



BURNING

Directed by | Lee Chang-dong
Cast | Steven Yeun, Ah-In Yoo, Jong-Seo Jun
Running time | 148 minutes
Certificate | TBC
Language | Korean
UK release date | 1st February 2019

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SYNOPSIS

Deliveryman Jongsu is out on a job when he runs into Haemi, a girl who once lived in his neighbourhood. She asks if he'd mind looking after her cat while she's away on a trip to Africa. On her return she introduces to Jongsu an enigmatic young man named Ben, who she met during her trip. And one day Ben tells Jongsu about his most unusual hobby...

DIRECTOR LEE CHANG-DONG BIOGRAPHY

LEE Chang-dong began a career in theatre in his twenties and then moved on to work as a novelist. He made his debut as a film director with GREEN FISH, a "one of a kind" Korean film noir. If GREEN FISH was an exploration of genre conventions and the real world, he continued his exploration of life and the cinema with PEPPERMINT CANDY, in which he experimented with a narrative using flashbacks, and OASIS, in which he questioned the nature of true communication between people. It was with these latter two films that he received critical acclaim as well as popular success not to mention international acclaim and accolades. OASIS earned LEE and lead actress MOON So-ri awards for Best Director and Best New Actress at the Venice Film Festival. In 2003, he was appointed as Minister of Culture and Tourism. When he was relieved from this official position, he directed his fourth film, SECRET SUNSHINE. The superb performance by JEON Do-yeon as the tormented Shin-ae in SECRET SUNSHINE earned her the Best Actress award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007.

His fifth film, POETRY won the best screenplay award from the 63rd Cannes Film Festival and won the prestigious awards at various national and international film festivals. After POETRY, he will finally meet the audience again with BURNING.

FILMOGRAPHY

2010 POETRY (director | writer)

- THE 24th FRIBOURG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL - Grand Prize
- THE 63rd CANNES FILM FESTIVAL - Best Screenplay, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury - Special Mention
- THE 45th KARLOVY VARY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Open Eyes
- THE 35th TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Masters
- THE 54th BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL, Film on the Square
- THE 4th ASIA PACIFIC SCREEN AWARDS - Achievement in Directing

2007 SECRET SUNSHINE (director | producer | writer)

- THE 60th CANNES FILM FESTIVAL - Best Actress
- THE 1st ASIA PACIFIC SCREEN AWARDS - Best Feature Film
- THE 32nd TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Contemporary World Cinema
- THE 42nd KARLOVY VARY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Open Eyes

2002 OASIS (director | writer)

- THE 59th VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL - Silver Lion for Best Direction, FIPRESCI Award, SIGNIS Award, Special Director's Award
- THE 21st VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL - Chief Dan George Humanitarian Award

2000 PEPPERMINT CANDY (director | writer)

- THE 53rd CANNES FILM FESTIVAL, Directors' Fortnight
- THE 35th KARLOVY VARY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL - Special Jury Prize, NETPAC Award - Special Mention, FICC Don Quijote Award

1997 GREEN FISH (director | writer) – feature debut

- THE 25th INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM - NETPAC Award - Special Mention
- THE 16th VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL - Dragon and Tigers Award

A DANCE THAT SEEKS MEANING OF LIFE

A SHORT CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR LEE CHANG-DONG BY OH JUNG-MI

I first met director LEE Chang-dong at the film school in 2010 and learned storytelling from him. He taught us that we do not come up with a good story but come across it. Like living organisms, good stories wander around us, and if we have the discerning eyes, we would finally recognize them. After finishing school, I have worked with director LEE as a screenwriter, and during those five years, numerous stories came our way and hovered around us. Some of them were made into film scripts, but they were put aside on the shelf because we couldn't quite answer why they "had" to be made into films. It felt as though we were going around in circles, looking for an uncharted road. Just when we were getting too weary from the waiting, we stumbled upon Haruki MURAKAMI's short story, "BARN BURNING". As director LEE had said, we came upon the right story by pure chance, in the most unexpected moment.

OH: I think people are surprised when they find out you made a movie based on this short story by MURAKAMI's. And the story is one of the stories in which nothing really happens. Aren't they the type of stories which you told the students in your storytelling class we should avoid?

LEE: When you first recommended me this short story, I was a bit taken aback. Because the story felt mysterious, but nothing really happens in it. But I had to agree with you that there was something very cinematic about that mysteriousness. A small mystery from the short story could be expanded to bigger mysteries in multiple layers in cinematic way. The gaping holes in the chain of events –the missing piece from which we can never know the truth– alludes to the mysterious world we live in now; the world in which we sense that something is wrong but cannot quite put a finger on what the problem is.

OH: We named some of our writings "Project Rage". You've wanted to tell stories about anger, especially the anger that young people feel these days. But at the same time, you've

also wanted to refrain from telling it in the conventional storytelling. How do you think this mysterious short story from Murakami gave rise to a story of anger?

LEE: It seems that today, people all over the world, regardless of their nationalities, religions, or social status, are angry for different reasons. The rage of young people is a particularly pressing problem. Young people in Korea are also having a hard time. They suffer from unemployment. They find no hope in the present and see that things will not get better in the future. Unable to identify the target at which they can direct their rage, they feel helpless. Yet the world looks as if it is becoming more sophisticated and convenient, a perfectly functioning place on the surface. To many young people, the world is becoming more like a giant puzzle. It's like how the protagonist in MURAKAMI's story feels listless before a man whose true identity is shrouded in mystery.

OH: I agree. People who have experienced feeling average or small could understand that feeling of helplessness. As for me, when I first read the line, "useless barns" from the original story, I thought they could metaphorically mean "useless people", which made me empathic and angry. By the way, you also became intrigued in this project by the fact that MURAKAMI's story has the same title as a short story by William FAULKNER.

LEE: William FAULKNER's short story is indeed about rage. Although this film is based on MURAKAMI's story, it is also connected to the world of FAULKNER. FAULKNER's story is about a man and his rage against life and the world, and it also vividly depicts the sense of guilt that his son feels for his father's arson. Unlike FAULKNER's story, MURAKAMI's is a story about a man who goes around burning barns for fun - an enigmatic story. As such, the way they tell their stories are quite opposite: MURAKAMI's barn is a metaphor rather than a tangible object whereas FAULKNER's barn represents reality itself - the very object at which rage is directed.

OH: And Jongsu, the main character of our film, becomes obsessed with that metaphor. The day we first started discussing BURNING, I remember we talked about a vignette with a man looking into a plastic greenhouse. A greenhouse, rather than a barn, came to our minds, because it is more commonly found in Korea. A greenhouse that is transparent but stained. And a man staring into an empty space of nothingness from the other side of the plastic veneer. I had a feeling that some secrets of our film lied there. Unlike wooden barns in MURAKAMI's story, the plastic greenhouse was given its own physical properties in the film.

LEE: If we were to say metaphor is a concept or meaning, the worn-out greenhouse in the film is an image which goes beyond concept or meaning. It has a physical form, but it is transparent and has nothing inside. It was once made for a purpose only to be rendered useless now. It is purely cinematic in the sense that it cannot be fully explained with a concept or an idea. There are other things that transcend ideas and notions as plastic greenhouse in our film: pantomime, the cat, and Ben, too. Who is Ben? And is the cat real? Is the story of Haemi's well true? Because you don't see it, does it mean that it doesn't exist? Unlike texts, films convey visual imagery, which itself is a mere illusion projected onto a screen by beams of light. Nonetheless, the audience take in the empty illusions, giving them a meaning and a concept of their own. With this film, I wanted to show such mystique that underlies cinema as a medium.

OH: I think the mystery that underlies film medium reflects the mystery of our own lives. People continue to question the meaning of the world that seems to be meaningless, but the world always stays as a mystery. Despite that, some people do not give up seeking for the meaning of life. Like the way Haemi does the dance of the Great Hunger in the film. I often think about a quote from the bushman, which I had come across during a research. I wanted to put it as a line in the film but was not able to find the right place for it. "All animals and objects in this universe are Great Hunger. The stars in the night sky tremble because they are doing the Dance of the Great Hunger, aware that they would wane and their light die. The early morning dew on leaves are the tears shed by the stars". The forefathers of humankind, the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, danced all night in search of the meaning of life. Just because someone dances all night, the world would not change. But the fact that someone dances in spite of it conveys hope. Filmmaking is not so different from doing the dance of the Great Hunger?

OH Jung-mi majored in Russian and English literature at Yonsei University, and completed a master's degree on Russian Literature. Her translation works include Vladimir NABOKOV's SPEAK, MEMORY, and Mikhail LERMONTOV's A HERO OF OUR TIME. Following her career in writing short TV dramas and having stage experience, she studied film at Korea National University of Arts. She also directed short films including FITTING ROOM and MR. COWPER. Since 2013, she has been working closely with director LEE as a screenwriter. Following a number of projects not filmized, she recently completed the script for BURNING.

ABOUT THE CAST AND CHARACTERS

AH-IN YOO AS JONGSU

"How does he live like this at his age?"

Jongsu is a young man in his twenties who works part-time at a distribution company. He develops a crush towards Haemi, a childhood friend who he hasn't seen for a long time, and begins to hang out with her. However, his life begins to crumble when he meets Ben, a mysterious man who Haemi introduces.

"It was an honour working on a project where everyone on set produced the best results with their detailed craftsmanship."

For every film he had appeared in such as VETERAN, THE THRONE, and TOUGH AS IRON, Actor Ah-in YOO instilled an unforgettable presence in the mind of the audiences. Whatever role he required to play, he has been able to show off his many faces and his ability to transform into his character. He has been captivating the audience both on screen and television with his prolificacy and transformability. BURNING will be the first time Ah-in collaborates with director LEE Chang-dong, where he will show the best performance of his lifetime. Through constant discussions with director LEE Chang-dong, he has been reborn as "Jongsu" in BURNING. He perfectly portrays the character who underneath his innocence possesses a hint of sensitivity. Ah-in YOO delivers the best performance of his

life in this film, fully transforming into this complex character. He will immerse the audience with his breath-taking performance.

Selected Filmography

2015: VETERAN (dir. RYOO Seung-wan)
 LIKE FOR LIKES (dir. PARK Hyun-jin)
2015: THE THRONE (dir. LEE Joon-ik)
2013: THREAD OF LIES (dir. LEE Han)
 TOUGH AS IRON (dir. AHN Gwon-tae)

STEVEN YEUN AS BEN

"It's fun. I'll do anything for fun..."

He rides a nice car, lives in a luxury villa in the middle of the city and enjoys fancy food and intellectual conversations. Although we do not know what he's thinking, he seems to be living a perfect life. However, one day, he confesses his secret hobby to Jongsu.

"Director LEE Chang-dong has unique intuition and the ability to see the world in a unified sense".

Through the popular television series, The Walking Dead and the movie OKJA, Steven Yeun has become increasingly well known and loved not only in Hollywood but also in Korea. Steven has secured a strong fan base with his prolificacy both in Korea and abroad. Through BURNING, he will show the audience something completely different, this time performing a character possessing a mysterious charm. "I thought that Steven Yeun's bright and mysterious charm was strangely appropriate to Ben's character", said director LEE Chang-dong. Like this, Steven Yeun succeeds in dramatically transforming into his character, fully expressing the mysterious emotions of Ben. He will show you a powerful performance of a never-seen-before character.

Selected Filmography

2017: MAYHEM (dir. Joe LYNCH)
 OKJA (dir. BONG Joon-ho)
2016: LIKE A FRENCH FILM (dir. SHIN Yeon-shick)
2013: CRASH SITE (dir. Jason SPERLING)
2010-2017: THE WALKING DEAD seasons 1 to 7 (dir. Frank FARABONT, Ernest R. DICKERSON, Guy FERLAND)

JONG-SEO JUN AS HAEMI

"Ben says... he just likes people like me".

Haemi is the childhood friend of Jongsu. A free spirit who thinks that things are real if one believes them to be. Her cat, who nobody can seem to see, is left with Jongsu as she travels to Africa. She returns with Ben, who she met on her trip.

Director LEE Chang-dong discovered the new actress through an audition process. Making her screen debut with BURNING, she leaves a powerful impression with her brilliant performance of Haemi, Jongsu's childhood friend who catches his heart with her free spirit. Jong-seo JUN, the new face of Korean films, transforms into a character who possesses both the boldness which attracts Jongsu and Ben and the innocence of a young girl. Play close attention to her powerful screen- inauguration. She is sure to light up the Korean film industry in 2018.

ABOUT THE CREW

Working hand in glove for director LEE Chang-dong's new film in 8 years! The film unites the best production team in Korea. They have worked on projects such as THE WAILING, SNOWPIERCER, MOTHER, and 1987: WHEN THE DAY COMES.

CINEMATOGRAPHER HONG KYUNG-PYO

"The key lighting for BURNING was sunlight. So I tried to capture each moment by finding the natural light appropriate to the screenplay".

Revered for his lively camera-work and his delicate cinematography which captures the characters' emotions, he is one of the best cinematographers working in Korea. In BURNING, he has increased the level of immersion through his beautiful visual style.

Selected Filmography

2016: THE STRANGERS

2013: SNOWPIERCER

2009: MOTHER

ART DIRECTOR SHIN JEOM-HUI

"I wanted to create things that are the most natural and humane".

By perfectly creating spaces which evokes clear contrasts according to the character's situation, SHIN Jeom-hui has embodied perfect realism. It is as if the audience is taking a peek at the everyday lives of Jongsu, Ben, and Haemi.

Selected Filmography

2010: POETRY

2007: SECRET SUNSHINE

2002: OASIS
2000: PEPPERMINT CANDY

PRODUCTION COMPANY

Produced by LEE Joon-dong and LEE Chang-dong

PINEHOUSEFILM is committed to produce high quality, challenging films since it's foundation in 2005. It has produced director LEE Chang-dong's SECRET SUNSHINE and POETRY. SECRET SUNSHINE came into the spotlight by winning the Best Actress at Cannes Film Festival 2007. LEE Chang-dong's next film, POETRY, received favourable comments from the critics worldwide and won the Best Screenplay at Cannes Film Festival 2010.

NOWFILM was founded in 2002. The company's first film was MY MOTHER THE MERMAID, and its second, NEVER FOREVER, was invited to the Sundance Film Festival in American drama section. In 2009, A BRAND NEW LIFE was invited to 26 international film festivals, including Cannes International Film Festival. After that, NOW FILM produced THE CAT in 2011 and HWAYI: A MONSTER BOY in 2013. In 2014, A GIRL AT MY DOOR was released and officially selected in Cannes Film Festival in the section of Un Certain Regard.

NHK, Nippon Hoso Kyokai (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), is Japan's only public broadcaster. As a public broadcaster funded by fees received from TV viewers, NHK delivers a wide range of impartial, high-quality programs, both at home and abroad.

WORLD SALES COMPANY

FINECUT is a film company specialized in international sales and marketing, production, financing and acquisition of high-end films, set up in 2008 by Youngjoo SUH, the founder of Cineclick Asia, who has represented many works of the best known Korean filmmakers such as LEE Chang-dong (POETRY), KIM Ki-duk (PIETA), HONG Sang-soo (THE DAY AFTER), PARK Chan-wook (OLD BOY), BONG Joon-ho (THE HOST), KIM Jee-woon (THE AGE OF SHADOWS), and NA Hong-jin (THE WAILING).

CAST

JONGSOO
BEN
HAEMI

AH-IN YOO
STEVEN YEUN
JONG-SEO YUN

CREW

DIRECTED BY
WRITTEN BY

LEE CHANG-DONG
OH JUNG-MI

PRODUCED BY

LEE CHANG-DONG
PINEHOUSE FILM

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS
CO-PRODUCTION
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
SOUND
EDITORS

MUSIC
COSTUME DESIGNER
1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

NOWFILM
LEE JOON-DONG
LEE CHANG-DONG
LEE JOON-DONG
NHK
HONG KYUNG-PYO
LEE SEUNG-CHUL
KIM HYUN
KIM DA-WON
MOWG
YI CHUNG-YEON (STYLE 7)
HA JUNG-SU