

Film Notes - Season 2025-26

10th October 2025

Misericordia

Cert 15 | 1h 42m | Original title: Miséricorde

Country: France, 2024

Director: Alain Guiraudie

Stars: Félix Kysyl, Catherine Frot

Language: French (with English subtitles)



Synopsis

Set in the fictional village of Saint-Martial, *Misericordia* follows Jérémie (Félix Kysyl), who returns to his hometown for his former boss's funeral. Staying with the widow Martine (Catherine Frot), tensions rise with her son Vincent, culminating in a fatal altercation. With the unexpected help of the village priest, Jérémie conceals the crime, sparking a darkly comic and unsettling chain of events. Blending thriller and black comedy, the film explores guilt, desire, and the complex alliances that form in small communities.

Context and Craft

Alain Guiraudie (*Stranger by the Lake*, *Staying Vertical*) continues his exploration of desire and moral ambiguity in rural France. Shot in southern Aveyron, the film uses the rugged landscapes of Saucières and the Dourbie gorges to evoke isolation and tension. Cinematographer Claire Mathon (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*) brings a stark, naturalistic palette that contrasts with the film's surreal undertones. Marc Verdaguer's sparse score heightens the discomfort, while Guiraudie's script draws inspiration from Pasolini's *Théorème*, infusing homoeroticism and absurdity into a deceptively simple narrative.

Critical Reception

Misericordia premiered in the Cannes Premiere section and was nominated for the Queer Palm. Though it received eight César nominations, including Best Film, it left empty-handed. Critics have noted:

- "A visually striking drama that veers between psychological tension and farce." — *DeepFocusReview*
- "Guiraudie's refusal to offer character empathy makes the viewer complicit in the film's moral murk." — *Cahiers du Cinéma*
- The priest's final monologues push the film into exploitation territory—perhaps deliberately." — *Le Monde*

Conclusion

Misericordia is a bold, unsettling meditation on secrecy, power, and desire. Guiraudie's refusal to moralize or sentimentalize his characters forces viewers to confront the absurdity and darkness of human behavior. The film's rural setting and minimalist style amplify its themes, making it a provocative entry in contemporary French cinema. Guiraudie is known for playing with genre and tone, so this might be a deliberate provocation, using B-movie aesthetics to challenge the viewers' expectations or to underscore the film's moral ambiguity.