

Het Mes

("The Knife")

Netherlands : 1961 : dir. Fons Rademakers : : 89 min

prod: : scr: Hugo Claus : dir.ph.: Eddy van der Enden

[Reitze van der Linden; Marie-Louise Videsc](#)

Ellen Vogel; Paul Kammermans; Guus Hermus; Cor Witsche; Maria Goossen; Hetty Beck; Elly van Stekelenburg; Cor Witschge

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2916a	2.5	4	1	1,138	3	-	-	-	-	No	unseen

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"From a screenplay by Hugo Claus, this was a drama with strong moments about an adolescent and his girlfriend and the – to their age – shocking goings-on which can happen in the adult world. Rademakers directed Marie-Louise and Reitze masterfully. An alluring film with fresh camerawork by Eddy van der Enden.

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Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide review:

"During a school vacation, Thomas (Van der Linden), 13 and fatherless, steals an oriental knife from an exhibition. His tutor, Oscar (Cammermans), confiscates it but Thomas steals it back, thus precipitating a series of emotional crises, particularly in his relationship with his mother (Vogel), whom he discovers to be locked into a degrading sexual relationship with Oscar. One of Rademakers' earliest films tells its story as a flashback recollection from Thomas, and entirely from his point of view. However, in spite of a convincing picture of Dutch small-town life, an interesting idea, and a startlingly mature and uncompromising central performance from the boy, the resulting film is somewhat plodding and pedestrian, and the director's attempts at the occasional Bergmanesque sequence tend to come unstuck."

Sight & Sound - Autumn 1961 - note:

"...Also worth importing is Fons Rademakers' **"THE KNIFE"**, the story of a boy's awakening from childhood to youth,

told with considerable savagery as well as tenderness."

Films & Filming – January 1962 – review:

"The first film of the Dutch director, Fons Rademakers, to be commercially shown in Britain is a vast improvement on his previous work. Earlier films, such as his saga of small-town life, **"DORN AAN DE RIVIER"**, from 1959, are arty and pretentious in the worst possible way, full of cloying literary and cinematic echoes. While he still hasn't completely assimilated his influences so that tend to overbalance **"THE KNIFE"** (dream sequence by Bergman, slow motion by Kurosawa, obeisance to Truffaut), this post-Freudian analysis of childhood has a wry flavour of its own that is quite stimulating, an urgency that is both savage and tender. Even in the company of **"LES QUATRE CENTS COUPS"** – a predecessor to which **"THE KNIFE"** owes a great deal – Rademakers' study can hold its own.

Thomas, it is true, has a great deal in common with Antoine Doinel, but whereas Truffaut's film was ultimately a savage indictment of society Rademakers is much less interested in this aspect of his theme. Thomas' mother is deeply, fatally infatuated with a young wastrel, Oscar; the discovery of the depths of her sexual degradation forms the climax of the work. Thomas tries to run away and, on being brought back, attacks her with "The Knife" of the title, but ultimately comes to accept and have compassion for her predicament. Sensitive children can be the bane of the

cinema¹, but Thomas, although he is blood-brother of Antoine Doinel, has enough of Homer Caulfield in his character to make the question mark at the end rather more hopeful than the one at the end of "**LES QUATRE CENTS COUPS**".

For a film so enmeshed in symbolism – the East Indian sacrificial knife of the title has a rather obvious symbolic value – the work has a great spontaneity and buoyancy, partly due to the beautifully flowing performance by Reitze van der Linden as the thirteen-year old boy, and partly due to the director's skill in building a jig-saw of the stresses of personal and family relationships through inflections and half-gestures. Action is observed entirely from the boy's viewpoint, so that as he becomes increasingly aware of complexities, as he comes to accept the need his mother has for Oscar, one's perception of these characters undergoes a transformation parallel with his. The director is at his best in the scenes between these three characters, most notably in the scene where Oscar, who has recently and publicly humiliated his mistress, comes to Thomas and his mother while they are watching television; the reconciliation of the two adults is beautifully established on several different planes of reality simultaneously.

One major flaw in Truffaut's film was the curious withholding of sympathy from the parents (they, no less than Antoine, were victims of "society"), but with an admirable discretion this is a mistake Rademakers never commits."

Still caption:

"Thomas (Reitze van der Linden) shows his girl-friend (Marie-Louise Viedé) an East Indian sacrificial knife he has stolen from a museum, in this scene from Fons Rademakers' "**THE KNIFE**" ("Het Mes"), in which the boy is faced with the complexities and stresses of family life."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993",

"Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

¹ Says who?

No further information currently available. Although I lived in the Netherlands for six years, and began work on this archive there, I seem to have missed it altogether. The lead, Reitze van der Linden, would presumably be a son of Dutch children's film director Henk van der Linden.

The synopsis above makes it sound promising, yet it's sad but true that Holland has produced scarcely any film-makers of note since the war, and even the best of Dutch cinema falls somewhat short of being riveting. The otherwise perceptive *Films & Filming* review neglects to mention the salient detail that Oscar was Thomas' teacher – a fact which in itself would explain the boy's resentment of his mother's sexual relationship with him, whatever the objective merits of that relationship. What 13-year old boy *would* like his mother sleeping with his teacher?

Continental cinema has always been more disposed than British cinema or Hollywood to examine children's relationships with their fallible parents from a standpoint of respect for the child's own maturity and perceptiveness. Numerous titles in the archive have a son or daughter labouring to support/protect/defend an alcoholic or prostitute mother, shedding their illusions about a father, discreetly overlooking a parental infidelity, and so forth. There is a common strand there, but one too elusive to make it a subject index category of its own.

Nothing else is known of Van der Linden or Marie-Louise Videc.

See subject index under **BOY MEETS GIRL, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS** and [SCHOOL](#) (although private tutors would be listed under **NANNIES / GOVERNESSES / DOMESTIC SERVANTS**).