



Love is the Devil

John Maybury

UNITED KINGDOM, 1998

91 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: **BFI Production/Première Heure/Partners in Crime**
 Executive Producer: **Frances-Anne Solomon, Ben Gibson**
 Producer: **Chiara Menage**
 Screenplay: **John Maybury**
 Cinematographer: **John Mathieson**
 Editor: **Daniel Goddard**
 Production Designer: **Alan MacDonald**
 Sound: **Paul Davies**
 Music: **Ryuichi Sakamoto**
 Principal Cast: **Sir Derek Jacobi, Daniel Craig, Tilda Swinton, Adrian Scarborough, Anne Lambton, Annabel Brooks, Karl Johnson**

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Perhaps John Maybury's greatest achievement in *Love is the Devil* is not the astonishingly original visual look of the film – transforming Francis Bacon's unique approach to light and figure into something wholly cinematic – but his ability to forge a transcendent love story out of the ruinous lives he has chosen to portray. At any rate, it is an extraordinary accomplishment, richly textured in every way and featuring the finest screen performance of Sir Derek Jacobi's extremely distinguished career.

The film begins in 1971 at the Grand Palais in Paris. Bacon (Jacobi), welcomed as the world's "greatest living painter," inaugurates a retrospective of his work while his model and lover of seven years, George Dyer (Daniel Craig), downs enough pills and alcohol in their Paris hotel room to fell a horse.

As he slips into unconsciousness, Dyer recalls the day when they "met." He was a cat burglar and a petty East End London thief who literally fell into Bacon's life through the skylight. Their unconventional relationship developed quickly on the painter's terms: Bacon was a masochist in bed and a sadist outside of it. Dyer became a model for some of Bacon's most celebrated and disturbing paintings, but found it difficult to penetrate his sophisticated demi-monde of dandyish artists, low-rent rent boys and amusing drunks, all of whom gathered at the legendary Colony Room. As Bacon's stature grew, Dyer sank into a delusional morass of drugs and alcohol, every day becoming more pathetic and helpless.

Each moment of this tragic story is seen through an arresting image. Most radically, the extraordinary Tilda Swinton, as a massive dowager hag lording over the Colony, is shot entirely in reflections off liquor bottles, distorting her in a way that would make Bacon proud. Details such as this make *Love is the Devil* eerily synchronistic; it is as though Bacon's aesthetic augurs the course of his life.

All the performances are wonderful in the film – especially considering the dense edifice of theory, history and cinematographical representation with which they compete – but Jacobi's Bacon is something else entirely. Rarely has an actor invested so much in someone so horrible and made him so absolutely irresistible.

■ **Noah Cowan**

John Maybury began making Super 8 shorts and features while attending art school during the late seventies, and worked with the late Derek Jarman as a costume and set designer. Filmography: *Man To Man* (92), *Remembrance of Things Past* (93) and *Love is the Devil* (98).

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