard to Tarantino. Fuller could condemn and praise at the same time. He could make violence virtuous and charity odious. His films live and breathe contradiction and leave us breathless.

#### Endnotes

1. In an interview with Robert Porfirio and James Ursini, Fuller gives a good account of why this was the case, as well as explaining his thinking behind the film and his disappointment at not being allowed to be more explicit. See Porfirio and Ursini, "[Samuel Fuller: About Film Noir](#)", *Images: A Journal of Film and Popular Culture* no. 10, September 2001. ↑

[You won't be bored, and you might be amazed. Great low-budget stuff.](#)

31 March 2010 | by [secondtake](#)

Constance Towers is fresh off of Sam Fuller's *Shock Corridor* the previous year, and she is perfectly adroit at the saint/sinner, prostitute/angel dichotomy at the core of it. This is a crazy movie to take seriously, yet there are so many serious parts to it, not the least of which is child molesting. For a 1964 movie that's daring stuff. Throw in a corrupt lovable cop, sweet children with physical disabilities, tinkly fairy tale music that comes out of nowhere when she is looking at a bedroom to stay in, and some good old female fist fights. Out comes a Fuller masterwork, of sort.

It's flawed enough to make some people run, but edgy enough to glue others to their seats. If the movie industry was looking for ways to break out of the doldrums of the late 1950s and early 1960s (there are some terrible high budget films from these years), it overlooked the breakthroughs coming from the fringes. The directness and everyday nasty material here would be the bedrock of movies in just two or three years, as violence, frank sexual content, and flawed people became the norm.

You may as well admit, too, that the best parts of this movie are terrific, including some hard edged, sharp, black and white photography. The Criterion DVD is as close to great as you can get, even though there is some confusion about the way even this famed company handled the release. The movie was actually shot in 4:3 format, in so called

"flat" 35mm shooting (no anamorphic lens used). It was then cropped along the top and bottom to create a wide screen format for theatrical release. The "fullscreen" version is formatted full (and I don't know if any of the fullscreen ones show the whole original "open matte" formatting, or are further cropped from the widescreen cropping). Either way, it was intended to be seen with wide screen composition, so get the Criterion. It's beautiful.