



PREVIEW

The Feast

+ Q&A with director Lee Haven Jones, producer-screenwriter Roger Williams and actor Annes Elwy

In a modern, luxurious house situated in remote Welsh mountains, a wealthy family prepare for an extravagant dinner party. They are on a mission to impress their neighbour and broker a business deal to mine the surrounding countryside. Tensions are already running high when their hired help, Cadi, an eerily quiet and sickly looking waitress, arrives traipsing all kinds of dirt into their precious home. Lee Haven Jones's disquieting and delicious debut feature delivers a masterclass in tension-building, while delightfully sinking its teeth into capitalism without restraint. A tasty treat for those with strong stomachs to consume!

Kimberley Sheehan, Events Programmer

Over plain opening credits, birdsong and the bleating of sheep sonically conjure a rural idyll before being interrupted – first by the sound of a car arriving, then by the noise of a much louder motor. The source of that noise is the film's first image: a roaring, squealing drill set up in the middle of an otherwise Edenic field, boring right into the ground. A man who we infer is the drill's operator – shot at a low angle from behind, as though from the perspective of the earth itself – staggers into shot before collapsing, his face visibly bloodied, and then the film's title, *The Feast* (or *Gwledd* in the original Welsh), appears on screen. This prologue establishes a pattern that is programmatic for all that follows: those who encroach upon and violate the land will be met with mysterious acts of nature's revenge.

Lee Haven Jones's first fiction feature unfolds over one day and night, in and around a house near that accident – and in keeping with this Aristotelian unity of time and place, it is a tragedy in which a deeply dysfunctional dynasty is brought down by its own hubris (and a local legend). After inheriting this entire estate from her late mother, Glenda (Nia Roberts) has had the traditional farmhouse of her childhood replaced by a modernist home where, when not in London, she lives with her MP husband Gwyn (Julian Lewis Jones) and their young adult sons – triathlete-in-training Gweirydd (Sion Alun Davies) and drug-addicted musician Guto (Steffan Cennydd). The new house is not the only change that they have brought to the environment: they have ditched the family's agricultural business, sold off some of the property, and found a new way to exploit what remains, licensing an international consortium to explore the land for mining opportunities. With a promising seam detected underground near the adjacent property, the consortium's representative Euros (Rhodri Meilir) has asked Gwyn and Glenda to arrange a dinner party where he can be introduced to their neighbours Mair (Lisa Palfrey) and Iori, and hopefully persuade them to provide access to their own land for profit.

With the usual hired help in the kitchen unavailable, local waitress Cadi (Annes Elwy) is sent in her place. It is a perilous environment for a pretty woman. An obvious sex pest already mired in scandal, Gweirydd is extremely creepy around Cadi, while the literally predatory Gwyn – first seen in the film hunting

rabbits with a shotgun, with less success than he boasts – also has a wandering eye for the young stranger. Everyone in this family is dressing up in a guise of normalcy and trying, to varying degrees, to ‘make a good impression’ (as Glenda puts it) on their guests. Yet faced with the family’s arrogance, entitlement and inner tensions, Cadi comes wearing her own mask, and with her own secrets just waiting to be unearthed. Saying very little but humming folk songs to herself as she observes everything, Cadi is strange – and her uncanny little behaviours, unnoticed by the others, leave their grubby mark on the house’s otherwise clean, minimalist surfaces. Nature cannot be kept permanently at a distance.

Mounted on the wall of the dining room where the exotic three-course banquet takes place is a large painting. With its odd geometries and bright splashes of colour, it looks like abstract art, but as Glenda points out to Mair, far from being the non-figurative expression of love or hope that some of her guests discern, it is in fact an accurate map of the district, commissioned at great cost as an ostentatious emblem of the family’s domain and affluence. For this clan of four – ominously the same number as the rabbits in the ‘family of little bastards’ Gwyn claims to have blasted earlier – see the land around them merely as something to own, aestheticise and exploit, rather than as a living, breathing ecosystem with its own history and myth. *The Feast*’s very language reinforces this sense of local tradition: while some Welsh was spoken in John Fawcett’s *The Dark* (2005) and William McGregor’s *Gwen* (2018), *The Feast* is a rarity in serving up its genre entirely in Cymraeg.

Teaming up again with writer/producer Roger Williams after their collaboration on *Galesa* (2015), director Jones crafts folk horror that, like the family’s polysemic painting, offers a feast for the eyes while accommodating more than one interpretation. For this is all at once environmental fable, anti-colonialist allegory, and Hanekean portrait of a family undone by its own errant appetites and all-consuming greed.

Anton Bitel, *Sight and Sound*, September 2022

THE FEAST (GWLEDD)

Director: Lee Haven Jones
©: Picturehouse Entertainment
Production Companies: BFI, Ffilm Cymru Wales, Joio Productions, S4C, Great Point Media
Producer: Roger Williams
Screenplay: Roger Williams
Cinematography: Bjørn Bratberg
Editor: Kevin Jones
Production Design: Gwyn Eiddior
Costume Design: Dawn Thomas-Mondo
Music: Samuel Sim

Cast

Annes Elwy (*Cadi*)
Nia Roberts (*Glenda*)
Julian Lewis Jones (*Gwyn*)
Steffan Cennydd (*Guto*)
Sion Alun Davies (*Gweirydd*)
Rhodri Meilir (*Euros*)
Lisa Palfrey (*Mair*)
Chris Gordon (*Gweithiwr*)
Caroline Barry (*Delyth*)

UK 2021©
93 mins

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