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The film is a near masterpiece. The "near" qualifier is because I think it takes time and distance to ensure any piece of work is a masterpiece.

From what I've read I guess the film is historically accurate, that's not a very important issue to me. What is important is how the movie creates a world. The screen isn't just a Brechtian window for observing this world, it's a door for us to enter.

First time I saw the movie I thought Gong-gil (Lee Jong-li) was the hottest actress I'd seen on screen since Jennifer Jason Leigh in "Miami Blues". So I was pretty shocked when I realized this might be, actually is a man . . . YOW!

This isn't "Crying Game" gimmickry. Gong-gil is open and charming and well, lovely in a girl next door sort of way.

The character is extraordinary - by turns pragmatic, loyal loving and a living example of sifu philosophy.

The plot is simple and elegant: In 5th century Korea Jang sang (Kam Woo-seong) is the star of a clown act. He balances on a high wire while juggling and telling bawdy stories. Gong-gil tumbles around the ground playing the female in Jang Sang's dirty stories.

The owner of the clown show often pimps Gong-gil out to various merchants. This infuriates Jang Sang. Gong-gil is the love of his life. He is further annoyed that Gong-gil is prepared to passively prostitute herself/himself.

Jang Sang attempts a rescue that results in the owner's death. The two chaste lovers escape.

The Koreans love melodrama and they have mastered the form and the medium of it.

The couple decide to take their clown skills to Seoul. They have a marvelous "duel" with another set of clowns. They all become friends and decide to work together.

Jang Sang had an audacious plan. He writes a savage spoof on the bad king presently in power. They perform the bawdy piece on the street and make more money than they could ever imagine.

And as great and entertaining as the film has been, as much as so many scenes presage and make possible the later effects (ala Chaplin) the film now enters the realm of magic and greatness. It also becomes one of the greatest yet chaste love stories I've ever seen or heard. You can immerse yourself in it by accepting it as a tale of brotherhood, or fool yourself, like I did, and believe that Gong-gil is female.

They are arrested by a member of the Royal Court who has his own designs.

When sentenced to be flogged for mocking the king Jang sang offers his own head in a deal: We make the King laugh or I accept execution.

This is what the minister wanted!



This was an austere and bad day. Its over. I gotta get another job . . .

6) **The King and The Clown** - Lee Jun-ik

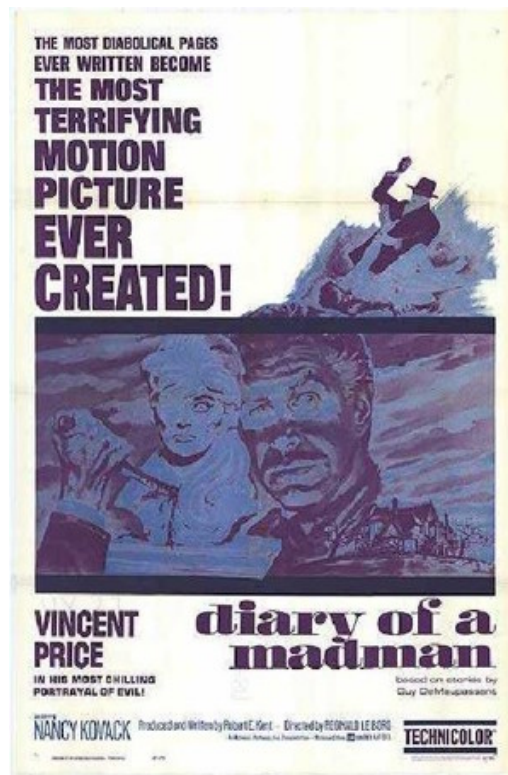
I vented earlier about this movie, mainly because I was stunned that it did not get nominated for an Oscar, even though it was eligible - especially in light of the heaps of praise being handed to the dreary and mundane "Pan's Labyrinth" and the shocking attention given to turgid hammy "Brokeback Mountain".

I was uncertain, wondering if I was giving too much credit to a film because of the way it has been ignored internationally.

"The King and The Clown" has been the most successful films in Korean history, which is a lot like saying, "The most successful film in the history of South Dakota".

Important to some people but not to all.

The film is a near masterpiece. The "near" qualifier is because I think it takes time and distance to ensure any piece of work is a masterpiece.



The performance is scheduled and a bunch of clowns are part of the Royal festivities. The five of them marvel at the wonders of the court, they are agog at the quality of the other entertainers, they feel dirty and worthless. They are street entertainers. They don't believe they fit into the palace.

They begin their performance. They are all terribly unnerved and it is falling apart, becoming a boring chaos. Even Jang Sang doubts himself.

[Click images for desktop size: "Clown Fish" by Apple](#)

Like in all great love stories Gong-gil believes in Jang sang more than he believes in himself. Gong-gil turns the skit into a one person show, dragging Jang Sang along until he rises up to his own level and the King laughs.

He laughs so much that, to the horror and disapproval of his court, he names the little street troupe as the imperial jesters and forces them to live in the palace.

Not content to simply have achieved this lofty status and annoyed by the way the ministers treat him and Gong-gil Jang Sang writes another skit, this time ridiculing the corrupt ministers and lords.

The King laughs at this as well but he recognizes the truth of it and executes the offending lord.

This dismays the little troupe. People aren't supposed to die at the hands of a joke!

Now I run into the only problem I have with this film. It has this in common with all the great comedies and adventure stories. I want to tell it to you, scene for scene, I want you to feel what this story made me feel, make the same discoveries in the story and in yourself.

I don't really know why that is. Its a big question, I think. We all do it at sometime. This film gives an answer to that, it answers about love, community and seeing ourselves in others. The power of seeing another's soul and in their soul seeing us.

I will tell you how the film ends. Throughout the standard of acting here is impeccable, whether its the directors talent or the actor's skills I couldn't know. All I know is that the 3 leads (The King is a lead) are wonderful. Even if you hate them you can see and understand them for what they are and how they are like us.

The two lovers are on a tightrope, jumping and bouncing in the air, while they profess their love to each other the only way they know how, by telling their stories. The King is in a window looking out at them, smiling and laughing at the two clowns who have obsessed him while all around them the massed might of the military rebellion swirls in the form of brightly dressed warriors.

The warriors don't matter. All that matters is the story being told in the Royal Courtyard by two people bouncing high on a tight rope.



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