

= The Man from London =

The Man from London (Hungarian : A londoni férfi) is a 2007 film by Hungarian director Béla Tarr . It is an adaptation by Tarr and his collaborator @-@ friend László Krasznahorkai of the 1934 French language novel L 'Homme de Londres by prolific Belgian writer Georges Simenon . The film was co @-@ directed by editor Ágnes Hranitzky , and features an international ensemble cast including Czech actor Miroslav Krobot , Tilda Swinton , and Hungarian actors János Derzsi and István Lénárt . The plot follows Maloin , a nondescript railway worker who recovers a briefcase containing a significant amount of money from the scene of a murder to which he is the only witness . Wracked by guilt and fear of being discovered , Maloin sinks into despondence and frustration , which leads to acrimony in his household . Meanwhile , an English police detective investigates the disappearance of the money and the unscrupulous characters connected to the crime .

The French , German and Hungarian co @-@ production of the film was fraught with difficulty and obstacles . The first of these was the suicide in February 2005 , days before shooting was due to begin , of the film 's French producer , Humbert Balsan . As the original financing of the film collapsed , the remaining producers managed to secure stop @-@ gap funding which allowed them to shoot nine days of footage on the expensive Corsican sets , until they were shut down through legal action by the local subcontractor . After many expressions of support from European film organisations , production companies and government bodies , a new co @-@ production contract was signed in July 2005 with a revised budget and shooting schedule . It then emerged that all rights to the film had been ceded to a French bank under the original production agreement , and only after further changes in the film 's backers was a deal struck with the bank to allow shooting to resume in March 2006 , over a year later than had been originally envisaged .

The Man from London was the first of Tarr 's films to premiere in competition at the Cannes Film Festival , but despite being highly anticipated , it won no prize . The French distributor blamed this on poor dubbing and a late showing , though the press were put off by the film 's extended shots and leaden pace . After being re @-@ dubbed , it was shown on the international film festival circuit .

Critical reception to The Man from London was generally positive , though less adamant than that of the director 's previous two works ; while reviewers spoke in glowing terms of the formidable cinematography and meticulous composition , they felt the film lacked compelling characters . Variety reviewer Derek Elley commented that the film was unlikely to reconcile the division between viewers of Tarr 's films who find the director to be " either a visionary genius or a crashing bore " .

= = Plot = =

The film concerns a middle @-@ aged railway pointsman , Maloin (Miroslav Krobot) , who lives in a decrepit apartment in a port town with his highly @-@ strung wife Camélia (Tilda Swinton) and his daughter Henriette (Erika Bók) . One night while in his viewing tower at the port 's rail terminus , Maloin witnesses a fight on the dockside . One of the shady combatants is knocked into the water along with the briefcase he carries ; when the other flees the dark quayside , Maloin makes a clandestine descent from the tower and retrieves the briefcase , which he finds full of sodden English banknotes . Maloin conceals the money and tells no @-@ one of what he has seen . The next morning , he visits a tavern where he plays chess with the barkeep (Gyula Pauer) . On his way home , he stops by the butcher 's where his daughter works , and finds to his indignation that they have her washing the floor . Later , from the window of his apartment , he notices Brown (János Derzsi) watching him from below . At dinner , Maloin is increasingly irascible , addressing Henriette brusquely and arguing with Camélia . Meanwhile , Brown searches the water at the dock 's edge without success before noticing the watchtower overlooking the quayside , and Maloin within .

Later at the tavern , a police inspector from London named Morrison (István Lénárt) discusses with Brown the matter of the stolen money . Morrison claims to be working on behalf of a theater owner named Mitchell , a theatre owner from whose office safe the £ 55 @, @ 000 was stolen . Morrison proposes that Brown , being intimately familiar with Mitchell 's office , is the only man he knows who

was capable of making away with the money without raising alarm . Morrison indicates that Mitchell cares only that the money is returned swiftly , and is even prepared to offer a two nights ' theater takings in exchange . When Morrison mentions having visited Brown 's wife and asks what he should tell Mitchell , Brown leaves the room under a pretense and slips out a side door . Nearby playing chess with the barkeep , Maloin has overheard the conversation .

Maloin calls to the butcher 's and drags Henriette from the store against her will and over the protestations of the butcher 's wife (Kati Lázár) . He brings her to the tavern for a drink , where he overhears the barkeep telling another patron the story of Brown 's meeting with the inspector , revealing that Morrison had called the local police when Brown absconded . Though Henriette refuses her drink , Maloin buys her an expensive mink stole . They return home to the consternation of Camélia , who cannot comprehend why Maloin has ruined Henriette 's chances of a job and spent what little savings the family had on the extravagant stole . During Maloin 's shift the next night he is visited by Morrison , who questions him as to the previous night 's events as the body of the drowned man is retrieved from the quayside below .

The next day at the tavern , Morrison meets Brown 's wife (Agi Szirtes) , and tells her that Brown is under suspicion for the theft and for the murder at the quayside . He asks for her help in finding him and repeats to her Mitchell 's offer to Brown , but she remains silent . At home , Henriette tells Maloin she found a man in their hut at the seaside , and in fear locked the door and ran home . An agitated Maloin tells her not to tell anyone , and leaves for the hut . He unlocks the door , and receiving no response to his calling Brown 's name , steps inside , closing the door behind . Minutes later he re @-@ emerges , breathing heavily . After pausing to compose himself , he locks the door and leaves . In the next scene , Maloin presents the briefcase to Morrison in the tavern , and asks him to arrest him , confessing to having killed Brown an hour ago . Morrison leaves with Maloin for the hut , dismissing the frenzied inquiries of Brown 's wife about her husband and handing the briefcase to the barkeep on the way out . Brown 's wife follows the men to the hut , and emerges weeping with Morrison moments later . Back at the tavern , Morrison prepares two envelopes with a small portion of the recovered money in each . One he leaves with the grieving widow to whom he apologizes and wishes well , while the other he gives to Maloin , telling him that his case was one of self @-@ defense . As he is preparing to leave , Morrison advises Maloin to go home and forget the whole affair . The camera focuses on the expressionless face of Brown 's wife momentarily before fading to white .

= = Analysis = =

According to critic Martha P. Nochimson , the film is an exploration of the place of anonymous breakdowns of social order in personal life . For the most part , questions of justice operate in the background of *The Man From London* , which foregrounds the perceptions and point of view of an accidental witness to the murder , who , like the viewer , has no connection with anyone involved . The film principally concerns the texture of the world of the protagonist Maloin as he experiences it ?rst hand : fog , light , shadow , skin , walls , ?oors , windows , sounds . These are much closer to Maloin than any broken laws involving strangers as in the killing at the dock . As distinct from the trope of crime functioning as a break from the boredom of the mundane for the Hitchcockian ordinary man " excitingly " caught up in it , the interjection of crime in the lives of the characters of *The Man from London* is a phantom occurrence for those burrowed into the center of the mundane details of their lives . In other words , Tarr 's ?lm suggests the possibility that it is only on an abstract plane that murder committed by and on strangers causes a stir and demands an investigation . In this context , it is fitting that the investigation must be undertaken by a stranger , the man from London , since abstraction entails distancing from an enveloping context . Only the appearance of the man from London , Brown , impels Maloin to struggle with his de facto alienation , as an ordinary man , from moral principle , an alienation linked , counterintuitively , to the absence of desire in his daily grind .

= = Background = =

Director Béla Tarr and novelist @-@ screenwriter László Krasznahorkai had been collaborators since making the acclaimed epic *Sátántangó* in 1985 . With *The Man from London* , they sought to adapt the 1934 French language novel *L 'Homme de Londres* by the Belgian writer Georges Simenon . The novel had been twice adapted for film previously ; as *The London Man* by Henri Decoin in 1943 , and as *Temptation Harbour* by Lance Comfort in 1947 with William Hartnell , Robert Newton , and Simone Simon in the lead roles . *The Man from London* was something of a departure from the social realism of the collaborators ' preceding films , as the characters exemplify no social classes and the film focuses on their internal and interrelational dynamics rather than their environment . Tarr explained that he had been drawn to adapt the novel because " it deals with the eternal and the everyday at one and the same time . It deals with the cosmic and the realistic , the divine and the human , and to my mind , contains the totality of nature and man , just as it contains their pettiness . " It was the first of the director 's films not to feature the Hungarian language or an Eastern European setting . The ensemble cast of the film included Czech Miroslav Krobot , Briton Tilda Swinton , and the Hungarians János Derzsi and István Lénárt . Tarr shared directorial credit with Ágnes Hranitzky ? the film 's editor and his long @-@ time collaborator .

= = Production history = =

The development of the film was problematic , with threats to shut down the production , lack of financing , and ultimately a return to work . The project first faltered in February 2005 , when the film 's producer Humbert Balsan committed suicide . Tarr reported receiving word of his producer 's death two days before shooting was scheduled to begin in Bastia , Corsica . Balsan 's death led to significant financial difficulties for the production . The film had been established as a co @-@ production with French , German and Hungarian financing . Tarr 's Budapest @-@ based production company T. T. Filmm?hely were to provide the Hungarian funding for the project , while Balsan had secured the French and German financing for the film by warranting a loan from the French bank Coficiné . Upon learning of his death , the bank withdrew its support for the production , which was then postponed .

After securing additional financing from Eurimages and ARTE , Tarr used these and the Hungarian funds to undertake nine days of shooting on sets he had built at a cost of ? 2 million . The French funding was cross @-@ financed for the shoot by T. T. Filmm?hely . As funds were frozen however , the Corsican subcontractor Tanit Films (controlled by the film 's then @-@ executive producer Jean @-@ Patrick Costantini) , terminated their contract with Balsan and through legal action compelled the production to dismantle the sets and leave the shooting location . At that point , Ognon Pictures shut the production down and disassociated themselves from the film , and Tarr withdrew to Hungary to regroup .

Expressions of sympathy and solidarity from the European film community manifested in renewed assurances of continued support from the production 's German partners , ARTE , and the French National Film Centre (whose support was conditional on the film having 51 % of its dialogue in French) . New French financing was secured from production company Mezzanine Film , and in Hungary , the Hungarian Motion Picture Foundation (MMKA) and the Minister of Culture pledged to back the production if a guarantee could be made that the film would be finished safely . A compromise filming schedule was negotiated whereby a quarter of the shoot would take place in Eastern Europe rather than Corsica and fewer shooting days would be allotted . This allowed the original ? 5 million budget to be reduced by ? 700 @,@ 000 to the amount available . With the funding promises secured and a revised shooting schedule , the film 's producers forged a new co @-@ production contract in July 2005 .

While the production 's lawyers worked to clarify its legal standing in the Summer of 2005 , it emerged that Humbert Balsan 's deeply indebted production company Ognon Pictures had pledged all rights to the production to Coficiné in exchange for loans . With production in legal stasis and faced with a lengthy court battle to recover the rights , the producers agreed to a settlement with Ognon 's bankruptcy officer . In the meantime , the French partners Mezzanine Film declared their

uncomfortableness with the scale of the production , and after mutual agreement with the producers , left the project on September 5 , 2005 . After meeting with the producers and their new French partner , Paul Saadoun of 13 Production , Coficiné consented to completing the film . On February 6 , 2006 , Tarr and producer Gábor Tényi issued a press release which documented at length the developments with the troubled production to that date , and expressed their hope and intent to persevere in completing the film . Tarr duly restarted shooting in March 2006 , after a year of inactivity . The filmmakers dedicated *The Man from London* to their late colleague Humbert Balsan .

= = Release = =

The Man from London premiered in competition at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival , Tarr 's first film to do so . Although its showing was highly anticipated , the slow pace and prolonged shots of the film " had the press fleeing like panicked slaughterhouse cattle " as *The New York Times* put it , and it won no prize . This failure was attributed by the film 's French distributor Shellac to its late showing and the poor quality of the dubbing . A proposal for the film to open the Hungarian Film Week out of competition had previously been rejected by the festival 's board . Following its Cannes appearance , the film was screened at the film festivals of Toronto , Melbourne , Edinburgh , Split , Vancouver and New York . It proved controversial in New York , where elements of the audience reacted favourably when the film appeared to end prematurely due to a technical fault ; others greeted the actual conclusion with fervent applause and calls of bravo .

Global sales rights to the film were bought by Fortissimo Films , and it was re @-@ dubbed in French and English . The new version had its North American premiere at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in September 2008 . In the United Kingdom , distributor Artificial Eye released the film theatrically in December 2008 , 18 months following its Cannes premiere . They later released a DVD box set of Tarr 's films which collected *The Man from London* with *Damnation* (1988) and *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) . In the United States the film was given a limited release in May 2009 by IFC Films , who later made it available through video @-@ on @-@ demand .

= = Critical reception = =

Critical reaction to *The Man from London* generally praised its formalist aesthetic and painstakingly composed scenes , while criticizing its slow pace and lack of a compelling plot . Most argued the film fell short of Tarr 's previous efforts . *Variety* 's Derek Elley rated the film on a par with his *Damnation* (1988) but as inferior to *Sátántangó* (1994) and *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) , remarking it was improbable that *The Man From London* would put an end to the polarization of Tarr 's audiences into those who hail him as a director of " visionary genius " and those for whom he is a " crashing bore " . Martin Tsai of *The New York Sun* allowed that Tarr " makes it easy for viewers to get lost in his beautifully bleak world and lose track of time " but complained that in comparison with its predecessors , the film 's central theme of guilt seemed insubstantial and the film itself felt " slight and incomplete " .

The *New York Times* reviewer Nathan Lee described *The Man from London* as " bloated , formalist art " , and an " outrageously stylized , conceptually demanding film " that dehumanizes and alienates its audience . In *The Hollywood Reporter* , Kirk Honeycutt complimented the intricacy of the cinematography and the monochrome photography , but judged the film to be " tedious " , " repetitive " and " nearly unwatchable " . In a review of Cannes ' offerings for *Time Out* , Dave Calhoun too drew attention to the meticulous cinematography and signature shot length 's of Tarr 's " austere and mesmeric " film , and declared Swinton 's dubbing into Hungarian one of the festival 's strangest instances of cultural displacement . Reporting from Cannes , *The Guardian* 's Peter Bradshaw described the film as " bizarre and lugubrious , but mesmeric " , and praised the muted performance of Agi Szirtes in the role of Brown 's wife as " strangely compelling " . Reviewing the film following its theatrical release , he found the dubbed dialogue affected and odd , the score doom @-@ laden , the occasional humour mordant , and the cinematography mesmerising ,

remarking that net effect was " unsettling , sometimes absurd , sometimes stunning " . Ed Gonzales of The Village Voice concluded that the film " stands as an example of style for the sake of pure and intense but dispassionate style " .