



JOANNA SCANLAN



"DRAMA OF THE HIGHEST ORDER"

MATTHEW ANDERSON, CINEVUE

"DEVASTATINGLY POWERFUL"

WENDY IDE, SCREEN

A FILM BY
ALEEM KHAN

AFTER LOVE



BFI and BBC FILMS PRESENT A PRODUCTION FROM THE BUREAU "AFTER LOVE" JOANNA SCANLAN, NATALIE RICHARD, TALIB ABISS, AND WASSER MEMARZIA
DIRECTED BY SHAHEEN BANG PRODUCED BY CHLOE BICE WRITTEN BY JOAKIM SUNDSTRÖM EDITED BY DIANORA FERREIRA COSTUME DESIGNER MIRAGE MIMAGE MUSIC BY SARAH JENNISON PRODUCTION DESIGNER GABRIEL C. SCALES EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ALEXANDER DYMAN
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS EVA YATES ROSE GARNETT NATASHA WHARTON VINCENT GABELLE PRODUCED BY GABRIELLE DUNN BERARDINE O'LEVIN PRODUCED BY MATTHEW DE BRACONIER WRITTEN BY ALEEM KHAN



BUREAU

AFTER LOVE
DIRECTED BY ALEEM KHAN
PRESSNOTES

2020

1H30

UNITED KINGDOM

ENGLISH, FRENCH, URDU, ARABIC

SYNOPSIS

AFTER LOVE tells the story of Mary Hussain (Joanna Scanlan), who converted to Islam when she married and now is in her early 60s, living quietly in Dover with her husband Ahmed. Following his unexpected death, she discovers that Ahmed had a secret life just twenty-one miles away, across the Channel in Calais. The shocking discovery compels her to go there to find out more, and as she grapples with her shattered sense of identity, her search for understanding has surprising consequences.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My need to tell this story was initially born out of a desire to express something about my own experience of existing between two worlds and in two skins.

Being mixed English-Pakistani meant I grew up within two cultures, and being Muslim and gay caused me to lead two very separate personal lives for a long time. These dichotomies in my youth were difficult to reconcile with and the feeling that I never fully belonged anywhere operated at quite a cellular level within me.

There was a turning point in my life when I was around 19. I was at Uni and I was going through a kind of inner separation with myself. I was coming to terms with my sexuality and falling out of faith with the religion I had been brought up with and was devout in observing. This questioning and reconfiguration in my own life happened to correspond with a personal crisis my mother was having at the time surrounding her own identity. There was something about this emotional crossover that had always stayed with me and it's something I wanted to explore further.

AFTER LOVE is a story built up of many layers, but at the centre of it is a woman grappling to piece together the fragments of her heart and her shattered sense of identity. She is searching for truth, for understanding, and ultimately, to recover a sense of family.



Q&A WITH DIRECTOR ALEEM KHAN

Are any of the elements in the story autobiographical?

The plot isn't autobiographical, but the characters; their inner workings, and their experiences of navigating identity and loss are very close to home. Mary was very much modelled on my mum whilst Ahmed is loosely inspired by my dad.

Reflecting on my parents' relationship was central to developing the story – they met and fell in love when they were fourteen, on an estate in Walthamstow, and when they married in their early twenties, my mum converted to Islam and they relocated to the Kent coast. She gradually stopped wearing western clothes and started dressing in shalwar-kameez; she learnt how to cook curry and also learnt to speak Panjabi.

AFTER LOVE follows a woman who, upon learning of her husband's deceit, is forced to question her entire life with him and the choices she made whilst in a state of acute grief, but what I hadn't expected was how central the loss of a baby earlier in their marriage would be to Mary's arc and to me personally.

I realised quite late in the writing process that the incorporation of Mary's dead child was really about my own coming to terms with the loss of my sister when she was six-months-old. I was a child when she died and I don't remember anything about her or how my parents and other siblings dealt with her loss. It's all blank and it wasn't until I was editing the film that the significance of this event in my life hit me.

What was the writing process like?

AFTER LOVE is the first feature-length screenplay I've written and the task of writing this film required a level of introspection I had never undertaken before, nor expected. It sounds clichéd to say, but the writing process was like therapy – it was difficult; it was confronting and it brought a lot of things that were tangled and hidden deep within me to the surface, which may be why it took six years to write. The blessing of this though was that I was able to reevaluate and ultimately re-order those experiences into something tangible for my characters – and myself.

What were the central questions you wanted to explore through this work?

I wanted to explore how our notions of identity are constructed, and more specifically, who we construct them for.

We are highly adapted to change the way we behave and act according to the environment and people we are with, and we also do it for those that we love. We can even go so far as to construct personas for ourselves to project onto others – but for what reason? Is it to make us more desirable, more acceptable – more loveable? Do we do this because we are simply too afraid to bare our true selves from fear of being rejected?

With Mary adopting Ahmed's religion and culture to such an extent that much of her original self seems to have been erased, it raises the question of how much of ourselves really belongs to us. Through Mary's journey I wanted to explore the process we go through after we lose someone we love, the process in which we grieve and how we come to terms with losing our 'other half', and what is left of ourselves when we do.

I was also very pre-occupied with how truth, morality and deception intersect in relationships and how the characters in this story navigated and broke their own moral codes. It was important to me not to condemn or judge any of the characters in AFTER LOVE, including.

Ahmed, for each of the characters are guilty of betraying one another and crossing lines – even Mary. But although Mary is unquestionably the victim of an awful betrayal, in pursuing her own needs she inadvertently, then actively, becomes complicit in Ahmed's deceit.

I'm curious to know at what point someone watching would say Mary has crossed the line beyond return – because where that point lies reveals something about the viewer's own moral compass. In watching the film, I hope the audience comes away re-evaluating their own relationships; the secrets they keep from, and the lies they tell those that they love.



PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

I first came across AFTER LOVE when Aleem pitched the idea in the context of Save Our Scripts that we were running from The Bureau back in 2013. The story and his very personal relationship to it immediately appealed to me and we joined forces to develop it.

Aleem also had a very touching short film script he wanted to direct. It became THREE BROTHERS that we made together through Film London's London Calling Plus Scheme. The short film went on to be BAFTA-nominated in 2015 and allowed us to cement our collaboration.

AFTER LOVE found early support in Creative England, under the generous care of Celine Haddad. Casting Director Shaheen Baig joined us early on in the process to assist us in imagining who our lead actresses could be and I teamed up with Gabrielle Dumon from our Paris office to explore the French elements of the film. It was about the production challenges of shooting between Dover and Calais as much as the technicalities of the magical aspect of the cinematic language we were developing.

A selection at the Sundance Screenwriter's lab soon followed, giving our development another boost. Eva Yates, then working from Film4, had been tracking us closely and, when leaving for BBC Films with Rose Garnett, took us with her, confirming development as well as our first production support in the process. We started speaking with Natascha Wharton at the BFI Film Fund who soon confirmed its support too, completing our budgetary needs. A selection at the Sundance Director's lab followed, further boosting our progress.

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We cast Joanna Scanlan and Nathalie Richard as the leads. A search led us to Talid Ariss for the part of Solomon. His audition really made him stand out. We assembled a wonderful crew: Director of Photography Alexander Dynan, fresh from the Best Screenplay Oscar-nominated *FIRST REFORMED*; Joakim Sundström (*THREE BILLBOARDS*, *THE CONSTANT GARDNER*) joined as Supervising Sound Editor, as well as Editor Gareth C. Scales (*HOW TO BUILD A GIRL*, *HARLOTS*) and composer Chris Roe, to name only a few members of the team, and we shot over the summer in 2019.

So far, our festival selections have been as one of only five Cannes 2020 Critics' Week films, and as part of the 2020 Telluride line-up. The film was also one of the TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) Industry Selects and was chosen for the 2020 BFI London Film Festival with both cinema and online screenings. It had its international premiere in Official Selection at the 2020 Rome Film Festival and its Asian premiere at the 2020 Tokyo International Film Festival.



CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Joanna Scanlan (Mary Hussain)

Prior to AFTER LOVE (BFI), for which she won the Best Actress award at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival 2020, Joanna Scanlan's film credits include THE VOYAGE OF DR DOLITTLE (Universal), HOW TO BUILD A GIRL (Film4), PIN CUSHION (Pinpoint), HOW TO TALK TO GIRLS AT PARTIES with Elle Fanning and Nicole Kidman (See Saw Films), BRIDGET JONES' BABY (Universal) based on Helen Fielding's 2006 columns; the film fills in the gap between the last film and Fielding's subsequent book 'Mad About the Boy.' Other film credits include Joanna's hugely celebrated performance as Charles Dickens' wife in the Ralph Fiennes-directed THE INVISIBLE WOMAN (BBC Films), GET SANTA (Scott Free), THE TESTAMENT OF YOUTH (BBC Films), IN THE LOOP (BBC Films), BAD EDUCATION THE MOVIE (Cave Bear Prod), THE OTHER BOLEYN GIRL, STARDUST, NOTES ON A SCANDAL, THE GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING and KINKY BOOTS.

Joanna's TV credits include MCDONALDS AND DODDS (ITV), THE ACCIDENT (CH4), DRACULA (BBC), the critically acclaimed REQUIEM for BBC, CRAZY DIAMOND by Philip K Dick (CH4), THE WOMAN IN WHITE (BBC), MAPP & LUCIA (BBC), REV (BBC), GETTING ON (BBC), THE THICK OF IT (BBC) and FUNGUS THE BOGEYMAN (SKY). Joanna

wowed audiences in Channel 4's hit show NO OFFENCE, playing the lead detective Viv Deering, which went on to have three series. Other recent TV shows include HOLD THE SUNSET (BBC) and THE TURNING written by Julia Davis. Joanna has been BAFTA-nominated for Best Female Performance for her role in GETTING ON and twice nominated for her screenwriting on the show, which she co-wrote. The comedy series was adapted for an American audience with HBO, with Joanna onboard as an executive producer and she was a guest star in the American version reprising her role as 'Denise Flixter'. Joanna also co-wrote and starred in the hilarious comedy drama PUPPY LOVE (BBC) with Vicki Pepperdine.

On stage, Joanna has worked with Thea Sharrock in her production of CLOUD 9 at the Almeida Theatre and TOP GIRLS, with Rufus Norris in VERNON GOD LITTLE at The Young Vic and featured in Polly Teale's MADAME BOVARY.

Joanna has a production company with Vicki Pepperdine called George & George Co and is responsible for the Sex Lives project on Instagram.



Nathalie Richard (Geneviève)

Nathalie Richard was born in Paris, France. She received the Prix Michel Simon film prize for most promising actress/actor for her role in the 1988 Jacques Rivette film GANG OF FOUR. Her film credits include GOODBYE MISTER WONG (2019) by Luang Kiyé-Simon, MY LIFE WITH JAMES DEAN (2017) by Dominique Choisy, APOCALYPSE AFTER (2018), THE WILD BOYS (2017) and OUR LADY OF HORMONES (2015) by Bertrand Mandico, HAPPY END (2017), CACHÉ (2005) and CODE UNKNOWN (2000) by Michael Haneke, YOUNG & BEAUTIFUL (2013) by François Ozon, NEVER LET ME GO (2010) by Mark Romanek, THE DIVORCE (2003) and A SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER NEVER CRIES (1998) by James Ivory and IRMA VEP (1996) by Olivier Assayas. Her recent theatre credits include A LA TRACE (2020) written by Alexandra Badea and directed by Anne Thérion, LA TRILOGIE DE LA VENGEANCE (2019) written and directed by Simon Stone and VENTS CONTRAIRES (2019) written and directed by Jean-René Lemoine.

Talid Ariss (Solomon)

Born in 2002, Talid Ariss started acting lessons at the age of 6. One year later his teacher proposed he participate in a casting for a feature film. It was for R.I.F by Franck Mancuseau in which he went on to take part, working alongside Yvan Attal. The experience led to him being asked by casting director Patrick Metzle to act in an advertisement, which enabled him to find an agent. He is now represented by the Zélig agency. Multi-talented, his performances have included the stage play THE LEFT HANDED WOMAN, written by Peter Handke and directed by Christophe Pertin in 2013 and the television film LA FIN DE L'ETE by Helen Angel in 2019. He has been combining his studies with his passions – the theatre and filming, ever since. AFTER LOVE by Aleem Khan, in which he plays the male lead, is his latest feature film to date.

Director biography – Aleem Khan

Born and raised in Kent, Aleem Khan is a writer and director of mixed English-Pakistani heritage. His debut short film, DIANA, premiered at the 2009 BFI London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival. His subsequent short, THREE BROTHERS, was commissioned by Film London on the inaugural London Calling Plus scheme and premiered at the 2014 BFI London Film Festival before touring the international festival circuit. A BAFTA nomination for Best British Short Film followed in 2015 and later that year, Aleem was named a Screen International Star of Tomorrow. A 2017 Fellow of both the Sundance Screenwriter's and Director's Labs, Aleem is also an alumnus of Guiding Lights, The Locarno Filmmakers Academy and BFI Flare: London LGBTIQ+ Film Festival. During the 2020 BFI London Film Festival he was shortlisted for the IWC Schaffhausen Filmmaker Bursary Award in association with the BFI.



Producer biography – Matthieu de Braconier

Matthieu de Braconier produces from The Bureau, an established, BAFTA-winning production company well known for launching new filmmakers including Asif Kapadia (AMY, SENNA), Andrew Haigh (WEEKEND, 45 YEARS) and Harry Macqueen (upcoming SUPERNOVA starring Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci). Trained in philosophy, systemic psychotherapy and creative writing, he worked his way through the roles of programmer, production coordinator and development executive before executive producing the UK Film Council and Film4's Cinema Extreme short film scheme. With support from Creative Skillset he developed the scheme to include script development and training support. It launched a generation of talent including Andrea Arnold, Rupert Wyatt and Andrew Haigh.

Matthieu's first feature as screenwriter, ALL CATS ARE GREY, premiered at the Rome International Film Festival and went on to win several awards. His second, THE ELEPHANT AND THE BUTTERFLY, was produced by the Dardennes brothers and executive produced by Martin Scorsese. He is presently writing English language screenplays which are at different stages of development and include Film4 and BBC Films commissions.

In 2018, Matthieu produced the BAFTA-nominated and BIFA-awarded ONLY YOU, directed by Harry Wootliff and starring Laia Costa (VICTORIA, PIERCING) and Josh O'Connor (THE CROWN, GOD'S OWN COUNTRY).

Matthieu's most recent production, AFTER LOVE, the debut feature by Aleem Khan, was supported by BBC Film and the BFI. AFTER LOVE was awarded the Cannes 2020 Critics' Week label, followed by selection for Telluride 2020, TIFF Industry Selects, Rome Film Festival Official Selection and the 2020 BFI London Film Festival.

FILM FESTIVAL AWARDS

Joanna Scanlan – DFCC (Dublin Film Critics' Circle) Best Actress, DIFF, Dublin International Film Festival, March 2021

Composer Chris Roe – Best Original Score, Les Arcs, December 2020

Joanna Scanlan – Best Actress Award, Thessaloniki International Film Festival, November 2020

Aleem Khan – selected for the 2020 edition of BAFTA Breakthrough, the British Academy's new talent initiative, November 2020

AFTER LOVE received the Gan Foundation Broadcasting Prize as part of the Cannes Critics' Week "Hors les Murs": awarded to Rezo Films, the French distributor of the film, October 2020

Aleem Khan – shortlisted for IWC Schaffhausen Filmmaker Bursary Award in association with the BFI, October 2020



MAIN CREDITS



BFI and BBC Films present

A Production from The Bureau

AFTER LOVE

Cast

Joanna Scanlan

Nathalie Richard

Talid Ariss

and

Nasser Memarzia

Written and Directed by

Aleem Khan

Produced by

Matthieu de Braconier

Co-Produced by

Gabrielle Dumon

Gerardine O'Flynn

Executive Produced by

Eva Yates

Rose Garnett

Natascha Wharton

Vincent Gadelle

Director of Photography

Alexander Dynan

Editor

Gareth C. Scales

Production Designer

Sarah Jenneson

Costume Designer

NirageMirage

Hair and Make Up Designer

Diandra Ferreira

Supervising Sound Editor

Joakim Sundström

Original Music composed by

Chris Roe

This film was supported by the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program

Developed by BBC Films, and with the support of Creative England via the BFI NET.WORK

Made with the support of the BFI Film Fund

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