



The Notorious Bettie Page

Mary Harron

USA, 2005
English

100 minutes ■ Colour and
Black and White/35mm

Production Company: **Killer Films/
John Wells Productions/HBO Films**

Executive Producer: **John Wells**

Producer: **Pamela Koffler,
Katie Roumel, Christine Vachon**

Screenplay: **Mary Harron,
Guinevere Turner**

Cinematographer: **W. Mott Hupfel III**
Editor: **Tricia Cooke**

Production Designer: **Gideon Ponte**

Sound: **Ben Cheah, Wyatt Sprague**

Music: **Mark Suozzo**

Principal Cast: **Gretchen Mol, Lili Taylor,
Jonathan M. Woodward,
David Strathairn, Jared Harris**

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Mary Harron may be considered a provocateur, but she never resorts to shock tactics or simplified polemics. Her approach is one of intelligence and an almost scientific detachment, tempered with a quiet tenderness toward her pariah subjects. In her latest film, Harron fixes her gaze on the figure of fifties pin-up queen Bettie Page.

The film follows Page from her childhood in Nashville to New York, where she moves to pursue her acting dreams. To make ends meet, Page starts modelling and soon gets into nude photography; it is not long before she is posing for sado-masochistic fetish pics. She becomes the first celebrity bondage model in the United States and finds herself at the centre of a Senate investigation into pornography. Soon after, in 1958, she undergoes a rather sudden religious conversion and disappears from the public eye.

A bodacious Gretchen Mol plays Page and, like Harron, she does not give away the secrets behind Page's dazzling eyes and smile. The Page we see reproduced onscreen is almost eerily the same sweet, but eternally enigmatic figure we know so well from her iconic image. Although the film frankly recounts darker chapters of Page's personal history such as physical and sexual abuse, it stops far short of drawing conclusions about the trajectory of her life. This light touch is apt: while *The Notorious Bettie Page* is a political film, it is not an unnecessarily cerebral one. It offers moments of delectable visual beauty and joie de vivre – not least of which are provided by Mol posing

with Bettie Page-esque enthusiasm.

The Notorious Bettie Page renders its story and its viewpoints through the finest modulations of tone, opting for a stripped-down naturalism that nevertheless retains the rich colours of fifties cheesecake. This honest, intrepid portrait has the brains and understated elegance of true seduction.

■ Noah Cowan



Mary Harron was raised in Toronto and studied at Oxford University in England. She now lives in New York. At this year's Provincetown International Film Festival, she was awarded the annual Filmmaker On The Edge award. Her feature films are *I Shot Andy Warhol* (96), *American Psycho* (00) and *The Notorious Bettie Page* (05).

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