

The Pumpkin Eater

UK : 1964 : dir. Jack Clayton : Columbia / Romulus : 118 min
 prod: James Woolf : scr: Harold Pinter : dir.ph.: Oswald Morris
Fergus McClelland; Gregory Phillips; Christopher Ellis
 Anne Bancroft; Peter Finch; James Mason; Cedric Hardwicke; Alan Webb; Richard Johnson;
 Maggie Smith; Eric Porter; Janine Gray; Rosalind Atkinson; Yootha Joyce

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Kbytes	Ω □ € Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"Intelligent if overlong drama chronicling the plight of Bancroft, the mother of eight children, who discovers third husband Finch has been unfaithful. Fine performances all round, with Bancroft a standout. Script by Harold Pinter, from the Penelope Mortimer novel. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Smart women's drama with top performance by Bancroft, who discovers that her husband has been unfaithful. Watch out for the devastating scene in the beauty salon. *** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A compulsive mother (of eight children) finds her third marriage rocking when she gets evidence of her husband's affairs. Brilliantly made if basically rather irritating kaleidoscope of vivid scenes about silly people, all quite recognisable as sixties Londoners; very well acted. Scr: Harold Pinter, from the novel by Penelope Mortimer. Dir.ph: Oswald Morris. Academy Award nomination: Anne Bancroft (Best Actress). *** "

"There never was a film so rawly memorable"
 - **Evening Standard**

"It is solid, serious, intelligent, stylish. It is also, for the most part, quite dead."
 - **Times**

"It plays like a house afire."
 - **Time**

The Critics' Film Guide review:

"A thrice-married mother of eight (Anne Bancroft) discovers that her screenwriter husband (Peter Finch) is unfaithful.

One of the better domestic dramas of the 60s: a harrowing portrait of a marriage in crisis, transparently inspired by Penelope Mortimer's own marital tribulations with her husband, screenwriter John Mortimer. The acting, unfortunately, is much better than the script, which is confused and has a tendency to ramble. Clayton's direction becomes unconscionably arty at times, but he does elicit marvellous performances, especially from Bancroft and Mason. 6/10 "

"A disappointing and ultimately stultifying film analysis of domestic relations, with close-up dissections of Miss Bancroft's sorrows as a woman wallowing in childbearing and self-pity."
 - **Judith Crist**

"[Anne Bancroft produces..] one of the finest pieces of acting ever captured on film."
 - **Rex Reed**

"Has authority and accomplishment of an uncommon sort... It is not so much about emotions as about nerves, sensations. Look in it for an interpretation of living and you may well come away chilled. But you won't be disappointed if you take it for what it is: a supremely skilled copy of life." - **Dilys Powell**

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"It was very fashionable at the time and its subject, a woman in the throes of a nervous breakdown, remains valid but the over-emphatic direction helps to date it badly, together with the Pinteresque pauses in the dialogue - Pinter wrote the script from Penelope Mortimer's novel. Anne Bancroft is the unfortunate heroine, a mother with eight kids; Peter Finch is the unfaithful husband; and James Mason is the husband of the woman he is being unfaithful with. The others are Cedric Hardwicke, Richard Johnson, Eric Porter, Yootha Joyce and, in a cameo role, Maggie Smith as a garrulous friend. * "

Movies on TV (1987) review:

"Absorbing, brilliantly acted story of a woman's personal insecurity and her crumbling marriage. Famed playwright Harold Pinter has written a stinging, perceptive screenplay based on the novel by Penelope Mortimer. Bancroft contributes a performance of dazzling range and power. ***1/2 "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"Solid acting by a fine cast enhances this melodramatic story about a thrice-married woman having husband trouble. Bancroft gives a superb performance as the bewildered and rather unstable mother of eight who finds yet another marriage falling apart. Finch co-stars as her unfaithful husband. The film is executed with considerable sensitivity. Academy Award nomination - Bancroft, Best Actress *** "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"The combined talents of director Jack Clayton, original novelist Penelope Mortimer, adapter Harold Pinter, leads Anne Bancroft, Peter Finch and James Mason should somehow have added up to a more convincing film than this. Perhaps the main fault is in Miss Bancroft's casting: she's a very fine American actress, but misses the essence of Englishness and Hampsteadness that should pervade the main character, who leaves one husband to marry Finch and is fecund to the point of neurosis. Nevertheless, the film deserves better treatment than when shown by LWT some years ago; they butchered it to squeeze it into a pre-ordained time-slot and all continuity and

chunks of the plot were lost. Let us hope that future showings are in full, or not at all. * "

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

" "Perceptive" and "lacerating" are among the adjectives which have been used to describe this powerful drama dealing with the disintegration of a marriage. The three stars (Peter Finch and James Mason are the others) all give excellent performances, and Anne Bancroft won a British Oscar for her interpretation of the role of the inward looking wife. The film was a landmark in the British cinema of the Sixties. Its excellent supporting cast includes Sir Cedric Hardwicke (superb in his last role), Richard Johnson, Maggie Smith and Yootha Joyce, who has a small but telling role as a woman in a hairdressing salon. ** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Harold Pinter's screenplay is based on a witty novel by Penelope Mortimer, and his script vividly brings to life the principal characters in this story of a shattered marriage, though Pinter's resort to flashback technique is confusing in the early stages. Jack Clayton's direction gets off to a slow, almost casual start, but the pace quickens as the drama becomes more intense.

Ann Bancroft is exceptionally good. She plays the mother of several young children who leaves her second husband to marry Peter Finch, a scriptwriter with a promising career ahead. And as he succeeds in his work, so she becomes aware of his increasing infidelities and she becomes a case for psychiatric treatment. The role may sound conventional enough, but not as played by Bancroft; she adds a depth and understanding which puts it on a higher plane.

Peter Finch's performance is a mature interpretation, and always impressive. To him, casual infidelities are the natural prerequisite of a successful writer. Notwithstanding the scope offered by those two roles, James Mason stands out in a much smaller part. He plays a deceived husband with a sinister, malevolent bitterness, to provide one of the acting highlights of the picture."

The Virgin Film Guide review:

"Bancroft, in an Oscar-nominated performance, plays a twice-married mother of six. She

divorces her second husband (Johnson) and takes up with Finch, a highly successful screenwriter. The two marry; it seems like a perfect marriage until Bancroft realises her philandering husband will never buckle down to her notions of marital fidelity¹. She gives birth to her seventh child and suffers a nervous breakdown. This, along with an encounter with an unbalanced woman at her hairdresser's, sends Bancroft to a psychiatrist (Porter). He is not much help. Bancroft's father dies, and she discovers that she is once more expecting a baby. She refuses to accompany Finch to a film location in Morocco but agrees to his arguments for sterilisation.

Later she runs into Mason, a man who once made a pass at her. Mason reveals that Finch has been having an affair with his wife (Gray), who is now expecting a child. In an ugly scene Bancroft confronts Finch and returns to Johnson². After she spends a night with her former husband, Johnson gets a phone call from old-friend Finch, whose father has just died. Bancroft goes to the funeral, but Finch pretends not to notice her. As she chases him, she slips and falls in the mud. Demoralised once more, she goes to their unfinished country house and spends the night alone. In the morning she wakes to the sound of her children as Finch leads them up a hill. Bancroft resigns herself to life, for good or ill, with the man.

This is a fine film, encompassing the joys and tragedies of life: birth and death, marriage and divorce, love and hate. The leads give their characters life. They seem to be real people on the screen, not actors in a drama. Bancroft lends her role real depth, switching moods with eerie and wonderful believability. Mason, in a small supporting role, is nothing short of excellent. The script, by noted playwright Pinter, is complex and painful but often exhibits a good sense of the comic as well. The direction, slow and even-handed, allows the story to develop at its own pace, gradually building in speed as the story's intensity grows. This is a fine and sensitive work, a truthful portrait of human foibles and complexities. The film was charismatic character actor Hardwicke's final one; he died the year of its release. **** ”

[no listing in "The Time Out Film Guide" or "Video Movie Guide 1993"]

¹ *She divorces husband no.2 to move in with no.3 – to teach him a thing or two about “marital fidelity”?*

² *Ah yes... Fidelity.*

One of those films, it would seem, in which children are viewed as mere accretions of marriage, barnacles on the keel of the good ship Haeterophilia. Let us ignore the ship and attend to the barnacles.

Only the boys' names are known. Fergus McClelland, star of "**SAMMY GOING SOUTH**" the previous year, was now 14. Mostly seen on TV, he later appeared in "**PRESS FOR TIME**" (66) and the witless Peter O'Toole musical "**GOODBYE MR CHIPS**" (69). Gregory Phillips (16) had turned in a nice performance as Dirk Bogarde and Judy Garland's illegitimate son Matt in "**I COULD GO ON SINGING**". He also made "**WHO KILLED THE CAT?**" (66), "**I START COUNTING**" (69) and the children's TV series "**Emerald Soup**" (63). Christopher Ellis, age unknown, would later play Miles in the awful prequel to "*Turn of the Screw*" - "**THE NIGHTCOMERS**" (71), with Brando chewing the scenery as Quint. His other work included "**THE FLOOD**" (63) and "**THE SANDWICH MAN**" (66).

Clearly of peripheral interest to the archive. No subject index categories suggest themselves, unless **LARGE BROODS**.