

1,000 Films to See Before You Die
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Ace in the Hole (Billy Wilder, 1951) Prescient satire on news manipulation, with Kirk Douglas as a washed-up hack making the most of a story that falls into his lap. One of Wilder's nastiest, most cynical efforts, who can say he wasn't actually soft-peddling? He certainly thought it was the best film he'd ever made.

Ace Ventura: Pet Detective (Tom Shadyac, 1994) A goofy detective turns town upside-down in search of a missing dolphin - any old plot would have done for oven-ready megastar Jim Carrey. A ski-jump hairdo, a zillion impersonations, making his bum "talk" - Ace Ventura showcases Jim Carrey's near-rapturous gifts for physical comedy long before he became encumbered by notions of serious acting.

An Actor's Revenge (Kon Ichikawa, 1963) Prolific Japanese director Ichikawa scored a bulls-eye with this beautifully stylized potboiler that took its cues from traditional Kabuki theatre. It's all ballasted by a terrific double performance from Kazuo Hasegawa both as the female-impersonator who has sworn vengeance for the death of his parents, and the raucous thief who helps him.

The Addiction (Abel Ferrara, 1995) Ferrara's comic-horror vision of modern urban vampires is an underrated masterpiece, full-throatedly bizarre and offensive. The vampire takes blood from the innocent mortal and creates another vampire, condemned to an eternity of addiction and despair. Ferrara's mob movie *The Funeral*, released at the same time, had a similar vision of violence and humiliation.

The Adjuster (Atom Egoyan, 1991) An insurance adjuster and his film-censor wife-who both have boundary issues when it comes to their work-catch the attention of a voyeuristic couple, with bizarre consequences for all involved. Spinning with plot twists, Atom Egoyan's deadpan comedy casts an impassive gaze on an elaborate ballet of desire and compulsion.

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension (WD Richter, 1984) Peter Weller plays the titular scientist/surgeon/inventor/presidential adviser/rock star defending the world from trans-dimensional aliens - all called John - in one of the most unusual mainstream movies of the 1980's. It pulls off the trick of being nearly incomprehensible yet sharply funny. Of course, it was a massive flop but that just makes it more of a joy to discover.

The Adventures of Robin Hood (Michael Curtiz, William Keighley, 1938) The supreme Robin romance, with Technicolor hues from stained glass. Here, Errol Flynn's charm is dew-fresh and his athleticism is effortless. Claude Rains and Basil Rathbone are the scoundrels, and every vault and sword-thrust is made more thrilling by Erich Wolfgang Korngold's score.

After Hours (Martin Scorsese, 1985) Joseph K's travails influence this tale of a data programmer lost in downtown New York and bouncing from one weird woman to another. Shot quickly with a low budget, this nocturnal odyssey marked Martin Scorsese's (brief) return to independent film-making, and it pulses with anxiety and paranoia.

Aguirre, Wrath of God (Werner Herzog, 1972) Wild-eyed Klaus Kinski is a 16th-century explorer in search of El Dorado who is slowly undone by fever, tribal incursions and delusions of grandeur. From its stunning first shot of ant-like human voyagers descending the Andes to its final hallucinatory rain of monkeys, Aguirre is an unforgettable journey into the void.

Airplane! (David Zucker, 1980) *Airplane!*'s comic philosophy is simple: let there be yuks! Wall-to-wall puns, a joke every 8 seconds, visual gags by the zillion: sheer comic overload is what counts. Its cast of stone-faced 50s has-beens found new careers thanks to the film, and the smart-ass American comedy was revived overnight.

Akira (Katsuhiro Ôtomo, 1988) Japanese anime's unarguable classic compensates for the genre's traditional pitfall - rampant overplotting - with its adrenalised portrayal of Tokyo in 2019, a city which has become the plaything of biker gangs, military-industrial goons and a psychic mummy's boy. Superlatively animated (by hand), it's the kind of deep-seated apocalyptic wet dream only manga could dream up.

Alexander Nevsky (Sergei M. Eisenstein, 1938) Russian nationalism, a battle on the ice and some rousing Prokofiev music are the ingredients in Eisenstein's propaganda pic. The setting may be the 13th century, but Nevsky's defeat of the Teutons had a topical resonance at a time when the threat from Hitler loomed ever larger. Stalin was a fan: during the second world war, he named an award "The Order Of Alexander Nevsky For Bravery" after the hero the movie celebrated.

Alfie (Lewis Gilbert, 1966) Often misappropriated as some kind of Loaded readers' hymn-sheet, Alfie is actually a deeply ambiguous study of the permissive society, luring you in with those iconic to-camera monologues. Caine alternates effortlessly between caddish charm and hood-eyed dispassion, and the abortion scene is another reminder of the chill aftermath of those 60s freedoms.

Ali: Fear Eats the Soul (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974) In Fassbinder's hands, Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* is transformed from swish melodrama to blunt instrument. The forbidden romance is now between an elderly Berlin cleaner and a Moroccan immigrant 30 years her junior, and Fassbinder picks away at society's scabs so mercilessly, you've got to applaud.

Alice (Jan Svankmajer, 1988) The Czech surrealist's part live-action, part stop-motion adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland* odyssey reinvented animation, infusing the children's fantasy with a dark, disturbing undertow of menace. Presented as a fever dream, it shows Alice as a lost, troubled heroine, adrift in a strange and sometimes frightening low-fi world of jack-in-the-box pandemonium.

Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979) Dirty realism and sexual symbolism combine to brilliant effect in the mother of all space horrors. Scott's relentlessly measured direction induces real dread as a slithery creature infests the dark corners of an industrial spaceship and begins picking off its crew one by one. A darkly adult sci-fi masterpiece that made a star of Sigourney Weaver - and a mess of John Hurt.

All About My Mother (Pedro Almodovar, 1999) This story of grieving mother Cecilia Roth finding a new life caring for pregnant nun Penelope Cruz and veteran actress Marisa Paredes richly deserved its best foreign film Oscar. Almodovar keeps the old flamboyance, but exhibits a new emotional maturity that's entirely gripping.

All That Heaven Allows (Douglas Sirk, 1955) A textbook lesson in saying two (or more) things at once, Sirk's finest movie is both a lush melodrama and a progressive social comment - not to mention something of a camp classic. Jane Wyman plays a respectable widow who scandalously steps out with her beefcake gardener (still-closeted Rock Hudson). No wonder it has been remade by both Fassbinder (*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*) and Todd Haynes (*Far From Heaven*).

All That Jazz (Bob Fosse, 1979) Song-and-dance man Fosse's grandly ambitious, autobiographical movie stars a rampant Roy Scheider as the self-centred, manically driven, sex-and-death-obsessed Joe Gideon. Giuseppe Rotunno's photography is superb and the choreography - particularly in the hallucinatory operating room numbers - quite stunning: all in all, a hell of a testimony to Fosse's wild talent.

All the President's Men (Alan J Pakula, 1976) The ink on Nixon's resignation letter was barely dry when this chronicle of the Watergate scandal came out. Never did investigative journalism look so much like police work, as reporters Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford piece together the political scandal through a combination of patience, legwork, cunning and shady informants.

Alphaville (Jean Luc Godard, 1965) Ground-breaking sci-fi thriller/fable about a hard-boiled secret agent (surly Eddie Constantine), who travels across space to the futuristic city of Alphaville, ruled by a giant computer. It's Orwell's 1984 stylishly revisited in grainy black and white, warning us about cyber-tyranny and the death of individualism.

Amadeus (Milos Forman, 1984) Peter Shaffer's smash stage-play, imagining a plot to murder Mozart. F Murray Abraham won the best actor Oscar as the glowering Salieri, the court composer whose plodding, time-serving mediocrity is brutally revealed by the blazing revelation of Mozart: a shrieking boor who has done nothing to deserve his genius. A gripping tale which holds up well.

The Lovers on the Bridge (Leos Carax, 1991) Brash, harrowing and melodramatic, Carax's movie created a sensation at the time. It is about homeless people on Paris's Pont Neuf bridge: Juliette Binoche is Michele, an artist who is going blind; Denis Lavant is the druggie street performer who falls for her, and then fears that a new eye treatment could end her reliance on him. Watching it needs a sense of humour, and a sense of absurdity.

Amelie (Jean Pierre Jeunet, 2001) Parisian life took on a fresh romantic sheen when Audrey Tautou's naive cafe waitress sets out on a quest for love and beauty after finding a stranger's forgotten childhood treasure. Jeunet's whimsical, neo-nostalgic blockbuster put Montmartre back on the map and catapulted Tautou into stardom.

American Beauty (Sam Mendes, 1999) Crisply written, lustrous-looking satire on the American Dream. Kevin Spacey gives a wickedly droll performance as self-confessed loser Lester Burnham, who quits his job and pitches headlong into dope-smoking, iron-pumping, mid-life meltdown.

American Gigolo (Paul Schrader, 1980) Richard Gere, dressed by Armani and objectified by Schrader, gleams with cool sexuality in a redemptive story of a male prostitute framed for murder in Beverly Hills. Schrader's hyper-stylish, hyper-alienated study of materialism anticipated the foibles of the yuppie generation, conveying an icy, calculating eroticism with unnerving precision.

American Graffiti (George Lucas, 1973) Where were you in '62? asks George Lucas in his only perfect movie, still the quintessential 50s/60s nostalgia-piece, whose distilled essence is reprised in movies as diverse as *Diner*, *Porky's* and *Dazed & Confused*. After seeing it, you can almost believe that America might once have been innocent.

An American in Paris (Vincente Minnelli, 1951) Gene Kelly is a would-be painter in Paris - because it's the country that invented love, art and Leslie Caron. Directed by Vincente Minnelli, with Gershwin music, it's an arty musical that rises to a long dream passage as seen through the styles of leading painters.

American Movie (Chris Smith, 1999) In the annals of do-it-yourself film-making, has there ever been a would-be auteur with more determination than horror aficionado Mark Borchardt? Funny and sad in equal measures, Chris Smith's documentary chronicles Borchardt's heroic but often hapless struggle to complete his labour of love against all odds.

American Pie (Paul Weitz, 1999) The most likeable teen grossout comedy, character is never forgotten in *American Pie*. A roundly written script lavishes attention on everyone, and ritual humiliations repaid with touching arcs and denouements for all the virginity-afflicted participants. Eugene Levy's unflappable dad, even when confronted with his pastry-humping progeny, is particularly fine.

American Splendor (Shari Springer Berman, Robert Pulcini, 2003) Perpetually disgruntled comic-book artist Harvey Pekar (Paul Giamatti) survives marriage, cancer, and the petty indignities of everyday life in this imaginative biopic-cum-documentary. Tweaking the conventions of both genres, the film invites the real Pekar to narrate some sections and even arranges for the actors to interact with the real-life people they're playing.

An American Werewolf in London (John Landis, 1981) This is to werewolves what *Shaun of the Dead* is to zombies: dark as night and funny as hell, alternating ultra-violence with a stomping soundtrack of lunar- and lupine-centric oldies. Plus Jenny Agutter at her, well, nudest, for those of us who never quite got over *The Railway Children*.

Amores Perros (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000) From the opening sequence, which begins with a bleeding Rottweiler and ends with a violent car crash, this feral drama grabs you by the scruff of the neck and doesn't let go. Shot on the mean streets of Mexico City, its three interlinked tales pump out a potent blend of passion, cruelty, violence and betrayal.

Anatomy of a Murder (Otto Preminger, 1959) More ambiguous than its clinical title might indicate, Preminger's courtroom drama stars James Stewart as a rumped lawyer skeptical of his client's trustworthiness. Ben Gazzara, Lee Remick, and George C Scott all put in early appearances. An absorbing, cynical puzzler in which no one ever means exactly what they say.

Andrei Rublev (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1969) The homeland of the medieval Russian painter is wracked by poverty and war in Tarkovsky's epic, which drew enough parallels with the Soviet Union that authorities attempted to withdraw it from Cannes in 1969. Rublev seeks to define the role of the artist in terrible times - a task that was surely familiar to Tarkovsky.

An Angel At My Table (Jane Campion, 1990) Originally shot as a TV mini-series, Campion's three-hour biography of Janet Frame leaps out at you, and it's easy to see why it made it to cinemas. Red-headed, unconventional Frame (played by three different actresses) is forced by her strait-laced social milieu into years of traumatic psychiatric treatment; that she came out in one piece is a triumph of the human spirit in itself.

Annie Hall (Woody Allen, 1977) A bittersweet Manhattan romantic comedy fuelled by baby-boomer angst. Some of Allen's wittiest gags are spouted by alter-ego, neurotic comedian Alvy Singer, to endearingly flaky girlfriend Annie (Diane Keaton). Unforgettable stuff, including a cameo appearance by Marshall McLuhan, a lobster chase in the kitchen and a split-screen shrink session.

The Apartment (Billy Wilder, 1960) Wilder's entry in The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit stakes, following corporate cog Jack Lemmon as he seeks to fulfill his fantasy of taking "a slow elevator-ride to China" with pixie-perfect Shirley Maclaine. Adultery! Suicide attempts! Corporate cravenness! Shockingly modern and dark in its day.

Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) Coppola's troubled production put Conrad's Heart of Darkness in Vietnam. In its brilliant first hour, the movie delivers both the spectacular thrills and stomach-churning atrocity of a pointless war, even if the final showdown (Martin Sheen confronts "the horror, the horror" in the rotund, muttering shape of Marlon Brando) is a tad opaque.

The Appartement (Gilles Mimouni, 1996) A French thriller in the Da Palma/Hitchcock manner. Vincent Cassel is Max, a smooth young flirt, on his way to Tokyo to get married, when he glimpses a woman in a Paris cafe whom he thinks is Lisa, his first great love - played by Monica Bellucci. He obsessively tracks her, gets into her apartment, but winds up having an affair with her lookalike (Romane Bohringer). A gripping puzzle.

The Apple (Samira Makhmalbaf, 1998) A remarkable conflation of fact and fiction, and an extraordinary debut for a 17-year-old director, this tells the true story of an Iranian couple who confined their twin daughters to the family home for their entire lives. The film is less a dramatisation than a reenactment of the story, in which the key characters play themselves. The simple set-up has complex ramifications.

Army in the Shadows (Jean Pierre Melville, 1969) A brooding, brilliant drama about the French resistance during the second world war, filmed with the stately rigour that Melville perfected in his gangster pictures. Patriotism, paranoia and betrayal have never looked so good, before or since.

Around the World in 80 Days (Michael Anderson, 1956) Jules Verne's global adventure was the Pirates Of The Caribbean of its day, a three-hour Technicolor extravaganza with a superstar cameo cast that managed to shoehorn in the likes of Marlene Dietrich, Buster Keaton and Frank Sinatra. Centre stage, however, was a terrific turn by David Niven as Phineas Fogg, the very English ringmaster of a very Hollywood blockbuster.

Arsenic and Old Lace (Frank Capra, 1944) Cary Grant was rarely better than in this uproarious black comedy, adapted from the Broadway smash by It's A Wonderful Life director Frank Capra. Grant plays a smart, charming newlywed who brings his bride back to meet the family, little knowing he will soon be upstaged by his two dotty, murderous aunts and a brother who thinks he's Teddy Roosevelt.

The Asphalt Jungle (John Huston, 1950) The prototype for every intricate heist movie that followed. Vividly drawn co-conspirators (casting is note-perfect) execute the perfect robbery, but double-crosses, greed, jealousy, and multiple betrayals bring it all to nought. An excellent introduction to the slow-burning volcano we call Sterling Hayden.

Assault On Precinct 13 (John Carpenter, 1976) Carpenter's lean, mean update of Howard Hawks' Rio Bravo launched him as a director who truly understood movie history and knew how to build on it - with limited resources. Hung around a wonderfully dry and tight-lipped performance from Darwin Joston - in a role Carpenter tailored for him - this is textbook exploitation fare.

Asya's Happiness (Andrei Konchalovsky, 1966) There's little overtly subversive about Konchalovsky's lyrical tale of life on a collective farm; perhaps the Soviet authorities took a dim view of its basic life-affirming humanism. It's rarely shown, but it should be: Asya's story achieves a near-perfect level of flavoursome pastoral, shot in luminous black and white.

L'Atalante (Jean Vigo, 1934) Jean Vigo lived long enough to make just one feature film: this is it, L'Atalante, the name of a barge that works the rivers and canals of northern France. As the film opens, the skipper (Jean Dasté) takes on a wife (Dita Parlo) as he might pick up a fresh cargo of hemp or coal. It's a business arrangement, he thinks, yet it opens him up to the heart and the imagination. The boy becomes a man. And all of this is watched by the old man (Michel Simon) who works the barge. He is a mixture of Caliban, Queequeeg and Merlin. And he guides what happens. Vigo was poor, an anarchist, a young man who traded medicines for film stock. He is the model of the young artist who will die for cinema. But La'Atalante justifies that desperate gamble. With talk, sound effects and music (Maurice Jaubert), it is one of those early sound films that moves at dream speed, the terrible, ponderous self-absorption of silent cinema drifts away. Harsh and tender, lyrical and surreal, simple and infinite, L'Atalante has impressed nearly every jury since 1934: it is among the 10 greatest films ever made. Vigo died as his film opened, and he is still alive. The characters of the film are rough, plain, common, but the poetry of their dream is exalted. The black and white photography was by Boris Kaufman, the brother to Dziga Vertov, the great Soviet experimentalist. Yet Kaufman would live on. He came to America, and he shot On the Waterfront, Twelve Angry Men and Long Day's Journey Into Night where the mist is like the river water in L'Atalante. The cinema has its tradition.

Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner (Zacharias Kunuk, 2001) The first film to be shot in the Inuktitut language, native to the Inuit people of the Arctic Circle, is based on an ancient yarn with the timeless excitements of fisticuffs, family rivalry, adultery and murder. The digital images are breathtaking - never more so than during Atanarjuat's naked dash across the blinding vista of ice and snow.

Atlantic City (Louis Malle, 1980) Would-be croupier Susan Sarandon and two-bit gangster Burt Lancaster forge a bond in the eponymous New Jersey burg amid betrayals, corruption, and Lancaster's delusions of grandeur. Sarandon bathing herself with lemons is the iconic image of Louis Malle's sweet-and-sour portrait of a gambling town poised on a threshold between decay and renewal.

Au Hasard Balthazar (Robert Bresson, 1966) It's an ass's life. Jean-Luc Godard certainly thought so, saying of Bresson's film about a long-suffering donkey, "everyone who sees this film will be absolutely astonished because the film is really like the world

in an hour and a half." We hear hardly a bray of complaint from Balthasar as he is mistreated by owner after owner but we learn plenty about human behaviour.

Au Revoir les Enfants (Louis Malle, 1987) A tender, compelling tear-jerker about a Jewish boy hidden from the Nazis in a Catholic French boarding school during the second world war. Beautifully played by first-time young actors, Malle's semi-autobiographical tale intertwines friendship and secrets with the grim reality of betrayal and lost innocence.

Audition (Takashi Miike, 1999) The kinkiest, creepiest, most pungently sexual horror film in recent memory: as macabre as a jewel-inlaid dagger or antique instrument of torture. Director Takashi Miike has devised a modern-day Jacobean revenge nightmare, which manages to make its delirium seem an integral and plausible extension of the ordinariness and sadness that prefigure it. Ryo Ishibashi plays Aoyama, a world-weary player in the Japanese film business. Having been urged to renew his acquaintance with love by his son, Aoyama tries an ingenious scheme: he holds open auditions for a film, but with a secret agenda; by auditioning for a non-existent subordinate role, Aoyama can then casually approach the one he likes best for a date. But it isn't long before we sense something wrong with Asami, the tall, willowy beauty with whom Aoyama falls head over heels in love. She reveals herself as a terrifying avenger, visiting on Aoyama the pain and death that he senses in the audition process, not merely as a punishment for the male sexual triumphalism inherent in Japanese society, but a gratification of his dark masochism of the spirit. And it really is pretty scary stuff. In the final scene - made even more unspeakable by its semi-hallucinatory quality - Miike takes his stomach-turningly dark playfulness, and marries it to the gruesomeness of a Clive Barker or the Stephen King of Misery. An intricate torture garden of a film: a lurid nightmare in which the power relations between women and men are acted out in the most barbarously extreme way.

Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery (Jay Roach, 1997) As the 1990s found time to recycle every single decade in one, Mike Myers' brand of character comedy found full expression by resurrecting Swinging London. Whether playing Powers, the "ultimate gentleman spy", or his neurotic nemesis Dr Evil, Myers throws off nifty cultural asides, killer scatological set-pieces and indelible catchphrases: "Oh behave!"

L'Avventura (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960) Distilling the essence of "ennui", Antonioni's audacious movie frustrates as much as it engages, resembling an apparently straightforward mystery (wealthy young woman goes missing, friends look for her) then allowing it to dissipate under the protagonists' soulless self-absorption. It has been dismissed as a "nothing happens" type of movie, but it's a provocative portrait of modern emptiness.

Babe (George Miller, 1995) George "Mad Max" Miller's penchant for cute animal flicks doesn't stop with penguins, as per last year's Happy Feet - he also adapted and directed this surprisingly heartfelt tale of about a pig reprieved from death row and adopted by a sheepdog. It skirts glutinous kids'-movie cliches, subtly flagging up its message of nonconformity and tolerance instead.

Babette's Feast (Gabriel Axel, 1987) Set in picturesque sepia-toned 19th century Denmark, this is the movie equivalent of dinner at the Brothers Grimm. Awash with a gently puritanical sensibility, it pares religion to its most spiritual form, with food as a sumptuous example of how to serve God, when French civil war refugee Babette thanks her new community with a feast fit for a king.

Back to the Future (Robert Zemeckis, 1985) Few things are as enjoyable, or as rare, in the movie world as a smart crowd-pleaser. A relentlessly entertaining time travel tale that heaps paradoxes and conundrums upon hapless Michael J Fox. Zemeckis was quite the subversive back then, smuggling in such risqué elements as Fox fighting off amorous advances from the girl who would later become his mother.

Bad Boy Bubby (Rolf De Heer, 1993) Fans of provocative cinema should track down this Australian one-off, that starts out bizarre and only gets stranger. A 30-year-old man has been kept locked indoors by his mother for his entire life. And used as her sex slave. When he escapes, there's no telling what could happen.

Bad Day at Black Rock (John Sturges, 1955) The train stops in the Black Rock desert and a one-armed Spencer Tracy gets off. He has a medal to deliver to a war hero. But Black Rock has forgotten this man and is now as grim as Robert Ryan, Ernest Borgnine and Lee Marvin. What's a one-armed man to do . . . ?

Bad Lieutenant (Abel Ferrara, 1992) "Gambler. Thief. Junkie. Killer. Cop." They forgot "Conflicted Catholic" and "Defiler of the Altar," but hey, who's counting? Harvey Keitel gives a masterclass in depravity, redemption and loss as an addicted, corrupt cop enduring a staggeringly unpleasant tailspin of a weekend. Abel Ferrara at his most outrageous and, weirdly, most controlled.

Bad Santa (Terry Zwigoff, 2003) Inebriated, foul-mouthed, child-hating, criminally intent Billy Bob Thornton gleefully desecrates everything the shopping malls hold dear. Plumbing new depths in festive vulgarity, it's definitely not for the children, but it is hilarious, and ultimately, it has a heart.

Badlands (Terrence Malick, 1973) Malick's first feature instantly established him at the forefront of the Movie Brat generation, and rightly so: his hyper-alienated study of two teen thrill-killers (loosely based on the Starkweather-Fugate) was perfectly in tune with its times. There's a L'Etranger-esque quality to the blank, seemingly motiveless need for violence; it's strangely funny, too.

Bagdad Café (Percy Adlon, 1987) Very often the best films about the US come from non-Americans. Bavarian Adlon places an efficient German hausfrau in a dwindling Mojave diner to turn its fortunes around. Jack Palance's dignified role as a patron eminded casting directors to start putting him back into good movies.

Bambi (David Hand, 1942) Many a grown-up can still be reduced to tears by the plight of the young deer and his doomed mother, but Disney's woodland coming-of-age story is less sentimental and more primal than you'd think. Animation experts watch and weep, too; the pioneering "multi-plane" technique brings the story to life perfectly.

Band of Outsiders (Jean-Luc Godard, 1964) In what's perhaps Jean-Luc Godard's most audience-friendly film, two guys fall in love with not just a girl but the money she might lead them to. The signature scenes are a Charleston dance sequence and a record-setting dash through the Louvre, but the zany action races toward a shocking finale.

Bandit Queen (Shekhar Kapur, 1994) Based on the true-life tale of "India's most feared outlaw", Poolan Devi, Bandit Queen doesn't make for easy viewing. Although Devi herself campaigned to have Kapur's film banned (arguing that there was more to her life

story than "sniveling" and being "raped") the film remains a powerful expose of caste in India and a gripping revenge movie to boot.

Barbarella (Roger Vadim, 1968) Along with Cat Ballou, this is the high tide of Jane Fonda's almost forgotten pre-feminist, transparent-miniskirt-and-gogo-boots bimbo period - a louche, campy, wildly over-the-top sci-fi spoof from serial Svengali Roger Vadim. Unpardonable in so many ways, and therefore unmissable.

Barry Lyndon (Stanley Kubrick, 1975) Kubrick's Thackeray adaptation is a staggering vision of the 18th century aristocracy, switching from cluttered detail to reveal yet another stunning composition in which the protagonists - snotty Irish aristocrats, suspicious Prussian mercenaries and Ryan O'Neal's ambitious arriviste - are situated. Kubrick is at his most imperious here, but it suits a thrilling European grand canvas.

Barton Fink (Joel Coen, 1991) The Coens have diverse influences, but this is insane: a Clifford Odets-ish playwright works for a Kafkaesque studio alongside William Faulkner's doppelganger, while his neighbour, a satanic Willy Loman, conjures an inferno that may prefigure the Holocaust. Spiritedly demented.

Batman (Tim Burton, 1989) An astonishingly successful high-gothic reinvention of the Caped Crusader, which banished the pop-art comedy of the TV show. Most of the humans were upstaged by the terrific set - except, of course, for Jack Nicholson as the Joker.

Battle of Algiers (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966) A stark, powerful account of the Algerian uprising that has the immediacy of a newsreel although it is, in fact, a dramatisation. Dealing with imperial power, terrorism, torture and counter-insurgency, it is as pertinent now as then - testament to its honesty and accuracy.

Battle Royale (Kinji Fukasaku, 2000) Blood-splattered gore-fest that pushes ultra-violence to delirious, satirical heights. Teacher Takeshi Kitano takes his junior-high students on class trip to a remote island to execute a brutal new Government directive: kill each other, or die. Teen rivalries and crushes play out in deadly style as the body count mounts.

Battleship Potemkin (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925) If Birth of a Nation established the ground rules of narrative cinema, Battleship Potemkin made it swing. Eisenstein's Soviet history of the abortive Odessa mutiny aimed for documentary realism, hot-wiring the narrative with pioneering montage techniques and the sort of dazzling set-pieces that had other directors rushing to pay homage.

The Beat That My Heart Skipped (Jacques Audiard, 2005) A superb remake of James Toback's 1978 film Fingers, this jumpy psychological thriller also tackles multi-layered mysteries about love and self-imposed prisons. Romain Duris stars as Thomas, a real-estate entrepreneur involved in brutal shady deals, who raids derelict buildings at night, releases rats out of bags and forces poor immigrants out of their homes. In private, however, Thomas is a talented but frustrated classical musician; the mysterious title of the film becomes increasingly clear as Audiard focuses on capturing the inner music of the soul, the syncopated flutter of a heartbeat. Eventually Thomas seeks out private lessons with a beautiful Chinese pianist to prepare an audition; Audiard creates some stunning scenes of subtle dialogue-free moments between teacher and student. With the grainy, close-ups of Duris's face and focus on the jagged pieces of his life, Audiard shows he is a master in setting up contrasts: gorgeous mix of gaudy colour and chiaroscuro shadows, the interplay of shattering violence and tremulous lyricism. Like like the Bach fugue that Thomas drums out endlessly on his baby Grand, Audiard's film is a rigorous study in counterpoint, evoking two parallel worlds that play off each other, then finally come together with a elliptic flash-forward ending Thomas is a fugitive running from his own demons; whether or not he will ever find peace in his new life is anyone's guess.

Beau Travail (Claire Denis, 1999) An outstanding aesthetic achievement that follows the rivalry between a Foreign Legion recruit (Gregoire Colin) and his jealous superior (Denis Lavant). Denis choreographs the rancour into an intense homoerotic ballet that, against the Djibouti desert, seems to aspire more deeply than cinema and more monumentally than dance: almost a kind of parched sculptural beauty.

Becket (Peter Glenville, 1964) An unlikely vein of homoeroticism runs through this epic about the troubled friendship between King Henry II (Peter O'Toole) and Thomas Becket (Richard Burton.) Burton and O'Toole, for all their reputation as hellraisers, are magnificent: they bring an intensity and intelligence to their roles that it is impossible to think of any contemporary British stars being able to match.

Before Sunrise (Richard Linklater, 1995) Two beautiful American strangers meet on a Eurorail train and spend a day and night walking around Vienna, a journey electrified by instant infatuation-maybe even love. Linklater's verbose two-hander runs on the heady buzz of kismet, and reaches a wide-open ending that led to an equally sublime sequel, Before Sunset.

Being John Malkovich (Spike Jonze, 1999) Ever want to be someone else? "Careful what you wish for" is the message in one of the greatest American films of the 90s, which is at once a slapstick comedy, a transsexual love story and a philosophical investigation into celebrity worship, gender confusion, the wages of ambition and the nature of identity. Controlled lunacy and pure genius.

Being There (Hal Ashby, 1979) Peter Sellers' penultimate role was one he had struggled to get to the screen for almost a decade. As Chance the gardener, who has lived a life with little more than television as a companion, Sellers offers a blank canvas upon which the other characters imprint whatever meaning they wish. Faultless in all departments.

Belle de Jour (Luis Buñuel, 1967) A surreal satire of bourgeois sexual neuroses, in which a wealthy, frigid housewife chooses to spend her afternoons working in a brothel. Catherine Deneuve delivers a typically impenetrable performance, enacting masochistic, degrading fantasies (both hers and others) and revealing the faultlines of a repressed, depraved middle class destined to self-destruct. Possibly Buñuel's greatest film.

La Belle Noiseuse (Jacques Rivette, 1991) A four-hour film, slow-moving but passionately detailed, about the nature of artistic creation, loosely derived from Balzac. Michel Piccoli is a 60-year-old painter whose talent is blocked until one day, he meets beautiful Emmanuel Beart. His powers miraculously revive, at the expense, perhaps, of his marriage. Rivette used improvisatory techniques to devise the movie, slowly following the technical process of painting itself.

Ben-Hur (William Wyler, 1959) The epic movie as originally intended - a life-or-death battleground in which world-views duke it out earnestly via oiled-up hunks in really cool chariots. Wyler's three-and-a-half-hour blockbuster has shown Homeric durability, thanks to the soulful clash of values between Charlton Heston's redeemed Jewish slave and his more pragmatic Roman friend. And Wyler hardly skimmed on the chariots either.

La Bête Humaine (Jean Renoir, 1938) Jean Renoir used the fiction of Emile Zola to create his deeply disturbing noir movie. Simone Simon and Dernand Ledoux play Séverine and Roubaud, a couple who kill their former employer on a train. Jean Gabin plays the engineer who witnesses the crime, but instead of turning them in, uses the information to exert a sinister blackmail. He is in love with Séverine, and begins a bizarre affair with her.

La Bete (Walerian Borowczyk, 1975) The great art-porn favourite of the 70s is crazily Gothic, madly over-the-top, and comically sublime. The gadabout son of a mysterious French aristocrat is engaged to be married to an innocent American heiress. He has an awful secret, linked to rumours of a "beast" rampaging around the estate. Notorious at the time for its close-ups of horse erections, the film also features scenes showing a young woman enjoying congress with someone in a big hairy Beast costume.

Better Off Dead (Savage Steve Holland, 1985) A morose high-school student contemplates suicide after his girlfriend dumps him, but he's luckily distracted by a comely exchange student and a constant parade of strange characters and situations. This glimpse of John Cusack's charms is a loopy sleeper among classic American teen comedies of the 80s.

Betty Blue (Jean Jacques Beneix, 1986) Set in a seaside bungalow resort, a torrid romance between a handyman/wannabe novelist and a wild waitress spirals into obsession and madness. Beneix's cult film is a winning mix of dazzling colours, audacious dialogue and steamy chemistry between Jean-Hugues Anglade and Béatrice Dalle.

Beverly Hills Cop (Martin Brest, 1984) The Bruckheimer-Simpson axis of evil in full seductive effect: star plus empowering premise plus megavolume action sequences. The star was Eddie Murphy, the premise was rough inner-city cop straightens out chi-chi LA enclave (including Steven Berkoff as chief badman) and avenges a lost buddy while he's at it. Harold Faltermeyer's slinky, synth title song, Axel F, was a perfect expression of how you felt after it was all over.

Beyond the Valley of the Dolls (Russ Meyer, 1970) The west coast hippie scene never looked as enviably groovy as it does in Meyer's exuberantly psychedelic masterpiece. Following an all-girl rock trio's ride on fame's roller-coaster, it boasts colourful characters, a vintage soundtrack, cod-Shakespearean narration and a brilliantly ludicrous ending.

The Bicycle Thief (Vittorio de Sica, 1948) De Sica's neo-realist classic came freewheeling out of the ruins of postwar Italy to take world cinema by storm. The director shot his simple working-class parable on the streets of Rome, using natural light and non-professional actors. Six decades on, it feels as fresh and as relevant as ever.

The Big Chill (Lawrence Kasdan, 1983) Seminal hippie-cum-yuppie tribute to friendship, centred on a nostalgic weekend reunion of seven college friends. Kasdan weaves bittersweet reflections on love and sex with a smattering of soul-searching for lost idealism, offset by a feelgood Motown soundtrack.

The Big Combo (Joseph H Lewis, 1955) Joseph H Lewis (Gun Crazy) and monochrome cameraman supreme John Alton to bring film noir to its minimally expressive climax in the same year as Kiss Me Deadly. Visually inventive (the climax takes place under a single bulb), and watch for Fante and Mingo, cinema's first pair of well-adjusted, mutually devoted gay contract killers.

The Big Heat (Fritz Lang, 1953) Against a characteristic Lang backdrop of fatalistic trajectories and encroaching madness, of myriad doublings and halvings (embodied by Gloria Grahame's half-disfigured face, courtesy of Lee Marvin's coffee-pot), Glenn Ford's enraged, grief-stricken cop comes close to mirroring the animalism of his gangster foes. Bleak and shockingly violent, even today.

The Big Lebowski (Joel Coen, 1998) Jeff Bridges' amiable stoner tangles with dark forces in this gloriously silly riff on Raymond Chandler. As loosely thrown together as one of The Dude's joints, the plot sprawls to include everything from a missing trophy wife to a bunch of hopeless German nihilists.

Big Night (Campbell Scott, Stanley Tucci, 1996) Character actor Stanley Tucci's starred and co-directed in this winning story of a pair of Italian immigrant brothers seeking out restaurant success in 50s America. The food is its own character, emotionally wrought and prepared with all the sensuousness of celluloid lovemaking. A delicious treat.

The Big Parade (King Vidor, 1925) The Saving Private Ryan of the silent era. Vidor's landmark war movie provided a showcase role for matinee idol John Gilbert as one of a posse of Yanks who sign up for the Great War; Vidor introduces many a stylistic flourish as bathetic human stories are juxtaposed with military conflict on a grand scale.

The Big Sleep (Howard Hawks, 1946) Take a classic Raymond Chandler novel set in Los Angeles. Make it a mystery more than anyone can fathom. Then watch the labyrinth turn into a love parade for Bogart and Bacall (truly a love affair made by the screen). So it's a film noir, a who-dun-what, a private eye caper, a love story and a screwball comedy.

Big Wednesday (John Milius, 1978) The unexpectedly sentimental side of writer-director Milius' testosterone-fuelled schtick is to be found in this emotional epic, as it tracks three Californian surfer buddies either side of the Vietnam draft. Cornball dialogue and overblown staging don't matter when the point is so obviously personal, the surfing magical, and the sense of diverging lives so true.

Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (Stephen Herek, 1989) California dudespeak is the universal lingua franca as Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter travel back in time for some field research for their history paper, of which they are in danger of "flunking most heinously". The duo's flipped-out enthusiasm and the script's slangy flair make for an air-guitar flourish of a teen comedy.

The Birds (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963) "An apocalyptic tone-poem", Fellini called Hitchcock's last masterpiece. What sets the birds off? Mother's incestuous sexual jealousy? The son's burgeoning emotional independence? Tippi Hedren's lime-green dress? Whatever - the sexual tremors beneath the avian horror are the movie's true motor; and the effects, instantly dated in 1963, now seem horrifyingly retro-beautiful.

The Birth of a Nation (DW Griffith, 1915) Proceed with caution, for this film is racist, ridiculous history and it revived the Ku Klux Klan. But DW Griffith made the audience sit still for three hours, held by the rhythm of long shot and close-up. Yes, it's ugly and compromised, but it's hard to resist - welcome to movie history.

Black Cat, White Cat (Emir Kusturica, 1998) Amiable beserk tale of chaos and carnival from Sarajevo-born Kusturica, set among a modern-day Gypsy community living on the banks of the Danube. Petty crime and even pettier punishment ensue, all leading up to an epochally frenzied wedding party full of commotion, frolics and runaway ducks. Funny, fascinating and faintly exhausting.

Blackboard Jungle (Richard Brooks, 1955) Lurid high-school drama that introduced Hollywood to rock'n'roll, with slash-the-seats credit music by Bill Haley And The Comets, but Elvis and co had yet to exert their influence over these inner city juvenile delinquents. Glenn Ford exudes cool authority as a teacher drafted into to tame their savage hearts, but Vic Morrow and Sidney Poitier are on fire as the boys who won't back down.

Blackboards (Samira Makhmalbaf, 2000) The doughty young Iranian director took her cast (mostly non-professionals) and crew high into the mountains of Kurdistan for her second feature, about the desperate plight of the Kurds. The imagery here is jarring and affecting: we see kids trying to smuggle themselves past armed guards, and teachers walking across rugged ground with blackboards strapped to their backs as they look for someone to educate.

Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982) Filmic visions of the future tend to either laughably short-sighted or absurdly rose-tinted, but Blade -Runner's holds up worryingly well. We might not have flying cars or new planets to escape to yet, but Los Angeles is still well on track to look like this come 2019 - parts of it do already. Bleak it might be, but Blade Runner's rainy, grimy, high-tech but rundown cityscape is rendered with such richness and consistency and imagination, it's almost a celebration. Wisely, Ridley Scott provides us with a familiar navigation device through this alien world: the good old film noir. Android or not, Harrison Ford is a cop right out of the 1940s: weary, reluctant, alienated but essentially effective. It also helps that he has a straightforward assignment: track down and kill four escaped replicants, or artificial humans, who prove to be formidable opponents. Thrilling though the chase is, there are complicating factors, particularly Sean Young's futuristic Mildred Pierce-like femme fatale, who raises the film's deeper, trickier existential questions: questions about humanity, and identity. Blade Runner's world may eventually come to look dated, but its themes will continue to haunt us.

The Blair Witch Project (Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sanchez, 1999) Launched by a word-of-mouth internet operation, The Blair Witch Project itself was just as much of a clandestine triumph. Stripped down to bare narrative, raw atmospheric and bleary-eyed performances from the three leads, it was a much-needed emetic after the ironic horror excesses of *Scream* et al. Why, in the YouTube era, haven't there been more films like this?

Blazing Saddles (Mel Brooks, 1974) Discomfort, disgust and improvised flurries have become the motor of studio comedies, but whatever happened to the well-crafted gag? Brooks was instrumental in increasing the studios' gag reflex - and they don't come any thicker than in the pelting he gave the western in 1974. The campfire scene has, of course, entered the comedy canon.

Blow-Up (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) It took an outsider to make the definitive Swinging London movie, and Antonioni's ambivalence makes this more than an ephemeral celebration. David Hemmings' playboy photographer is sucked into a spiral of delusion and paranoia as he snaps a murder on film, then comes to wonder if his camera is lying to him.

The Blue Angel (Josef von Sternberg, 1930) Hollywood sent Josef von Sternberg to Berlin, where he picked a minor actress named Dietrich to play opposite the master, Emil Jannings. It's early sound, with songs and sex, and it's the start of sexual humiliation on screen. Marlene went back to America with Joe - loved him, dropped him - just as the film predicted.

The Blue Dahlia (George Marshall, 1946) Scripted by Raymond Chandler, and as taut a thriller as you'd expect. The emotionless Alan Ladd is in many ways the perfect noir hero, here playing a taciturn war vet who returns to LA, only to get framed for his wife's murder; dodgy blonde Veronica Lake is pure trouble . . .

The Blue Lamp (Basil Dearden, 1950) Britain's answer to the film noirs of the US: Dixon of Dock Green. This is the film that introduced Jack Warner's saintly bobby. Here, he's stopped in his tracks sharpish, gunned down by punk Dirk Bogarde in a classic period piece of austerity Britain.

Blue Velvet (David Lynch, 1986) Arguably the most accomplished film from one of American cinema's great stylists, Lynch mixes Hitchcockian sexual obsession with 1950s kitsch (plus a heavy dose of the uncanny) in his small-town fable of evil below the surface of picket-fence normality. The iconic status of Isabella Rossellini and Dennis Hopper was sealed along the way.

The Blues Brothers (John Landis, 1980) Raucous soul musical that ladles on the grand cameos - Aretha Franklin, Cab Calloway, James Brown - as gratuitously as it sacrifices cars in sensationally uninhibited chase sequences. As the brothers Blues, Dan Aykroyd and (with a touch more scowl) John Belushi are the counterpoints, adding deadpan pauses and comic beats to the chaos.

Bob le Flambeur (Jean-Pierre Melville, 1956) Elder brother-mentor to the upstart Nouvelle Vague-ists, Melville here combined regret, encroaching obsolescence and perfect, sleazy/beautiful, six-in-the-morning Parisian vistas to introduce us to the gambler Bob, who seeks to rob the biggest casino in town. Lighter in tone and mood than, say, *Le Samourai*, and much more approachable.

Body and Soul (Robert Rossen, 1947) Almost everyone involved in this blank-verse noir masterpiece was later blacklisted: director Rossen, screenwriter Abe Polonsky, star John Garfield. The bleakest, best written, most poetic boxing movie until *Raging Bull*. "So... you gonna kill me, huh? Everybody dies!" Garfield, the speaker of that line, died three years later.

Bombón: El Perro (Carlos Sorin, 2004) Good breeding shows in this wonderful Spanish-language road-trip, in which an unemployed mechanic adopts a purebred Argentine dogo, Bombon. Travelling the plains of Patagonia, he meets a dog trainer who informs him that Bombon is a prize draw on the dog show circuit, heralding the start of a strange but sincere partnership that's both cemented and confounded by the dog's eerily human comic timing.

Bonnie & Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967) A controversial, groundbreaking mix of romantic love and brutal violence, based on the true-life 1930s bank-robbing couple Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker. With stunning performances by 28-year-old Warren Beatty and then-newcomer Faye Dunaway, it redefined the gangster film.

Boogie Nights (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1997) A dazzlingly ambitious and surprisingly affecting trawl through LA's porn industry. The sprawling story tracks Mark Wahlberg's Dirk Diggler from skinflick ingenue in the drug-and-disco-fuelled 70s to sleazy junkie in the 80s. Flashy camerawork, razor editing and terrific ensemble playing make for visually stunning entertainment.

Das Boot (Wolfgang Pedersen, 1981) One of the small number of foreign-language movies iconic enough to be known by its original title. A classic WW2 drama about the claustrophobic world of the German U-Boat and its terrified inmates under threat from the Allies. This created a Hollywood career for its director, Pedersen.

Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan (Larry Charles, 2006) Fearless exposé of American values, or numb-nuts bigotry with a thin crust of irony? As with all the sharpest satire, Borat walks a very fine line, unearthing prejudice everywhere. Sacha Baron Cohen's forays as the Kazakhstani Clouseau are closer to performance art than cinema, creating the first globalisation-era comedy - boundaries hilariously tested and transgressed.

The Boston Strangler (Richard Fleischer, 1968) One of Fleischer's series of memorably creepy true-crime melodramas (10 Rillington Place, Compulsion, etc), Strangler made innovative use of split-screen technology to illustrate police chief Henry Fonda's manhunt for serial sex-killer-weaking Albert De Salvo (Tony Curtis working overtime to demolish his pretty-boy image) as he terrorised Boston in the early 1960s.

Le Boucher (Claude Chabrol, 1970) Exquisitely understated murder mystery about a butcher courting a beautiful but reticent schoolteacher who begins to suspect him of the vicious serial killings of local women. A master of slow-burning suspense, Chabrol paints an unforgettable portrait of small-town life and its unspoken dark secrets.

Bowling for Columbine (Michael Moore, 2002) Moore at his mightiest, contesting that great American absurdity: why the country's citizens continue to fetishise guns when events such as the Columbine and Virginia Tech massacres keep happening. His methods may sometimes be questionable, but the results are there: NRA president Charlton Heston holed up in his mansion, offering up desperate excuses for a paranoid culture.

Boyz n the Hood (John Singleton, 1991) John Singleton was just 23 when he directed this powerful coming-of-age story set in South Central LA. Though the message about personal responsibility is laudable, it's the atmospheric textures of the ghetto-screaming sirens, hovering choppers, the threat of violence hanging in the air like smog-that make the movie sing.

The Brady Bunch Movie (Betty Thomas, 1995) Fun and watchable scaling-up of the cheesy TV show that found its way by unashamedly mocking its source. Seemingly unchanged since the Dayglo 1970s, the Brady clan have to fend for themselves on the mean streets of the mid-90s; the clash of cultures is handled with genuine humour.

Branded to Kill (Seijun Suzuki, 1967) It's always entertaining to see a genre director breaking all the rules. Japanese wildcard Suzuki practically destroyed his career with this jazzy, eccentric hitman movie, but it was worth it. Butterflies, rice fetishes and ingenious assassination techniques are all in the mix as a sulky "number 3 killer" shoots his way to the top.

Braveheart (Mel Gibson, 1995) Mel Gibson may have mangled history in his own unique and self-serving way but his urgent, thrilling semi biopic of 14th-century Scots warrior William Wallace romped to Oscar success on the back of its sheer adrenaline energy. Gibson, in a starring role, captures the full-throttle attitude of its hero and distils the gung-ho headiness of Wallace's myth.

Brazil (Terry Gilliam, 1985) While Gilliam's well-publicised struggle to get his vision released was unpleasant, it's quite appropriate to the subject matter of the film. In a possible future where entropy is blamed on terrorism, one small cog dreams of freedom. And yes, it does have a happy ending - but on its own ruthless terms.

Breakfast at Tiffany's (Blake Edwards, 1961) Truman Capote's story of a free spirit adrift in New York was written with Marilyn Monroe in mind, but it's impossible now to imagine anyone but Audrey Hepburn in the role of Holly Golightly. Sure, it's dated, but Hepburn's luminous performance, the chic New York settings and Mancini's swooning score can't fail to cast a spell.

Breaking Away (Peter Yates, 1979) Likely a favourite in the Lance Armstrong household, Peter Yates' winning smalltown drama about a bicycle-racing freak was a surprise sleeper nominee at the 1980 Oscars. Its success derives from the beautiful interaction between its four bored Midwestern high school grads, including Dennis Quaid and Jackie Earle Haley.

Breaking the Waves (Lars von Trier, 1996) A modern-day melodrama that functions like an emotional mangle, with Emily Watson's committed acting and von Trier's sadistically tragic story dragging the audience through an unforgettably harrowing experience. Watson's devout newlywed sacrifices herself for the sake of her paralysed husband in the belief that God will understand. Her close-knit community certainly doesn't.

Breathless (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960) The quintessential Nouvelle Vague romantic thriller following the final days of a car thief who kills a cop, then hides out with a young American journalist in Paris. Godard's frenetic jump-cuts and hand-held cameras revolutionised cinema, but Belmondo's provocative antics and Seberg's final betrayal are what make the film unforgettable.

Brick (Rian Johnson, 2005) A teenager plays gumshoe after his girlfriend goes missing amid the complex universe of cruel one-upmanship, power plays, and exaggerated passions also known as the American high school. It's the perfect setting for Rian Johnson's delicious detective yarn, which reinvents the noir film and comes with its own native slang.

Bride of Frankenstein (James Whale, 1935) The Monster has mellowed, learned to speak, and is ready for love in James Whale's funny frightener, which is itself an exotic invention: a sequel that lives up to the original. And it knows how to keep us wanting more: the titular Bride only gets a few indelible minutes of screen time.

The Bridge On the River Kwai (David Lean, 1957) Forget the bloated and soulless exercises in logistics-management that are Lawrence of Arabia and Doctor Zhivago. This is Lean's great movie: an action-movie epic, but one centered around a richly conceived clash of values and codes of honour, which animate Alec Guinness's British colonel and Sessue Hayakawa's Japanese POW camp commandant.

Brief Encounter (David Lean, 1945) Tumultuous passions are kept in check by British reserve as Trevor Howard and Celia Johnston conduct a properly improper affair against a backdrop of tea rooms and train schedules. The restraint is almost comical by today's standards, but beneath the chaste facade, Lean gets to the heart of the matter with an admirable lack of fuss.

A Brighter Summer Day (Edward Yang, 1991) Conceived on an awesome scale, this three-hour-plus epic about 60s Taiwanese street gangs is nothing less than a complete summing up of an entire nation in a single film. Meticulously detailed, Yang's semi-autobiographical tale of quiff-sporting delinquents heading toward violent confrontation takes us to the heart of a culture in crisis.

Brighton Rock (John Boulting, 1947) This Graham Greene adaptation, co-scripted by the novelist, is kerosene-fuelled by Richard Attenborough as juvenile gangster Pinkie, brimming with menace. The oppressive opening murder on the ghost train sets out the film's stall: a crushing journey into violence and spiritual damnation that stands alongside the best of American noir.

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia (Sam Peckinpah, 1974) Peckinpah's most complex exploration of his skewed moral code. At times this is almost a buddy road movie, albeit an impossibly dark one, with Warren Oates teamed up with the decomposing head he's claiming bounty on. A tequila-and sweat-sodden tale of life on the bottom rung.

Bringing Up Baby (Howard Hawks, 1938) Susan wants fun. David wants grant money. She wants to go through life as a tempest; he wants to rebuild a dinosaur skeleton. Then a leopard gets loose. The film was a big flop, but it's Howard Hawks, Hepburn and Grant, and it's a masterpiece comedy on making work fun.

Broadway Danny Rose (Woody Allen, 1984) Superbly shot in black and white, this gentle, Runyonesque comedy is a real gem. Allen plays a legendary talent agent who promotes the acts that others won't touch: balloon twisters, piano-playing birds, blind xylophone players. But the fun starts when he takes on an alcoholic lounge singer and his mafia moll (Mia Farrow behind giant sunglasses).

Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005) Ang Lee's epic of cowboys in love is multilayered, achingly subtle, stunningly photographed - a peerless heartbreaker and an instant classic. Jake Gyllenhaal is touching as the puppyish Jack Twist, but it is Heath Ledger's clenched, wrenching performance as the taciturn Ennis Del Mar that's the soul of the film.

Buffalo 66 (Vincent Gallo, 1998) Buffalo, New York, is in many ways a terrific city with a rich artistic and architectural history. Fairly or not, it's also something of a national US punchline, best known for its dreary winters and chicken wings. A rabid sports town, Buffalo lost four consecutive Super Bowls starting in 1991, when place-kicker Scott Norwood famously missed a field goal that could have won the game and finally given Buffalo its moment in the limelight. In *Buffalo 66*, writer-director-star Vincent Gallo takes this pivotal disappointment and claims it as his own personal trauma. As far as Gallo's wretched protagonist, Billy Brown, is concerned, his life ended the second that kick veered wide right of the goal. Badly damaged by a loveless upbringing, Billy (played by Gallo, who was born and raised in Buffalo) reaches a point of no return when he bets \$10,000 that he doesn't have on the Bills and, to escape the wrath of his bookie, takes the rap for another man's crime. Once out of jail, Billy kidnaps a dance student, Layla (Christina Ricci), and drags her home to his appalling parents (Anjelica Huston and Ben Gazzara) while also planning to avenge his football-playing nemesis. Gallo's autobiographical film is a poison-pen letter to his hometown, but it also holds out the possibility of redemption for Billy in the form of Layla. No matter how much Billy berates or ignores her, she sticks adoringly by his side. She's something of a miracle worker, in fact, her steadfastness turning a caustic tale of how you can't go home again into a cockeyed, weirdly -convincing love story.

Bugsy Malone (Alan Parker, 1976) Mini-me musical starring a young Jodie Foster and Scott Baio in a Prohibition-era gangster-movie homage. Though strictly for kids, filmic nods will entertain adults too. The sexualised tweenies might be risqué now, but there are some seriously contagious tunes and the custard-pie fights are a blast.

Bull Durham (Ron Shelton, 1988) Nominally a Kevin Costner vehicle, this is the film that made left-liberal history by introducing his co-star Tim Robbins to their leading lady Susan Sarandon. Nevertheless, sparks fly in every direction in this warm, romantic baseball drama, in which a local groupie has a struggling team competing for her sexual favours at the start of a new season.

Bullitt (Peter Yates, 1968) Steve McQueen hired Yates after seeing the car chase in *Robbery*, but Yates brought more than just motor-skills to Bullitt. Its violence and eye for sleaze pioneered the gritty 1970s urban policier, but its sleek, weary hero embodied JFK-ish virtues of public service and private integrity that were already on the wane.

Burnt By the Sun (Nikita Mikhalkov, 1994) If Chekhov had still been writing in the Stalin era, this is the kind of story he might have told. Lyrical and brutal by turns, it starts like an Uncle Vanya-style country house drama, but darkens as its main protagonist (played by the director, Nikita Mikhalkov) becomes caught up in the terror of the 1930s Stalinist purges.

Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid (George Roy Hill, 1969) An offence to the western genre - slick, meretricious, and altogether too good-natured - Butch and Sundance none the less works as the feisty chronicle of a charmed bond between salt-and-pepper bandits.

Cabaret (Bob Fosse, 1972) Life is one big, perverse party for Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli) and her chums as the Nazis come to power in 1930s Berlin. Bob Fosse brings Christopher Isherwood's Berlin stories vividly to life with showstopping choreography that sees Minnelli strutting the stage of the Kit Kat club in suspenders and bowler hat. Divine decadence, darling!

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1920) Despite its reputation as the template for a thousand horror movies, Robert Wiene's silent-screen phantasmagoria remains a rare and unruly treasure. With its outlandish style (wild theatrics, expressionistic sets), this may even be the genre's missing link, shackling old-style grand-guignol to the emergent medium of cinema.

Caché (Hidden) (Michael Haneke, 2005) Enigmatic Paris-set thriller with middle-class couple Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche terrorised by creepy videotapes in revenge for the husband's guilty past. Voyeurism meets paranoia in a remarkable nerve-striking parable that proved unexpectedly popular.

La Cage Au Folles (Edouard Molinaro, 1978) Then-daring high-camp comedy that found unexpected international success; the fact that it was genuinely funny helped. Michel Serrault has the best lines as the drag queen "auntie" to lover Ugo Tognazzi's son; when he announces his marriage - to a girl - the stage is set for dinner-party farce of the highest order.

A Canterbury Tale (Michael Powell And Emeric Pressburger, 1944) Beware the glueman. Critics writing retrospective analysis of Powell and Pressburger cite Eric Portman's village squire (who goes around squirting sticky stuff on the hair of girls on dates with GIs) as evidence that the imp of the perverse was in their work right from the outset. Glue aside, this is a wondrously evocative paean to pastoral England. The wonder is that it was made in the middle of the war.

Capturing the Friedmans (Andrew Jarecki, 2003) The title has a double meaning, referring to the persecution of a suburban family for unsubstantiated sex crimes and to the family's compulsion for putting their entire lives on videotape. The cameras keep running even when they hit rock bottom, making for a staggering tragedy that dares you to look away.

Caravaggio (Derek Jarman, 1986) Jarman brings all the irreverent force of his punk poetry to his take on the wild-child baroque painter Caravaggio. With its mix of contemporary references and Jarman's highly mannered, stage-set version of 17th century Italy, this is a movie as non-conformist, as headily, violently sexual and inventive as its title character.

Carry On Cleo (Gerald Thomas, 1964) The Carry On team's tilt at the superstar pairing of Liz Taylor and Richard Burton is one of their more focused efforts, starring Jim Dale and Kenneth Connor as a primitive Brits taken to Rome to be sold as slaves. Kenneth Williams steals the show, though, as the haughty Julius Caesar, going nasally to his death with the immortal line, "Infamy, infamy - they've all got it in for me!"

The Cars That Ate Paris (Peter Weir, 1974) Low budget exploitation has proved an easy entry into moviemaking for many directors, and the smarter ones manage to sneak in satire. Weir's movie has cars covered in spikes and enough gore to satisfy the Friday night crowd, with well-aimed barbs at consumerism and automobile culture for those seeking a little depth.

Casablanca (Michael Curtiz, 1942) Rick's Cafe is in Burbank, not north Africa, and Paul Henreid got his scar in make-up, not Dachau. Who cares, when the real war relieved Casablanca just as the movie opened? This is looking at you, kid, playing it again, and musing over hills of beans. I have the letters of transit, but I'm staying in Casablanca forever.

Casino (Martin Scorsese, 1995) Scorsese's savage epic weaves a fascinating tapestry, illustrating the workings of organized crime in Las Vegas - from kingpins to the lowest underlings - as an exercise in controlled chaos. The graphic violence is essential to the milieu, with the "head in a vice" scene the most famous among many acts of brute force.

Cat On a Hot Tin Roof (Richard Brooks, 1958) Tennessee Williams' brilliant dissections of human relationships were rarely better served than this luminous melodrama, starring Paul Newman as a former football hero who is falling into alcoholism and closet homosexuality. His steely-eyed charm meets its match, however, in the buxom, blousy Maggie - a terrific Southern belle part that liberated Elizabeth Taylor from her coy National Velvet roots forever.

The Celebration (Festen) (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998) A black-tie reunion descends into accusation and recrimination, and Vinterberg's hand-held camera captures the ugliness with all the raw honesty and immediacy of a home movie. A blistering study of bourgeois secrets and lies that kickstarted the Dogme movement.

Céline and Julie Go Boating (Jacques Rivette, 1974) Two eccentric women run amok in Paris. Jacques Rivette's three hour feature is whimsy on an epic scale, mannered, playful and inspired by turns. Madonna's movie career might have been different without it: Susan Seidelman was inspired by Céline and Julie when she came to make Desperately Seeking Susan, in which Madge had the best part.

The Cement Garden (Andrew Birkin, 1993) Ian McEwan has rarely had a better showcase than this heated and haunting adaptation of his Lord of the Flies-style analysis of suburban anarchy. Against the backdrop of a forbidding concrete house, a husband and wife die of natural causes, leaving their children to cover up their deaths and explore their new freedoms, sexual and otherwise, in ways that defy convention and - especially - the law.

Central Station (Walter Salles, 1998) The film that kicked off Latin America's cinematic renaissance, and the most emotionally honest. Fernanda Montenegro's seasoned turn as a cynical ex-schoolteacher, and newcomer Vinicius de Oliver as the nine-year-old she is forced to care for, fuse into a film with all the tough social credentials of the "buena onda".

La Cérémonie (Claude Chabrol, 1995) In Claude Chabrol, France's master of suspense, Ruth Rendell found the perfect cinematic interpreter for her classic A Judgment In Stone about an illiterate young woman hired as a cleaner in a well-off bourgeois household. She forms a dangerous friendship with the local postmistress who is enviously resentful of the family's local prestige.

The Charge of the Light Brigade (Tony Richardson, 1968) Tony Richardson fashioned a MASH-like anti-war film set in the Crimean era. Many of Britain's finest actors are on display, most of them sporting facial hair to die for. Trevor Howard is wonderfully bad-tempered as Lord Cardigan, Charles Wood's dialogue is barbed and witty, and the charge itself is staged with élan. The cartoon sections (courtesy of Richard Williams of Roger Rabbit fame) aren't bad either.

Chariots of Fire (Hugh Hudson, 1981) Iconic running scenes accompanied by Vangelis score. The film tells the true story of British athletes, Eric Liddell (Ian Charleson) and Harold Abrahams (Ben Cross) who overcame personal difficulties to compete in the 1924 Olympics. What with all the slow-mo action by top toff totty, it's easy to get carried away with all the flag-waving.

The Chess Players (Satyajit Ray, 1977) Elegant, lavish, but emotionally understated satire from the great Indian film-maker about the British Raj in 1850. Richard Attenborough plays the British General Outram, and Saeed Jaffrey and Sanjeev Kumar play two noblemen whose passion for chess means they won't wake up to the clear and present danger from the rapacious British. They are about to be checkmated.

Chicken Run (Peter Lord, Nick Park, 2000) Aardman's attempt to court America could have led to dilution of their homegrown vision. But despite drafting in Mel Gibson to lead a group of chickens, Great Escape-fashion, to safety, Lord and Park retained the eccentricity and delicate characterisation of their best work, as well as unbelievably intricate technical prowess.

Un Chien Andalou (Luis Buñuel, 1928) Sensual, shocking and deeply subversive, Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's surreal short from 1928 - complete with razor and eyeball - is a masterpiece of provocation. One of the few films really to use the medium's potential for pure anarchy.

Children of Paradise (Marcel Carné, 1945) Monumental classic set in Paris's 19th-century theatrical world, recounting an ill-fated affair between the mime Baptiste (Jean-Louis Barrault) and the mysterious Garance (Arletty), loved by four different men. Shot by Carné in secret in occupied France, this riveting three-hour drama is cinema's mightiest metaphysical ode to love and freedom.

Chinatown (Roman Polanski, 1974) Classic 1970s neo-noir set in a glaring, sunbaked Los Angeles dying of thirst. Jack Nicholson is the gumshoe who pokes his nose into corruption and gets his nostril sliced open for his pains. Superb cinematography, meticulous direction and many-layered screenplay by Robert Towne combine to devastating effect.

Chuck & Buck (Miguel Arteta, 2000) Pre-adolescence never really ended for lollipop-sucking Buck, an unsocialised man-child who tries to rekindle the relationship he shared with his boyhood best friend, Charlie, when they meet as adults. Turning the fantasy of childhood innocence on its head, this dark stalker comedy will make you squirm in your seat.

Chungking Express (Wong Kar-Wai, 1994) Filmed in Wong Kar-Wai's typically uncontrolled fashion in 23 days, and expertly photographed by maverick cameraman Christopher Doyle, Chungking Express is more coherent than the director's previous Days of Being Wild and more spontaneous than his later In the Mood for Love. It's a breezy, enigmatic, compact statement of the key Wong themes: love, longing, loneliness, time.

La Ciénaga (Lucrecia Martel, 2001) The Swamp (as the title translates) was an apt metaphor for late 90s Argentina. Money was swilling around but there was a sense of corruption and an undercurrent of violence. Martel captures brilliantly the ennui of Argentina's sinking middle-classes, too listless and apathetic (and too cowed by memories of the dictatorship) to change the society that is decaying around them.

The Cincinnati Kid (Norman Jewison, 1965) Did for poker what The Hustler did for pool. Steve McQueen plays against bluff master Edward G. Robinson in a smoky, backroom card sharp drama. As it's perhaps not the best spectator sport, the script is full of great character touches from screenwriters Terry Southern and Ring Lardner Jr with Rip Torn providing some casually terrifying villainy.

Cinema Paradiso (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988) A famous film-maker recalls his rapturous discovery of cinema as a child in his native Sicilian village, his ensuing friendship with the elderly projectionist and a forever-lost teenage love. Tornatore's wistful autobiographical drama, set in grim postwar Italy, is unabashedly sentimental, but it's a touching homage to the magic of movies.

Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941) Yes, it's bizarre that in a young medium the best film is already 60 years old. And putting Citizen Kane on that plateau may prevent people from seeing it, or thinking about it. But the voting is right. In 1941, Orson Welles changed our expectations about the movies and showed what a mixed-up thing it is to be American.

City of God (Fernando Meirelles, 2002) Meirelles brings the storytelling sass of Scorsese to the slums of Rio of Janeiro, and how thrillingly. The rise of the precociously psychotic gangster Li'l Zé to rule his scrappy fiefdom, watched by photographer Buscapé, is a heady and morally queasy ride - with added samba style and Copacabana sunshine.

Clerks (Kevin Smith, 1994) The first and best instalment of Smith's ongoing slacker epic, and a boon to no-budget filmmakers of the early indie-Hollywood period. Shot for buttons in crappy-looking black-and-white, it transcends its shortcomings through the inventiveness of its scatology and vulgarity.

A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) Kubrick's notorious delinquent drama engaged with the problems of violence and spectatorship so effectively, it became a problem itself, and he withdrew it from British cinemas. The film's "ultraviolence" made the headlines, but it's a bold enterprise all round: technically brilliant, consistently confrontational and disarmingly cheerful, with an iconic anti-hero in the form of Malcolm McDowell.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Steven Spielberg, 1977) Spielberg's first trip around the extra-terrestrial block is one of his best films -it's certainly his creepiest. Richard Dreyfuss is on superb form as the small-towner haunted by visions and sounds he doesn't understand. And that really is François Truffaut playing the kindly French boffin.

Closely Watched Trains (Jiri Menzel, 1966) A beautiful comedy of boredom (gentle, tragic and farcical by turns) that exposed a vibrant new wave of Czech cinema flourishing behind the Iron Curtain. Hard to believe that so much humour could be wrung from the experiences of a lugubrious adolescent whose dearest wish is to "stand on a platform and avoid hard work".

Close-Up (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990) With minimal resources and considerable intelligence, Kiarostami turns truth and fiction into a hall of mirrors in an astounding film. His elusive subject is a man charged with impersonating another film director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Kiarostami complicates matters considerably, though, interviewing the impostor, filming his real-life trial, restaging scenes and, most poignantly, introducing him to the real Makhmalbaf.

Clueless (Amy Heckerling, 1995) Director Amy Heckerling had done teen before, with Fast Times at Ridgemont High; here she takes Jane Austen's Emma along to a prissier establishment, and lets teen queen Cher (Alicia Silverstone) rearrange the lives of her fellow pupils. Everyone, not least Cher, is capable of a delectable, barbed riposte in this 90210 wonderland, but Heckerling makes sure her satire of self-absorption is essentially sweet.

Cocksucker Blues (Robert Frank, 1972) Lacking as we do any filmed account of Led Zeppelin's US tours, CSB stands as the definitive account of degenerate British rock bands on tour in the early-stadium rock era. Robert Frank's crisp photography captures the Stones, junkie sidemen and sexually available groupies in all their heedless, satanic splendour.

The Colour of Pomegranates (Sergei Paradjanov, 1969) Ostensibly a biography of Sayat Nova, the 18th-century Armenian poet and archbishop, this is a biopic like no other. Paradjanov concocts a bizarre mosaic of religio-folk iconography, in which farm animals wander freely. Soviet officialdom, unimpressed by its astounding beauty, banned it.

Come and See (Elem Klimov, 1985) Among the innumerable horrors of the second world war, the savagery of the conflict in German-occupied Byelorussia was among the most bestial, and Klimov bears witness to this through the eyes of young partisan Alexei Kravchenko. An anti-war film with a vengeance, it connects atrocities and scenes of compelling beauty.

The Company of Wolves (Neil Jordan, 1984) An adult fairytale, adapted from Angela Carter, positing Little Red Hiding Hood in a world forested by Freudian symbols and gender issues, and fleshed out with some splendid human-to-wolf transformations. The heroine's conclusion: the beast in man is as alluring as it is dangerous.

Comrades (Bill Douglas, 1987) The last testament and only colour film of Bill Douglas, lost genius of poetic British realism, memorialises the Tolpuddle Martyrs, 19th-century labour agitators transported for attempting to unionise. This "Lanternist's Account" utilises many proto-cinematic tools, and a revelatory increase in the aspect-ratio from 1.33:1 to 1.85:1 once the story reaches Australia.

Con Air (Simon West, 1997) Sure, it stars Nic Cage and was directed by Simon West, but real ownership of this movie lies with producer Jerry Bruckheimer. There's no real story but that just leaves more room for goofy character work - "make a move and the bunny gets it" - and great action sequences. Big dumb fun, in the best possible way, as a good Bruckheimer should be.

The Conformist (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1970) Disturbing thriller based on Moravia's 1930s novel about a spineless Italian aristocrat (creepily played by Jean-Louis Trintignant) who is sent to Paris while on his honeymoon to assassinate his dissident ex-professor. Treachery, cowardice and sexual decadence have never looked as dazzling as in this masterful baroque assembly of light, shadow, and camera fluidity.

The Consequences of Love (Paolo Sorrentino, 2004) Italian cinema's bright hope masterfully stages a mystery in miniature: what is the story behind a seemingly innocuous 50-year-old man who lives in a Swiss hotel and spends his time solving chess problems? The director's elegant visual sense and Toni Servillo's supple performance as the unfathomable resident give Sorrentino's second feature a sharp and compelling shape.

Contempt (Le Mépris) (Jean Luc-Godard, 1963) Despite its ambivalence towards its own big-budget, widescreen production values, this is a movie of towering proportions: its cast is filled with legends (Brigitte Bardot, Michel Piccoli, Jack Palance, Fritz Lang), and its story overlays autobiography, Greek myth, domestic drama and movie-making satire. It's atypical of Godard, but it marks a key moment in his, and cinema's, history.

The Conversation (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) Gene Hackman gives one of his greatest performances as a surveillance whiz incapable of the most basic intimacy in Coppola's paranoid character study. An impeccable technical achievement (the sound design was supervised by Walter Murch), the film arrives at its unforgettable finale inside the self-made prison of a lonely, tortured soul.

Coogan's Bluff (Don Siegel, 1968) Clint Eastwood is Arizona sheriff Walt Coogan, hunting killer Don Stroud through the alien territory of New York: the city cops mock the cowboy "from Texas", but out west or in the urban jungle, Coogan always gets his man. This was the first of the tough, taut Siegel-Eastwood collaborations that included Dirty Harry.

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover (Peter Greenaway, 1989) Greenaway's trademark elements - schematic plot, extravagant design, stately Michael Nyman score, bourgeois-shocking sex and violence - are all in perfect balance in this ripe tale of culinary revenge, transformed into a seductive feast. The cast is outstanding, led by Michael Gambon and Helen Mirren.

Cool Hand Luke (Stuart Rosenberg, 1967) Facile, sentimental, desperate to be loved, and larded with overripe crucifixion imagery, Cool Hand Luke none the less thrives on Paul Newman's indomitable charisma as a convict who won't be caged. The finest hours of Strother Martin and George Kennedy. Avoid eating eggs beforehand.

Le Corbeau (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1943) A French provincial town is plagued by poison-pen letters from Le Corbeau, or "The Raven". Who is the villain? A clever, dyspeptic whodunnit from Clouzot, brilliantly capturing a spirit of paranoia, pettiness and self-loathing during the Nazi occupation of France.

The Cranes Are Flying (Mikhail Kalatozishvili, 1954) The Russian film industry effectively died out during Stalin's final years before bursting back to life with this potent anti-war melodrama. Kalatozishvili won the Palme d'Or for his hard-edged antidote to Soviet propaganda, though it's Sergei Urusevsky's cinematography that most stirs the senses.

Crash (David Cronenberg, 1997) Cronenberg's obsession with encounters between human flesh and hard technology usually produces horrific results, but when it came to this adaptation of JG Ballard's novel, it produced an erotic one, which many found even worse. In less able hands, this would be patently absurd, but it manages a sleek, fatalistic conviction.

The Cremaster Cycle (Matthew Barney, 1995-2002) In an undifferentiated foetus, the cremaster is the muscle that dictates whether it will be male or female. This is fine-art prodigy Barney's central conceit for his five-part meditation on the creative process, which has given rise to more interpretations than David Beckham's barnet. Bizarre rituals, claustrophobic struggles and (as Barney's budgets increased) dizzying spectacles abound: an endlessly fertile seed-bed of ideas.

Crimes and Misdemeanors (Woody Allen, 1989) Allen's Janus-faced moral tale is two films in one: a comedy starring Allen as an unlucky-in-love film-maker, and a tragedy about the extreme measures that Martin Landau takes to protect what's his. The film disturbs in its depiction of everyday evil and its characters' ability to blind themselves to uneasy truths.

Crocodile Dundee (Peter Faiman, 1986) Uncouth anthropological specimen hits America, terrifies the locals and pursues improbable romance with blonde princess: now we know what Borat's real lineage is. It probably set Australian stereotypes back 50 years, but Paul Hogan's comedy of manners rattles along with populist spirit, down to the subway climax.

Cronos (Guillermo Del Toro, 1993) A kindly antique-shop owner happens upon a strange little contraption that gives him the gift and curse of everlasting life. Guillermo Del Toro's re-tinkering of the vampire myth is a marvel of spooky atmosphere, while its unrivalled star is the ornate, musty production design.

Crooklyn (Spike Lee, 1994) Spike Lee's retort to the grim early 90s wave of 'hood movies is his underrated personal best, telling the story of grouchy jazz musician, his schoolteacher wife and their houseful of kids. Eschewing cosy Cosby-style sentiment, it's a lovely evocation of Lee's 70s childhood, charged with the hazy warmth of summers gone and scored with an impeccable selection of hustlin' period R&B.

Crossfire (Edward Dmytryk, 1947) Future director Richard Brooks's novel about a homophobic murder became a liberal whodunit about the murder of a Jewish soldier. Square Robert Young and cynical Robert Mitchum track down the insanely anti-semitic killer - Robert Ryan in a hypnotically coiled performance. Swift, claustrophobic and sparely directed by Dmytryk.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, 2000) Packed with mythic characters, acrobatic chases and swordfights on the rooftops, Ang Lee's lush martial-arts adventure is pure cinematic delight. Chow Yun-Fat and Michelle Yeoh are the supple stars who fly off in pursuit of a stolen sword, taking us along for a thrilling ride.

Crumb (Terry Zwigoff, 1994) This rich documentary on comic-book artist Robert Crumb is hilarious and blunt in its approach to his tormented personal history and gnarled psychosexual profile. Both a portrait of the artist and a tragicomic family album, Zwigoff's film achieves an arresting intimacy with its subject.

The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, 1992) Writer-director Neil Jordan won a best original screenplay Oscar for this darkly poetic drama that helped trigger the 1990s British cinema revival, and it's not hard to see why. His thought-provoking storyline -delivers not one but two shocking twists as it delves into tangled questions of identity, loyalty and desire. The action opens at a north Armagh fairground, where black British soldier Jody (Forest Whitaker) is kidnapped by an IRA gang. Astutely assessing his chances of survival, Jody strikes up a friendship with softer cell-member Fergus (Stephen Rea) and over the following days the men become close. Aware that this relationship is seen as weakness by the rest of the gang, Fergus offers to be the one to execute the soldier - but when the time comes, Jody bolts, the army swoops, and the kidnapping ends in chaos. In the subsequent shootout, Fergus slips away, eventually making his way to London where he goes in search of Jody's lover. Even if you know its secret, Jordan's subtle, multi-layered drama remains a gripping emotional journey. Switching from political to romantic thriller, its second half cleverly mirrors the tensions and power play of the first. The acting is uniformly excellent: Whitaker is memorable in a brief role, while Rea's soulfully lugubrious face is put to good use as the vulnerable IRA man. Locales from the backwoods of Ireland to London's smoky underworld are atmospherically evoked, and Jaye Davidson is convincingly sexy and inscrutable. A deceptively low-key thriller that gets under your skin and stays with you. Liese Spencer

Cul-De-Sac (Roman Polanski, 1966) Polanski's quirkiest film flits across several genres with a great deal of ease and grace. Few other movies can move from broad comedy to violence without losing pace or audience attention. A career best turn from Donald Pleasence ties things together as Polanski works out his mild obsession with Beckett, Pinter and US gangster movies.

Cyrano de Bergerac (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1990) A nose is a nose is a nose, so Cyrano (Gerard Depardieu), a witty poet and expert swordsman, woos the fair Roxanne by love letters, embarrassed by his colossal schnoz. Alas, she believes the author is his handsome, dull rival. Rappeneau's Oscar-winning adaptation of Rostand is so compelling that you almost forget the dialogues are in verse.

Dancer in the Dark (Lars Von Trier, 2000) Devastating and exhilarating in equal measure, Von Trier shreds our emotions into mince with this distinctly dreamlike collapse of one woman's American dream. It showcases an extraordinary tour de force debut by Björk as the innocent east European dreamer who dances through life as if in a Hollywood musical, until the magic decays alongside her failing eyesight.

Dangerous Liaisons (Stephen Frears, 1988) Christopher Hampton's adaptation of the De Laclous novel about seduction and revenge among the decadent French aristocracy was elegant, sexy and refined. Glenn Close and John Malkovich found perhaps the most satisfying roles of their careers as the jaded epicures who stave off ennui with a sexual wager.

Danton (Andrzej Wajda, 1983) Arguably the finest cinematic treatment of the French revolution, from a Polish director fresh from the Solidarity struggles in his homeland. Gerard Depardieu makes for a suitably imposing incarnation of the revolutionary ideologue, duelling impressively with Wojciech Pszoniak's Robespierre.

Dark Star (John Carpenter, 1974) Carpenter's genre-savvy dissertation project at UCLA somehow indirectly gave birth to the sci-fi boom. Here is that boom in a stoner/surfer/hey-mister-spaceman embryo: a brain-dead mission leader, a pilot who dreams of the Perfect Wave, and history's most mischievous and menacing Space Hopper. The anti-Silent Running.

Darling (John Schlesinger, 1965) Intelligently scripted by Frederic Raphael, this satire of swinging London may seem a little heavy-handed today, but there's no denying Julie Christie's star power. Gorgeous and charismatic, she breathes real life and sympathy into her shallow good-time girl.

Day for Night (François Truffaut, 1973) Often regarded as the best film about film-making ever made. Truffaut himself stars as the harassed, haggard director who is stuck making a brassy romance-drama called Meet Pamela. On location, he has to keep everybody happy: Jacqueline Bisset is the beautiful female lead; Jean-Pierre Léaud is the lovestruck actor with a crush.

The Day the Earth Stood Still (Robert Wise, 1951) Sci-fi message-movie that explicitly takes aim at cold war paranoia, as eight-foot alien robot Gort descends from the skies to warn humanity against the evil of nuclear weapons. Notwithstanding cheapo 50s special effects, it's held together by an overpowering earnestness that belied its lowly status.

Days of Being Wild (Wong Kar-Wai, 1991) A chain reaction of romance that reverberates around 60s Hong Kong is kicked off by a drunken ex-hooker's confession. Days of Being Wild saw the first bright sparks of lionised style-merchant Wong Kar-Wai: he manages to be both new-wave fresh and mesmerisingly nostalgic, a conflicted match for characters bearing tear-stained memories in the maelstrom of city life.

Days of Heaven (Terrence Malick, 1978) Shot entirely at the "magic hour", this lovers' tragedy is bathed in golden twilight and grounded by a world-weary child's narration. Even amid the flames and violence of its late scenes, the movie seems elusive and somehow unreal - like a dream confused with a memory, or a memory confused with a dream.

Dazed and Confused (Richard Linklater, 1993) Linklater's beloved coming-of-age comedy shows the director's singular gift for the free-associative sidwinding of conversation, which here is given shape and momentum on the last day of high school in 1976. The one-liners are priceless and the period soundtrack is expertly curated.

Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid (Carl Reiner, 1982) Mind-boggling technical achievements are at the heart of Carl Reiner's uproarious spoof of film noir, integrating footage from classics of the 40s to put Steve Martin's idiot detective in the frame with figures as diverse as Bogart, Cagney, Ray Milland, Bette Davis, Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas and Ava Gardner.

Dead of Night (Alberto Cavalcanti, Charles Crichton, Basil Dearden, Robert Hamer, 1945) With four directors handling five stories, this was one of the first and best of the compendium horror films. As a whole, it's a little uneven in tone, but the weaker stories only appear so next to the two classics on show here: a gothic chiller concerning a haunted mirror and Michael Redgrave's tour-de-force as a ventriloquist struggling to keep his dummy in line.

Dead Presidents (Albert Hughes, 1995) After their calling-card gangsta drama Menace II Society, the Hughes brothers turned up the heat with this retro heist movie that kicks off in the Bronx in 1968 but takes a turn for the hellish when its charismatic lead (Lorenzo Tate) finds himself in 'nam. From here, the Hugheses create a harsh but credible morality tale, as much about the US government's abandonment of returning black soldiers as the issue of crime and punishment.

Dead Ringers (David Cronenberg, 1988) Anticipating his more recent films, Cronenberg made a step away from vicious body horror, here crafting a thoroughly disturbing tale of twin gynaecologists (Jeremy Irons x2) who swap lives and lovers at will. Without overt show, Cronenberg builds a terrifying atmosphere of violence, the doctors' gruesome gynaecological instruments like a relief impression of a deviant and damaged psychology.

Dear Diary (Nanni Moretti, 1993) In which Nanni Moretti scoots around Rome on a Vespa, goes sightseeing on the islands off Sicily, has treatment for cancer (thankfully curable) and meets Jennifer Beals. The director-star's comic-sarcastic persona treads a fine line between clever and irritating, but in the end you will be charmed.

Death In Venice (Luchino Visconti, 1971) Ill winds blow through the sinking city in Visconti's high-art tale of disease and desire, with Dirk Bogarde as an ailing, dispirited composer taking a recuperative holiday in Venice and falling into a forbidden infatuation. A grandiloquent portrait of an artist, a man, and a whole city in crisis, it drips ardour and subtext from every burnished frame.

The Decline of Western Civilisation Part II: the Metal Years (Penelope Spheeris, 1981) Hilarious and often incredibly sad look at the hair metal scene in Los Angeles. Spheeris supplies the rope and the deluded musicians are all too eager to hang themselves. It introduced Ozzy's clownish persona, had WASP's Chris Holmes achieving Olympic levels of onscreen drunken-ness, and provided loser rockers Odin with their moment in the sun.

The Deer Hunter (Michael Cimino, 1978) Along with Apocalypse Now, this shattering film remains American cinema's most monumental attempt to take on the legacy of the Vietnam war. Robert De Niro, Christopher Walken, Meryl Streep and John Cazale are all mesmerising as the small-towners affected in different ways by the conflict.

Deliverance (John Boorman, 1972) The greenest (in politics and colour-palate) of Boorman's many green-hued movies (see Excalibur, The Emerald Forest), Deliverance sees nature, long violated by man, repaying the favour as four river-rafting Atlanta suburbanites find their manhood severely tested. The riverside rape of Ned Beatty is Boorman's Psycho shower sequence: horrifying and indelible.

Desperately Seeking Susan (Susan Seidelman, 1985) A bored New Jersey housewife decides to add spark to her life by inserting herself into an ongoing personal-ads drama in Susan Seidelman's delightful mistaken-identity comedy. Added perks are the glimpses of the funky, pre-gentrification East Village and Madonna in her mid-80s glory: teased hair and underwear-as-outerwear.

Detour (Edgar G Ulmer, 1945) All the Z-movie superlatives are called for here: the shortest, bleakest, most pessimistic, cheapest, fastest-filmed, most pared-down and despairing road trip to the end of the night. Ever. Tom Neal and the spectacularly malevolent Ann Savage leave, by hazard or design, a trail of corpses in their wake in Ulmer's expressionistic nightmare in monochromes.

Devdas (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002) The most expensive Bollywood movie ever made, Indian cinema's third version of Devdas took the original plot (Romeo and Juliet plus added family rivalry and alcoholism) and topped it with extra doses of silk, sequins and dance sequences. Though former Miss World Aishwarya Rai gets top billing, it's Madhuri Dixit's femme fatale who steals the show.

Devil in a Blue Dress (Carl Franklin, 1995) Franklin meticulously and sensitively recreates the lost African-American semi-Eden of 1940s south-central Los Angeles in this slow-burning neo-noir adaptation of Walter Mosley's first Easy Rawlins novel. It's a tale of murder, political corruption, betrayal and child molestation; a perfectly cast Denzel Washington is almost outshone by Don Cheadle's amiably psychopathic buddy Mouse.

The Devils (Ken Russell, 1971) The knee-jerk controversy that surrounded this may have long faded, but the film's power hasn't diminished at all. In an adaptation of Aldous Huxley, Russell captures the frenzied hysteria of a (literal) witch-hunt and the grotesquery of torture, amid some incredibly stylish Derek Jarman-designed sets. A timeless tale of injustice.

Diabolique (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1955) When a sadistic headmaster is drowned in a bathtub by his wife and former mistress, a phoney suicide plot is thwarted when his body mysteriously disappears. Clouzot's sombre portrait of murder in a provincial village remains a classic in Hitchcock-style suspense with a nifty shocker ending.

Diary of a Country Priest (Robert Bresson, 1951) Sombre portrait of an ailing young churchman who arrives in a village parish, where he's met only with indifference. Bresson's lesson on spiritual salvation is decidedly austere but powerful.

Dick Tracy (Warren Beatty, 1990) Beatty's "comeback" after the legendary flop of Ishtar. He looked set for another blunder by taking the lead role in an expensive movie about a comic book character few kids of the time would have known anything about - with box office kiss-of-death Madonna in tow. It actually works, using a six-colour palette and prosthetics-covered turns from Al Pacino and Dustin Hoffman. It's like a family version of Sin City.

Die Hard (John McTiernan, 1988) Released when action heroes were almost exclusively pumped-up supermen like Arnold and Sly, Bruce Willis provided a much-needed alternative. His John McLane was worn down and cynical rather than merely blankly sarcastic. He also took several severe beatings. Alan Rickman's consummate turn as the lead terrorist guaranteed RSC actors a fat paycheque as Hollywood villains for decades to come.

Dig! (Ondi Timoner, 2004) One scene, two bands: multimillion-selling Vodafone sales-reps the Dandy Warhols, and heroically combustible junkie-rock outfit the Brian Jonestown Massacre. Timoner traces the bifurcation of former musical allies with caustic wit in a gripping look at artistic politics - largely thanks to Jonestown frontman Anton Newcombe, a one-man reality show.

Diner (Barry Levinson, 1982) American Graffiti for grown-ups, or rather for men afraid of growing up. Five Baltimore friends contemplate impending adulthood - warily, drunkenly, bitterly - in the last week of 1958, as the least mature of them prepares to wed. Barry Levinson's first, most personal and still his funniest, wisest, most perfect movie.

Dirty Dancing (Emile Ardolino, 1987) Like Top Gun, Dirty Dancing has overcome the 1980s high-concept pigeonhole and become something greater than itself: a pop-culture fable. Rewind it for transcendental soundtracked sequences, genuine chemistry between Jennifer Grey's ingénue Baby and Patrick Swayze's Johnny, and the soft-focus background against which Swayze could usefully reinvent himself in Donnie Darko as proprietor of a "kiddie porn dungeon".

The Dirty Dozen (Robert Aldrich, 1967) This war movie offers a different take on heroism. Here it's not born from patriotism but from desperation, as a team of nothing-to-lose criminals are sent on a suicide mission behind enemy lines. They certainly are dirty too, throwing petrol and grenades into a roomful of Germans has to one of the coldest moments of any world war two flick, and possibly one of the most honest.

Dirty Harry (Don Siegel, 1971) Clint Eastwood gleefully tore out pages and pages of needless dialogue to create the pared-down anti-hero Harry Callahan. His history and motivation are barely alluded to, but his distaste for authority and red tape is written on every wrinkle of his craggy face. Faced with a villain based on the Zodiac killer, Harry refuses to have his hands tied by such petty concerns as the human rights of his suspect.

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (Frank Oz, 1988) Michael Caine and Steve Martin star as rival conmen working a variety of escalating scams on the French Riviera in a broad comedy that lets them both play to their strengths. Packed with well-timed physical gags and one-liners, this is a film that is as fun to watch as it must have been to make.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (Luis Buñuel, 1972) Buñuel was never an artist who needed big budgets - asked once what he'd do with \$5m, he said he'd still make a \$500,000 movie - but after 1960 he moved back to Europe from his Mexican exile, and for the first time in his career was able to work unencumbered, and often. Thus we were afforded one of the great late flowerings of cinema: the mature Don Luis in all his spiky, mordant glory, and The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie may prove his most enduring late masterpiece. It's a kind of reversal of the situation of The Exterminating Angel (1962). There, guests at a dinner party are terrified to leave, for reasons that are never clear; here, six people keep trying to dine together, but something always prevents them. Like all of his movies, from Un Chien Andalou onwards, Charm is wide open to the notion of dream-logic, and moves smoothly from character to character through successive nightmares, until it's difficult to tell where reality ends and crazed reverie begins. The key to Buñuel is that he is as interested in the logic as in the dream, and the movie proceeds in remarkably orderly and clear-sighted fashion into realms of fantasy that never seem forced or preposterous, no matter how many torturers, tyrants or terrorists show up. At this stage of his career, Buñuel commanded immense respect among performers, and he was able here to gather the cream of 1970s French cinema: Stephane Audran, Delphine Seyrig, Bulle Ogier, and best of all, Fernando Rey.

Distant (Uzak) (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2002) A beautiful and sad movie that attains a clarity and simplicity that lesser film-makers could strain every sinew trying to achieve without ever getting anywhere. Uzak is about loneliness and depression, and particularly the kind of depression suffered by men of a certain age, yet the film itself is, gloriously, the opposite of depressing. It is gentle and deeply humane, and even ventures into an arena of delicate visual comedy with a shy adroitness that Woody Allen might admire. Uzak means "distant": an idea whose metaphorical significance matches the more obvious sense of physical distance and estrangement. Mahmut (Muzaffer Özdemir) has made a success of his life as a photographer living in Istanbul; professionally bored and disillusioned, he is conducting a deeply unsatisfactory affair with a married woman. His life is upended by the deeply unwelcome arrival of Yusuf (Mehmet Emin Toprak), a dopey country cousin from the village that he has left behind. It isn't long before Yusuf is getting on his nerves in a very big way, but the realisation that Yusuf is the nearest thing Mahmut will now ever get to human companionship in the evening of his life is appallingly sad and funny. This odd-couple tragicomedy is so well acted by both men, so utterly involving, and so real. Uzak is about the distances that open up inexorably as we enter middle age: between the past and the present, between the present and an unattainable future, and between lonely men who shut themselves in their own carapaces of pride. Uzak is a film that I admire more than I can say - the work of a brilliant film-maker.

Distant Voices, Still Lives (Terence Davies, 1988) Davies' primal, poetic reimagining of his Liverpool childhood marked him out as one of British cinema's brightest talents. Two decades later, the funding has dried up and the backers have gone elsewhere. All of which only serves to make Distant Voices seem all the more tragic, and precious.

Diva (Jean-Jacques Bénéix, 1981) Stylishly convoluted 1980s cult thriller, set in Paris, about a stew of quirky characters including gangsters, cops, and an opera-loving mailman whose passion for an American diva leads to a strange twist of events. A new wave-inspired romp of noir-ish suspense, filmed in lush Technicolor.

Django (Sergio Corbucci, 1966) Banned in the UK for its extreme (for 1966) violence, Django remains the Corbucci film that most convincingly stakes his claim to being the silver medallist of spaghetti westerns. Franco Nero drags around a coffin full of machine-guns and wreaks his bloody vengeance on, well, everyone.

Do the Right Thing (Spike Lee, 1989) Racial tensions in a Brooklyn neighbourhood combust on a sweltering summer's day in a movie that gets audiences as hot and bothered as its characters. A powerful tragedy about a community caught in the throes of mutual suspicion, the film is diagnosis, reportage, and prophecy.

Dodgeball (Rawson Marshall Thurber, 2004) "He's ball-less, Cotton!" Dodgeball-less, that is. The funniest, stupidest sports comedy in years is chockablock with transcendently dirty jokes and one-liners, crowded with masterful moron-cameos from persons as diverse as wrench-hurling coach Rip Torn, idiot-savant commentator Jason Bateman and (wha...?) Lance Armstrong. More belly laughs than the average viewer can handle without throwing up.

Dog Day Afternoon (Sidney Lumet, 1975) "Attica! Attica!" The Al Pacino movie where you never forget how short he is. He's The Little Man robbing The Man's bank, with useless co-conspirators like John Cazale (think of the career he might have had), to finance his lover's sex-change. This is Lumet's dirty New York at its most absurd and poignant.

Dogtown & Z Boys (Stacy Peralta, 2001) Stylish and inspirational account of the latchkey kids from Santa Monica who stormed the backyard pools of the rich and famous, drained them, and invented skateboarding's "aerial" moves. Full of renegade charm and marvellously evocative archive footage, the film oozes that priceless subculture commodity: authenticity.

Dogville (Lars Von Trier, 2003) The wind of change that Dogme ushered in emerged as full-blown Brechtian alienation in Dogville, a schematic floorplan standing in for the Colorado town in which Nicole Kidman's harried Grace takes refuge. Von Trier prods and provokes with his sententious view of America, but this presiding archness, against the bare stage, produces super-invigorating drama.

La Dolce Vita (Federico Fellini, 1960) Fellini's grand statement on the emptiness at the heart of the Italian postwar economic miracle has become one of the era's defining films: ravishing to look at, filled with iconic faces and places, and brilliantly modulated for every minute of its three-hour running time. Rarely has spiritual desolation appeared so enticing.

Don't Look Back (DA Pennebaker, 1967) Legend-building portrait of a 23-year-old Bob Dylan hitting London for a pivotal UK tour. His bemused reactions to the fusty British press's painfully unhip questioning are priceless, and there's also Joan Baez, that iconic Subterranean Homesick Blues card-flipping clip, and plenty of signs that show, yeah, he really was pretty special.

Don't Look Now (Nicolas Roeg, 1973) A small figure in a red coat making its way along narrow passageways and foggy canals is just one of the memorable gothic motifs that make up this elliptical horror, adapted from a story by Daphne du Maurier. Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland star as the couple mourning the death of their daughter in a sinister, wintry Venice.

Donnie Brasco (Mike Newell, 1997) What Unforgiven is to the western, Donnie Brasco is to mafia flicks: carefully demythologising Mob rituals and prising open the sordid emotional realities of criminal life. Johnny Depp, as an FBI mole, adds another solid notch to his early-career gallery of misfits, and Pacino, the washed-up small-timer who tutors him, shows what he can do when he keeps the sluice gates closed.

Donnie Darko (Richard Kelly, 2001) Afforded the status of instant cult classic by the Generation Y audience it appealed to, Donnie Darko blends the small-town nostalgia of vintage Spielberg with 1980s teen-movie tropes to create a dark, sci-fi-inspired puzzle. A giant rabbit of the apocalypse, a resurrected Patrick Swayze and Drew Barrymore, and Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal in their first roles of note, all add to its staying power.

Double Indemnity (Billy Wilder, 1944) Beware the insurance man with wise cracks on his lips and murder in his heart. But pity the sucker if Barbara Stanwyck answers the door. From James M Cain's novella, this is the film that made Billy Wilder and gave a working definition for "hard-boiled". An everyday story of love, lust and friendship - that three-card trick.

Dougal and the Blue Cat (Serge Danot, 1970) Feature-length extension of the Magic Roundabout universe, which ups the psychedelic ante with a full-scale bad trip for Dougal - a room full of sugar. Why can't Florence, Zebedee, Dylan and the others see that newcomer Buxton is a malevolent addition to the garden? After he turns everything blue overnight, it's up to the grumpy furball to try and save the day. Eric Thompson's reworking of the French original may have been adopted as a stoner classic, but it's also a thoughtful, cautionary tale for kids.

Le Doulos (Jean-Pierre Melville, 1962) One of Melville's most painstaking homages to American gangster noir, with Jean-Paul Belmondo as the petty crook and copper's nark who is targeted by a fellow crook. Everything is hard-boiled: this is a film about hats and trenchcoats as much as loyalty and betrayal.

Down By Law (Jim Jarmusch, 1986) Jarmusch's absurdist style flourishes in this story of a mismatched trio of convicts who go on the lam from prison in Louisiana. When they seek shelter in a room that resembles the cell they have escaped, it becomes clear that Jarmusch's droll comedy is also a riff on No Exit.

Downfall (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004) Bruno Ganz makes a terrifyingly charismatic Hitler in this sombre account of the last days of the Third Reich, as seen through the eyes of his young secretary. Set almost entirely in Hitler's underground bunker, it details the ghoulish devotion of his Nazi court as the Soviet army closes in on Berlin. A thoughtful, humanistic study of absolute power.

Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (Stanley Kubrick, 1964) A delusional US general brings on nuclear apocalypse in Kubrick's "nightmare comedy". Gleefully satirical direction and a witty script lampoon cold-war posturing, while Peter Sellers is at his brilliant best as a Nazi scientist, the US president and stuffy group captain Lionel Mandrake. Doomsday has never been such a blast.

Doctor Zhivago (David Lean, 1965) David Lean is sometimes pigeon-holed as a purveyor of empty widescreen spectacle - certainly not a criticism that can be levelled at his adaptation of Boris Pasternak's great novel set during the Russian revolution. The emotion is in every frame: if all those scenes of Omar Sharif and Julie Christie making calf eyes at each other aren't enough, Maurice Jarre's music is there to tug at the heartstrings too.

Dracula (Terence Fisher, 1958) Silky-smooth Christopher Lee makes an urbane bloodsucker in this delicious gothic horror. Filleting Stoker's novel, it's full of nice touches, such as the blood-soaked credit sequence and the way the birds fall silent as Jonathan Harker approaches Castle Dracula. Peter Cushing is sterling as vampire hunter Van Helsing.

The Draughtsman's Contract (Peter Greenaway, 1982) Arguably Greenaway's most accessible film, this elegantly structured and playful murder-mystery/erotic comedy of manners unfolds at a Restoration-era country house. The paradox is that this is one of the most formally innovative period dramas in British film history, and yet as close as its director has come to making a mainstream movie.

The Dream Life of Angels (Erick Zonca, 1998) Powerful, naturalistic drama set in Lille about an unlikely friendship between two young down-and-out women. Flat-sitting for a hospitalised mother and daughter, they try to overcome life's difficulties. Zonca's first feature impressively weaves handheld camerawork with the raw emotions of delusions and dreams.

Dreams That Money Can Buy (Hans Richter, 1947) An extraordinary assemblage of avant-garde film-making involving some of the highest of high-art names: Max Ernst, Fernand Léger, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp. Richter's conceit is that dreams are being offered for sale; the resulting portmanteau may be unorthodox cinema, but it's utterly fascinating to watch.

The Dresser (Peter Yates, 1983) Albert Finney is a roaring, hard-drinking thesp of the old school and Tom Courtenay his long-suffering personal assistant. Yes, it is stagey - director Peter Yates doesn't have time for any Bullitt-like car chases here - but Finney is in such magnificent form it's churlish to complain about the difficulties of opening up Ronald Harwood's play for the big screen.

Drugstore Cowboy (Gus Van Sant, 1989) Van Sant's breakthrough film about an attractive quartet of junkie thieves takes a refreshingly matter-of-fact approach to its easily glamorised subject matter. The movie draws a link between chemical dependence and religious devotion, with lead addict Matt Dillon approaching his recovery as a form of penance.

Drunken Master (Yuen Woo-Ping, 1978) Acting drunk is notoriously difficult; doing kung fu and pretending to be hammered must be more difficult to the power of 10. One of six movies Jackie Chan made in 1978, this was the closest fit for his comedic powers. The martial arts are fantastically controlled sprawlings that owe as much to his Beijing Opera training as to po-faced Bruce Lee-esque mysticism.

Duck Soup (Leo McCarey, 1933) It takes real brains and talent to be this silly. Without the cloying romances that sullied many of the Marx brothers' later films, this is pure comedy from start to finish. There are enough sight gags and wordplay here for a dozen movies. Many films deliver an anti-war message, few coat it in jokes as funny as "Go, and never darken my towels again."

Dumb & Dumber (Peter and Bobby Farrelly, 1994) A relentlessly hilarious road movie that sealed Jim Carrey's fate as blockbuster clown and also heralded the arrival of the Farrelly brothers. The loose plot is reinforced by an avalanche of gags that make high art out of low-rent humour. Jeff Daniels proves himself no slouch in the comedic stakes - just who is who in the title?

East of Eden (Elia Kazan, 1955) James Dean's big screen debut. Based on the novel by John Steinbeck, it repositions the sibling rivalry of Cain and Abel into a post-first world war farming community in California. An angsty Dean struggles to earn the respect of withdrawn father Raymond Massey, who favours golden twin Richard Davalos. It may be hard to watch Dean without knowing you're watching a doomed idol, but it's a tribute to his very real talent that the performance outweighs the legend.

Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper, 1969) Drop-outs Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda get on their motorbikes and head in search of freedom in this seminal 1960s road movie. Between LA and New Orleans, the long-haired outlaws freak out small towns, drop acid and pick up alcoholic lawyer Jack Nicholson. Smartly scripted by Terry Southern, with a classic soundtrack.

Edward II (Derek Jarman, 1991) Derek Jarman's painterly queer-cinema stylings often overshadowed his investment in storytelling and, more importantly, character, but Edward II is his most potent amalgam of all three. Based on Marlowe's 16th-century play about the UK's only acknowledged gay monarch, it's an imaginative, anachronism-laden assault on homophobia, buoyed by some of his more outré performances and a pertinent contemporary edge.

Edward Scissorhands (Tim Burton, 1990) Burton's near-perfect fable somehow manages to yoke gruesome European fairy-tales with picket-fence America, and injects a dose of Hammer horror for good measure. Johnny Depp and Winona Ryder have true screen chemistry, but it's Burton's heady cocktail of design, image and harmless eccentricity that steals the show.

Eight and a Half (8 1/2) (Federico Fellini, 1963) A semi-autobiographical satire about Marcello Mastroianni's harried Italian filmmaker, lost in a magnificently poetic, surreal narrative jumble; wild dreams and a circus-like setting joyfully fuse together. Still wonderful to look at.

Eight Men Out (John Sayles, 1988) An incredible cast of character players brings to life the "Black Sox" baseball scandal of 1919, when gangster Arnold Rothstein bribed the Chicago White Sox to throw the World Series. Meticulously put together on a nothing budget, the movie looks surprisingly sumptuous for Sayles, who never stints on the drama, and shoots good baseball too.

8 Mile (Curtis Hanson, 2002) Capitalising on Eminem's phenomenal record sales, this loosely biographical, hip-hop aficionado's wet dream charts the rise of poor white trailer-trash B Rabbit, set against the backdrop of rundown, racially-tense Detroit at the birth of its hip-hop explosion. The incendiary lyrical battle scenes are elevated by Eminem's silver-tongued talent.

Election (Alexander Payne, 1999) Payne relocates What Makes Sammy Run? to the political battleground of the American high school, where a sad-sack teacher gets a bit too intimately involved in the face-off between a likeable slacker and a type-A go-getter, played to flinty, ruthless perfection by Reese Witherspoon.

Elephant (Gus Van Sant, 2003) Van Sant's "interpretation" of the Columbine high-school massacre defies a conventional reading of the horrible event at its core. There's no traditional central character to identify with; through a series of long tracking shots, kids saunter about on a languid vibe, being jocks, cheerleaders, or like, whatever - en route to a grisly conclusion.

The Elephant Man (David Lynch, 1980) With hindsight we can all see what a good fit Lynch was with this material, but back then, with only Eraserhead under his belt, producer Mel Brooks showed real vision in choosing his director. John Hurt deftly pushes the sweet soul of the deformed John Merrick through pounds of incredible prosthetics. Lynch's imagination has not reached this level of emotional connection since.

Elizabeth (Shekhar Kapur, 1998) "I am married... to England!" Cate Blanchett's closing-curtain announcement of the aloof monarch we all know from school textbooks is a thrilling moment, and Kapur's period thriller a sterling account of how she got there. A character study powered by passion and realpolitik, with Blanchett's supple transformation from princess to Gloriana, and Geoffrey Rush just as good as courtly fixer Sir Francis Walsingham.

Elmer Gantry (Richard Brooks, 1960) Sinclair Lewis's dissection of an evangelist was published in 1927. More than 30 years later, director Richard Brooks and star Burt Lancaster fell upon Gantry and showed a new being - a media celebrity, patently fake yet deeply irresistible, and a model for immoral and moral leadership.

Empire of the Sun (Steven Spielberg, 1987) One of Spielberg's early attempts to mark himself out as a mature director. With such strong source material - an autobiographical novel by JG Ballard adapted by Tom Stoppard - he can get his teeth into the complex and often mercenary morals of the characters; in truth, he's more at home with the rousing set-pieces.

End of the Century (Jim Fields, Michael Gramaglia, 2003) While it's no major surprise that musicians are people too, the music industry spends billions helping fans ignore this simple fact. Onstage and in uniform on their almost never-ending tour, the Ramones gave away nothing of their private selves. They're revealed to be as flawed as the rest of us in this excellent and candid documentary.

The Endless Summer (Bruce Brown, 1966) Brown bottles the original innocent impulse of the 50s surfing explosion, grabbing his camera and following two young board-riders as they hunt for tasty waves in uncharted territory. But his gee-whizz narration now has a sharp nostalgic bite: harking back to the days before commercialisation took over the sport, and mass tourism marred untouched horizons.

L'Enfant (The Child) (Jean Pierre & Luc Dardenne, 2005) A superb Belgian film about a young man below society's moral radar who lives only to serve his immediate needs. It is far more than a study of doomed youth, though it certainly is tragic. The Cannes-winning Dardennes transcend the finger-wagging of social problem movies to confront humanist questions that are as simple as they are profound.

The English Patient (Anthony Minghella, 1996) A rich adaptation job from Michael Ondaatje's novel by writer-director Minghella that preserves most of the complex plot and a good measure of the poetry. The subjective puzzle of the narrative feels modern, but the romance between Ralph Fiennes' mysterious count and Kristin Scott Thomas' sensual married woman has that killer old-fashioned swoon factor.

The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser (Werner Herzog, 1974) Derived from the true story of a man who appeared in a Nuremberg market square in 1828 with no history or social abilities. It transpires he had been raised in complete isolation, and Herzog uses the character both to provide a blank canvas and a mirror to examine if society has really given us anything of real worth.

Enter the Dragon (Robert Clouse, 1973) Despite the atrocious acting, paper-thin plot and rancid production values, this is the alpha and omega of Bruce Lee. But also, more importantly, it was the first movie to transfuse the ecstatically over-the-top sensibility of Hong Kong action film-making into the American mainstream. The fight sequences still feel state-of-the-art.

Eraserhead (David Lynch, 1977) A timid man is bewildered by family pressures and strange visions on the industrial fringes of an unnamed city in Lynch's avant-garde debut. It conjures an eerie, hermetic underworld, riddled with dirty secrets and bizarre phenomena - a stage set for the most uncanny of nightmares.

ET: the Extra-Terrestrial (Steven Spielberg, 1982) Spielberg's story of the little boy from a broken home who befriends an extra-terrestrial left behind on Earth is a movie of passionate idealism and unapologetic faith in the power of love. In this strange and beautiful love story lies the genesis of the Generation-X phenomenon: a whole raft of people in the west growing up in a secular, affectless society, yearning to feel reverence and rapture, and looking for love in the ruins of faith. We all know the story: ET is orphaned by the departure of his spaceship, but a happy chance leads him to young Elliot (Henry Thomas) who takes him in, feeds him, experiences ET's divine gift for healing, and finally in an ecstatic mind-melding process, experiences a strange and divine state of grace. They are united in their loneliness and vulnerability, and you simply don't have a pulse if you don't feel your spine tingling and scalp prickling at Elliot's speech over ET's lifeless body: "I don't know how to feel; I can't feel anything any more. I love you, ET." This is a brilliant film about the alienated and powerless experience of being a child, yet it is a way of imagining how a child would feel if it had an adult's freedom and responsibility. It is a visionary romance.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Michel Gondry, 2004) Charlie "Being John Malkovich" Kaufman proved he was no one-trick pony with this layered, complex romance. Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet are especially good as the lovers who are trying to forget; Gondry is whip-smart in the director's chair.

The Evil Dead (Sam Raimi, 1981) Raimi mixed DC Comics horror, nerve-jangling suspense, some pioneering no-budget Steadicam and a million sick belly-laughs into one of the greatest homemade Hollywood calling cards ever dreamed up.

The Exorcist (William Friedkin, 1973) The special effects may have dated, but this classic story of a little girl possessed by the devil remains intensely scary. When her daughter begins to act up, Ellen Burstyn calls in the services of Jesuit Max Von Sydow and the stage is set for a climactic confrontation between good and evil.

Eyes Without a Face (Georges Franju, 1960) One of those films that you'd swear was made at least 20 years later than it actually was. A plastic surgeon kills young girls to provide temporary face grafts for his disfigured daughter. Coldly clinical and, in one memorable scene, explicitly gory. So much nastier than other early 60's horror films.

The Fabulous Baker Boys (Steve Kloves, 1989) The casual suavity of the Bridges brothers was caught, like lightning in a bottle, in this lounge-lizard romance about a cocktail-bar duo whose act and personal lives are dragged apart when a gorgeous wannabe chanteuse (Michelle Pfeiffer) joins the act. The subsequent ménage a trois isn't new, but the scintillating chemistry between the players is dazzling to watch and deceptively rich in detail.

A Face in the Crowd (Elia Kazan, 1957) A before-its-time satire said to prophesise the power of the media, shock-jock megalomaniacs, even the Reagan presidency. Andy Griffith made his debut, in a role very different from the folksy warmth with which he would be later associated - Larry Rhodes, an Arkansas tramp with the gift of the gab who is included one day in a radio programme. He rises to become one of the country's biggest stars, with a chillingly faked sort of down-home bonhomie, masking egotism and a growing taste for power.

Face/Off (John Woo, 1997) Fasten your seatbelt for exhilaratingly over-the-top action - Nic Cage and John Travolta are the terrorist and FBI man who swap faces in a surgically enhanced game of cat and mouse. No one does operatic fight sequences quite like Woo, and this film has arguably his greatest: a slo-mo shoot-out set to Over the Rainbow.

The Faculty (Robert Rodriguez, 1998) Breezy and exciting homage to 1950s paranoid sci-fi augmented by Scream writer Kevin Williamson's clever-clever postmodernisms - Invasion of the Body Snatchers meets The Breakfast Club. And it's one of the few teen movies with an oddly positive drug message.

Fahrenheit 9/11 (Michael Moore, 2004) However universally derided the Iraq war is now, Michael Moore's sensational docu-polemic against it was out on a limb at the time. With a raucous mixture of comedy, scorn, anger and devastatingly chosen news clips, Moore landed a sledgehammer punch on President Bush and his various shabby consiglieri.

The Fallen Idol (Carol Reed, 1948) Long-lost Greene-Reed collaboration, which surfaced after decades in limbo, this is also one of the great tales told from a child's perspective - fit to stand alongside The Go-Between and What Maisie Knew in its account of a child destroyed by the sexual misdemeanors of adults. After The Heiress, Ralph Richardson's finest hour on screen.

Fanny and Alexander (Ingmar Bergman, 1982) Perhaps the cinematic climax to Bergman entire career, this wonderfully rich three-hour autobiographical drama revisits episodes from his childhood, focusing on the fictional Ekdahl family, particularly 10-year-old Alexander and his sister, Fanny. When their widowed mother remarries a tyrannical bishop, misery ensues. Gorgeously shot by Sven Nykvist, this intimate tale transcends the director's habitual dark torment to suggest that life's pleasures are for the taking.

Far from Heaven (Todd Haynes, 2002) Todd Haynes' lush simulacrum of Douglas Sirk's 1950s melodramas is wild with colour and suffused with yearning. Julianne Moore is stunning as the lavishly costumed housewife who loses her husband to a man, and scandalises her community through her friendship with her black gardener.

Farewell My Concubine (Chen Kaige, 1993) Following the fortunes of two Beijing Opera performers through half-a-century of turbulent Chinese history, this is epic film-making of the highest order. Few directors would contemplate such an ambitious undertaking; the fact that Chen pulled it off so successfully is something of a miracle.

Fargo (Joel Coen, 1996) The wit, the style and the drolly eccentric performances complement a strong sense of menace and disquiet in this comedy-thriller classic from the Coens. Frances McDormand earns her place in the hall of fame as the pregnant police officer whose dogged detective work in the freezing Minnesota snow foils a bungled mock-kidnapping plot hatched by the sinister yet incompetent William H Macy.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (Amy Heckerling, 1982) Everybody here became a star, down to minor player Forest Whitaker, and it's Cameron Crowe's finest hour. Somewhere between Jeff Spicoli ("Duuuuuude!") and Judge Reinhold ("I'm gonna kick 100% of yer ass!") lies suburban teenage Nirvana. Until Mr Hand shows up... .

Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill! (Russ Meyer, 1965) Domineering women, fast cars, rape, murder, lesbians and a sleazy soundtrack - the world had seen little to compare to this kinky crime classic at the time, and it's become a touchstone for 60s retro-heads. It's more complex and less trashy than it sounds (there's a proper story) and after all these years it still pulsates with energy.

La Femme Nikita (Luc Besson, 1990) The epitome of French 90s cool. Low-rent junkie thief Anne Parillaud is offered two choices after being arrested: life behind bars or glamorous assassin. Luckily for us, she opts for the latter. After a brutal three-year training programme, she's released back into the normal world, a sleeper femme fatale waiting to be activated by handler Jean Reno.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off (John Hughes, 1986) Matthew Broderick is the slick teen top-cat who plays hooky in spectacular fashion, despite the efforts of teacher nemesis Jeffrey Jones. More of a straight fantasy than any other of Hughes's lauded works, FBDO is still pulled off with the frictionless brio of the best screwball comedies: it never patronises its characters (unless they are adults), and has a peerless straight-guy in Jones, plus engaging performances from the skiving trio of Broderick, Mia Sara and Alan Ruck.

Field of Dreams (Phil Alden Robinson, 1989) A spiritually uplifting movie about a ghostly baseball team starring Kevin Costner might sound like a bad joke, but this enduringly heart-warming film about a simple Iowa farmer who builds a baseball diamond in his yard after a voice tells him, "If you build it, they will come", is a quietly provocative, stunningly acted tale of regret, redemption and forgiveness.

The Fifth Element (Luc Besson, 1996) A shamelessly overblown futuristic thriller, with Bruce Willis's tough-guy cab driver doing his damndest to save the planet and keep evil at bay. Besson's crossover hit is a lavish treat of dazzling colours, special effects and campy performances.

Fight Club (David Fincher, 1999) Edward Norton and Brad Pitt found some fizzing alpha-male chemistry in this stomach-turning satire, taken from the cult novel by Chuck Palahniuk. Norton is the sleepless neurotic who finds unwholesome fascination in hanging out at 12-step addiction groups; through this shadowy world, he hooks up with the charismatic and witty Pitt, who introduces him to an underground sect for bare-knuckle fights. Therapy for the politically incorrect real man.

Fires Were Started (Humphrey Jennings, 1943) Humphrey Jennings' best-known world war two documentary reconstructs one night in the lives of a dockside fire company in the East End, staffed by ordinary Britons of all classes - a Bevan-esque ideal - as they prepare for another night of heavy bombing raids. Filled with Jennings' peculiarly beautiful brand of docu-poetics.

A Fish Called Wanda (Charles Crichton, 1988) Ealing veteran Crichton helmed this sly transatlantic heist flick, splicing the remnants of the Monty Python team with newcomers from Hollywood: Jamie Lee Curtis and Kevin Kline as scheming "siblings". The ensemble cast spar gamely, and a blithe meanspiritedness - witness the tormenting of pet-loving hitman Michael Palin - is the order of the day.

Fists in the Pocket (Marco Bellocchio, 1965) Lou Castel plays a teenage epileptic, simmering like a shop-soiled Brando, in this turbulent tour of a dysfunctional Italian family. While writer-director Marco Bellocchio is still making acclaimed films today, he has never quite equalled the intensity of his electrifying debut feature.

Fitzcarraldo (Werner Herzog, 1982) Herzog tried to cast Jack Nicholson, Mick Jagger and Jason Robards in the role of the impresario who tries to build an opera house in the Peruvian jungle, but who else but Klaus Kinski could have been the avatar of human absurdity the director wanted - or who, indeed, could have kept pace with Herzog's own derangement? Dragging a steamboat over a mountain says it all: the crew really did that.

Five Easy Pieces (Bob Rafelson, 1970) Jack Nicholson plays Bobby, a randy oil-rig worker who, as we eventually discover, is also a trained pianist in flight from his affluent background. There were many disaffected road movies that emerged from America during the Vietnam-war era, but this was one of the most incisive and influential.

Flesh (Paul Morrissey, 1968) The hustlers, society darlings and drag queens of Andy Warhol's Factory, though cast in fictional scenarios, scream, preen, mumble and bumble through their everyday lives on screen. This, along with companion movies *Trash* (1970) and *Heat* (1972), are testament to the allure and vacuity of Pop Art, both as product and critique of the most romanticised era of cultural experimentation.

Flirting With Disaster (David O Russell, 1996) Comic masterpiece about a furiously uptight manchild (Ben Stiller) travelling cross-country with his wife (Patricia Arquette) and his breathtakingly useless social worker (Tia Leoni) in search of his real parents, who turn out to be acid-dealing, pot-growing 60s casualties. His in-laws, predictably and hysterically, are very much not.

The Fly (David Cronenberg, 1986) One of the few films that gives remakes a good name. It's a love triangle between a man, a woman and a genetic-level infestation of rampant, mutating fly DNA. Then real-life couple Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis show real chemistry - by no means a given - adding real pathos to Cronenberg's body-horror.

Force of Evil (Abraham Polonsky, 1948) In this classic noir, lawyer John Garfield puts himself through the wringer to protect his numbers-racketeering brother from bankruptcy when his criminal clients embark on a plan to ruin their opposition. Polonsky was an active and committed Marxist and even though the film attacks a rather dubious form of capitalism, it was enough to get him blacklisted.

The Fortune Cookie (Billy Wilder, 1966) First and best example of the Jack Lemmon-Walter Matthau double act: the former is a cameraman knocked over while covering a sports event, the latter an ambulance-chasing lawyer who persuades him to ham up his injuries for the compensation money. Wilder and co-scripter IAL Diamond are at their cynical funniest; this is a real treat.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rex Ingram, 1921) Blood-heat silent melodrama that made Rudolph Valentino a worldwide star. He's the incarnation of dark-eyed South American sensuality as the scion of Argentinian ranch-owners who decamps to debauchery in France but gets killed in the war. Before that, though, he tangoed into the hearts of women everywhere.

The Four Hundred Blows (François Truffaut, 1959) A moving portrait of an unloved and misunderstood adolescent who turns to petty crime, this marks the first of Truffaut's semi-autobiographic saga of Antoine Doinel, sensitively played by the director's alter-ego protege Jean-Pierre Léaud. A landmark in black-and-white new wave realism for its understated emotion and innovative technique.

Frankenstein (James Whale, 1931) Although it strays somewhat from Mary Shelley's novel, Whale's *Frankenstein* provided one of cinema's most iconic visions in the form of Boris Karloff's flat-topped monster. His sensitive, mute performance still seems years ahead of the rather stagey showboating of the other actors. Viewed today, you can still catch glimpses of how groundbreaking this was on release.

Freaks (Tod Browning, 1932) "One of us! One of us!" Browning's oft-banned masterpiece tells of a circus girl who marries a dwarf for his money, only to suffer the terrifying vengeance of his pals from the freak tent. Still a queasy experience today.

The French Connection (William Friedkin, 1971) Archetypal tough-guy policier that cemented Friedkin's reputation in the early 70s New Hollywood, as well as catapulting Gene Hackman to the major league after years of toiling in relative obscurity. His Popeye Doyle was perfect for the times: violent, ruthless, amoral, and too desperate to care.

The Front (Martin Ritt, 1976) Ritt's drama is a grim reminder of how McCarthyism destroyed actors' and writers' careers. Ritt himself, along with screenwriter Walter Bernstein and several of their cast, had been blacklisted in the 1950s because of their perceived communist sympathies. Their anger at the injustice of it is palpable. There are desperately sad moments - Zero Mostel begging for work - but some dark comedy too, courtesy of Woody Allen as the neurotic New Yorker acting as a "front" for a blacklisted writer friend.

The Fugitive (Andrew Davis, 1993) One of the strongest of the 1990s' round of TV remakes, *The Fugitive* is Harrison Ford's last great browbeaten star turn before he began the long slide into irrelevance. US Marshal Tommy Lee Jones makes a superbly antagonistic opponent, cranking up the tension in an unpretentious, pile-driving blockbuster.

Funny Games (Michael Haneke, 1997) Like all the best horrors, this one begins happily, with a nice family driving through the countryside. What's different is the way Haneke handles what follows. As a pair of white-gloved psychopaths get to work, he cleverly challenges our own appetite for screen sadism, keeping the suspense at screaming point all the while.

Gallivant (Andrew Kotting, 1997) A travelogue like no other. Andrew Kotting's freeform road trip around the British coast is a tribute to the unsung eccentrics who make up our national identity and to the bonds of family. The two women in Kotting's life - his octogenarian gran and his young daughter Eden, who has Joubert syndrome - are his companions on this salty mini-epic journey in a movie that is as innovative and experimental as it is earthy.

The Garden of the Finzi-Continis (Vittorio De Sica, 1970) A wonderfully quiet, elegiac late film from the Bicycle Thieves director, dwelling on an Italian Jewish family who live serenely behind their garden walls as Mussolini's fascism starts to bite in the world outside. A dreamlike metaphor for the internal places that cannot be despoiled by simple brutality.

The General (Clyde Bruckman, Buster Keaton, 1927) Watch *The General* with an audience and you realise just what a masterpiece this is. It's the great communal rollercoaster of silent-screen cinema, greased with quicksilver, no-nets physical comedy that constantly takes the breath away. Buster Keaton is the soulful centre of a slapstick storm.

Get Carter (Mike Hodges, 1971) The granddaddy of the Brit-grit crime genre is every bit as sordid and compelling as when it first came out. Michael Caine is the magnificently deadpan gangster who journeys to Newcastle to investigate the mysterious death of his brother. He delivers some great lines, including (all together now): "You're a big man, but you're in bad shape. With me, it's a full-time job. Now behave yourself!"

Ghost (Jerry Zucker, 1990) Lovers Sam (Patrick Swayze) and Molly (Demi Moore) are sundered when the former is killed by a mugger, but Sam returns from beyond the grave to save his girl from a similar fate. It's supernaturally silly and sentimental, but in spite of that, moving, with a transcendent performance from Whoopi Goldberg as a wacky medium.

Ghost Dog: Way of the Samurai (Jim Jarmusch, 1999) Jarmusch's reputation as the one-off genius of US indie cinema was mightily reinforced by this intriguing mood piece with a wonderfully authoritative performance by Forest Whitaker - the best he was to get until Idi Amin came along. He is Ghost Dog, a mercenary assassin who lives according to the code of the Japanese samurai and conducts his life in a spirit of ascetic self-denial and Zen acceptance of his own inevitable violent death.

Ghost in the Shell (Mamoru Oshii, 1995) A Japanese anime whose combination of thrilling high-tech action and creditable philosophical questioning lifts it far above the genre's customary nerdy concerns. Like Blade Runner, it anticipates the convergence of artificial intelligence and the human soul in the form of a neo-noir detective story. Its intricately imagined future dictated the shape of sci-fi to come.

Ghost World (Terry Zwigoff, 2001) Daniel Clowes' comic series about teen-girl anomie enters the third dimension in the capable hands of director Terry Zwigoff. Star Thora Birch reveals layers of vulnerability and alienation behind her character's ironic façade, and Steve Buscemi is also outstanding as a sad-sack record collector and Birch's unlikely paramour.

Ghostbusters (Ivan Reitman, 1984) The action-comedy has been the death of many a Hollywood hack director, but Ivan Reitman averted it with a wonderfully daft premise: supernatural janitors save New York from an ancient Sumerian deity. Cue whip-crack special effects, a gothic frisson, iconic marketing and one very cheesy theme song. Bill Murray on sinful deadpan form can't have hindered, either.

Giant (George Stevens, 1956) Endemic racism and the metamorphosis of Texas from ranch land to oil well are operatically told, with Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor as rich farmers, and James Dean the poor handyman turned oil magnate who infects their lives. Justifies the epic length with Dean's mesmerising screen presence alone.

Gigi (Vincente Minnelli, 1958) "Thank heavens for leetle girls," sings twinkly Maurice Chevalier: not sure he'd get away with that today, but it won him a special Oscar, one of nine garnered by this effervescent musical. Adapted from Colette's story, it has Leslie Caron's coquettish Gigi training to become a courtesan in 1890s Paris, to the tune of Lerner and Loewe's sweet songs.

Gilda (Charles Vidor, 1946) Rita Hayworth, at the absolute pinnacle of her beauty and torpid, moth-to-a-flame seductiveness, is the souped-up, purring V8 engine of this majestically batty and obsessive, Argentina-based casino thriller, in which soulful fugitive Glenn Ford and George "Scarface" Macready (of Paths of Glory fame) tussle ruthlessly and fruitlessly for her favours.

Gimme Shelter (Albert and David Maysles, 1970) The Rolling Stones engaged verite forefathers the Maysles brothers to film their Altamont concert, little realising that the hideous consequences of the night would be caught forever by the unflinching pair. However, this groundbreaking rock doc isn't simply a record of chaos, showing the Stones in hypnotic, mellow studio moments as well as performing in their prime at an electrifying pre-gig university-show warm up.

Ginger Snaps (John Fawcett, 2000) Neat title, that - the Ginger in question is an eye-rolling teenager who falls victim to both the onset of menses and a mysterious hairy beast, with spectacular consequences. This smart Canadian horror film uses the werewolf legend to express the anxiety, alienation, and raging hormones of adolescence.

Gladiator (Ridley Scott, 2000) Russell Crowe is a suitably meaty presence in this sword-and-sandals spectacular. The epic blood-and-guts battle scenes are breathtaking and the legendary Oliver Reed makes his final performance as the gladiatorial showman. Terrifically entertaining.

Glengarry Glen Ross (James Foley, 1992) A pummelling translation of the David Mamet play, Glengarry Glen Ross sets four Chicago real-estate salesmen at each other's throats in a microcosm of American capitalism. Mamet's muscular argot is handed around the cast like testosterone supplements, and it's fascinating to see the macho ensemble - Pacino, Lemmon, Arkin, and Ed Harris - fight their corners with it.

Gloria (John Cassavetes, 1980) Against her wishes, a hard-boiled dame with former mafia connections becomes caretaker of an endangered little boy after his parents are murdered by the mob. The tidy premise - tough broad paired with adorable orphan - is given welcome rough edges by John Cassavetes' direction and Gena Rowlands' full-blooded performance.

The Go-Between (Joseph Losey, 1970) Before Merchant Ivory turned them into a formula, this is the way Edwardian period movies used to look: mighty essays on class and repression as well as febrile evocations of a rural English landscape that had, even then, almost totally vanished. LP Hartley's 1953 novel - with its imperishable opening lines, "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there" - accentuates the gulf between the pre-first world war summer, and a Britain that was just about to enter the socio-sexual revolution of the second half of the 20th century. His narrative focuses on the traumas suffered by a young boy whose guilt at spilling details of a cross-class love affair results in a catatonic condition. By the time American exile Joseph Losey made the film, the 1960s had battered away most of the Edwardians' taboos, and the crisis of ideas had abated. But there was plenty of room to create the film as a counterpoint to that poetic opening; the presence of two very starchy British actors - Julie Christie and Alan Bates - at the height of their powers stresses a continuity between turn-of-the-century Norfolk and the modern day. The Go-Between was Losey's third collaboration with Harold Pinter (after The Servant and Accident), and in many ways the most orthodox. Nevertheless, Pinter did insert flash-forwards and the like to create a fractured sense of chronology that reflected the novel's later-life perspective. Losey, ever the observant exile, luxuriates in the period detail, but never allows the surfaces to become too glossy. He knew, first and foremost, that this was a story about people, and a great one at that.

The Godfather (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) The potency of the organised-crime genre was massively re-established by this family epic: a locus classicus for 1970s American cinema. It established wiseguys as the true American anti-heroes and adventurers for our time, more seductively glamorous than cowboys or spacemen; for decades afterwards the movie was a how-to behaviour manual for real-life criminals.

Going Places (Les Valseuses) (Bertrand Blier, 1974) Gérard Dépardieu and Patrick Dewaere play two criminals and drifters who spend their time robbing, harassing, bothering women and somehow getting away with it - just. Jeanne Moreau is the sensuous

older woman who briefly hooks up with them. Blier's view of devil-may-care male sexual adventurism is a little self-congratulatory and leaves a strange taste in the mouth now, but it's a movie with gusto.

Goldfinger (Guy Hamilton, 1964) Somewhere in between the comparative realism of the first two Bond films and self-parodic Roger Moore frippery, Goldfinger is high operatic 007, with Sean Connery on majestic form. Hamilton takes the key obsessions - sex, power, danger, money - and smelts them down into iconic images: Shirley Eaton embalmed in gold; the laser inching towards the coveted crotch...

The Golem (Carl Boese, Paul Wegener, 1920) A rabbi in 16th-century Prague conjures up a living clay man to save his community from expulsion by the emperor - for, ironically, charges of witchcraft. Once activated, the powerful creature eventually runs amok amidst the expressionistic sets, in many scenes that later found echoes in Frankenstein.

Gone With the Wind (Victor Fleming, 1939) It's the American civil war, with Vivien Leigh stepping forward to be Scarlett as they burned Atlanta, and Clark Gable not giving a damn. David O Selznick made it, exhausting his writers and directors. It's the film of films, the eternal money-spinner. Is it worth it? I'll think about that tomorrow.

Good Night, and Good Luck (George Clooney, 2005) George Clooney's gorgeously photographed, black-and-white chamber drama looks at the waning years of the McCarthy era in America - and its disastrous toll - from the vantage point of the television news studio. Star David Strathairn doesn't merely impersonate legendary newsman Edward R Murrow so much as he channels his solemn gravitas.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (Sergio Leone, 1966) The most successful of Leone's Dollars trilogy, and the best, with its trio of civil war antiheroes in search of a fortune in lost gold. Stylish to the max, witty at every turn and ceaselessly inventive on the visual front - plus the biggest explosion in movie history.

Goodfellas (Martin Scorsese, 1990) Narrated by coked-up "wiseguy" Ray Liotta, Scorsese's mafia masterpiece plunges us into a dizzying underworld - vicious gangsters, their wives and girlfriends, henchmen and hangers-on. Propelled by adrenalin-pumped paranoia and punctuated by bloody violence, the path it plots from glamour to horror is pure genius.

Gosford Park (Robert Altman, 2001) A return to form after a tepid 1990s with a classic Altmanesque spin on the country-house whodunnit. Murder most inconsequential and Stephen Fry's bungling detective stalk the mansion, but the real pleasure is the immersive, near-documentary eavesdropping through a vast cast of aristos and servants.

The Gospel According to St Matthew (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964) Fundamentalists take note: it took a homosexual Marxist to bring us the finest biblical epic ever made. Pasolini reconfigures the messiah as a political animal; he dramatises his story with amateur actors and garnishes it with a soundtrack that runs the gamut from Bach to Billie Holiday. It is a devastating piece of work.

The Graduate (Mike Nichols, 1968) The older-woman-younger-man scenario has never been the same since Nichols launched Dustin Hoffman's career as Benjamin, the confused college boy whose love affair with Mrs Robinson (Anne Bancroft) goes sour when he falls for her daughter. A counter-culture classic, and its haunting Simon and Garfunkel soundtrack is as fresh as it was four decades ago.

The Grand Illusion (Jean Renoir, 1937) Renoir's landmark first world war drama revolves around two French officers - an aristocrat and a working-class mechanic - in a POW camp where they befriend a Jewish banker. Prussian commander Erich von Stroheim treats his prisoners with civility, but they dig an escape tunnel. An unconventionally filmed gem about social class, ethnicity, and war's futility.

Le Grand Voyage (Ismael Ferroukhi, 2004) A modern classic road movie, and a lovely, gentle story of father-son bonding. Mohamed Majd is an elderly Moroccan exile in France who chivvies his irreligious younger son (Nicolas Cazalé) into driving him 3,000 miles on a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Ferroukhi was the first feature film-maker to be allowed to shoot in Mecca, and the crowd scenes there are really spectacular. A lovely, bittersweet reconciliation between the two men crowns the story.

La Grande Bouffe (Marco Ferreri, 1973) Super Size Me's Morgan Spurlock has nothing on this splenetic 1973 last supper, in which Marcello Mastroianni and three grumpy mates fornicate, philosophise, then eat themselves to death. A decadent orgy that impressed Cannes but repulsed just about everyone else, it's scatological, unrepentantly on a road to nowhere, and defiantly one of a kind.

Grapes of Wrath (John Ford, 1940) Steinbeck's novel about the Dust Bowl saw the country in despair. The Fox film, made by John Ford but driven by Darryl Zanuck, has the common man triumphing. There's some awkwardness in that, but this is a riveting dramatisation of the Depression with Henry Fonda as Tom Joad - an Abe Lincoln in dusty jeans.

Grave of the Fireflies (Isao Takahata, 1988) Most animated films are little more than weak musicals tied together with gormless pop-culture references. This Japanese offering - from the peerless Studio Ghibli - offers a reminder that animation is merely a tool for telling a story, and not a genre. A heartbreaking tale of a young brother and sister struggling for survival in a firebombed Tokyo. The "acting" and "camerawork" are superb.

Grease (Randal Kleiser, 1978) Infectious musical capitalising on the 1970s' nostalgia for the 1950s, with lots of toe-tapping numbers, charismatic performances from Travolta and Newton-John in the leads, and an unabashed desire to entertain. In that it succeeds wonderfully.

The Great Dictator (Charlie Chaplin, 1940) The fight of the century - Chaplin v Hitler. Who has the funniest moustache and the most frightening speeches? So the two universal celebrities of the age met in one film. The sermon part is lame, but the comic ballet is a crushing defeat for fascism. You can see Charlie going mad before your eyes.

Great Expectations (David Lean, 1946) The finest Dickens adaptation not starring the Muppets, Great Expectations sees Lean on maestro form in his pre-epic phase, condensing the original novel into a graceful, shadowy British classic. Guy Green's Oscar-winning cinematography subtly translates Dickens' gothic touches, and John Mills and Alec Guinness forge a touching friendship against the encroaching dark.

The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle (Julien Temple, 1980) Hailed by Variety magazine as "the Citizen Kane of rock pictures," this incendiary affair charts the implosion of the Sex Pistols (in particular) and pop culture (in general). Original director Russ Meyer bailed out due to "creative differences" and was replaced by Temple, whose smart, cynical handling strikes the right note.

Greed (Erich Von Stroheim, 1924) Most of us probably know Erich Von Stroheim best as Gloria Swanson's Teutonic-looking and very sinister butler in *Sunset Boulevard*, but he was also responsible for this silent-era folie de grandeur, adapted from Frank Norris' novel *McTeague*, about a brutish dentist. The stories of Von Stroheim's battles with producer Irving Thalberg are as famous as the film itself; much of the footage was destroyed but hints of the director's genius still survive.

Gregory's Girl (Bill Forsyth, 1981) The consummate innocent teen romance story, as seen through the unflinchingly optimistic eyes of an easy going 16-year-old boy in love with life, love and Dorothy, the girl who usurps his place on the football field. Charmingly told, with a total lack of guile to sully its sweetness.

Grey Gardens (Ellen Hovde, Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Muffie Meyer, 1975) An extraordinary portrait of mother and daughter Big and Little Edie, cousins of Jackie O and former society women, who are living out their (last) days in a decaying mansion infested with wild animals, dressing eccentrically and eating foie gras (or is it dog food?) straight from the can. The directorial approach is restrained - would the Maysles dare impose their vision on these impressive ladies? - but Big and Little Edie are more than capable of telling their story on their own.

The Grifters (Stephen Frears, 1990) Jim Thompson's pulp novel is given classy Hollywood treatment, with mother-and-son con artists Anjelica Huston and John Cusack putting in superlative performances. Along comes Annette Bening to really mess things up. Frears, to his credit, avoids the noir cliches and puts the drama centre stage.

Grizzly Man (Werner Herzog, 2005) It's a scandal that Herzog's film, at the forefront of the documentary revival, didn't receive an Oscar nomination. The footage of Alaskan bears is remarkable enough, but it is unhinged naturalist Timothy Treadwell who is the real focus - and his borderline-deranged desire to be at one with the wilderness. Frequently unbelievable viewing - this is a different breed of nature film.

Grosse Pointe Blank (George Armitage, 1997) Few films dealing with hired killers ever show them having much of a personal life other than sitting alone in hotel rooms, assembling sniper rifles. This one places assassin John Cusack at his high school reunion. The excellent character work by the cast - including Minnie Driver and Alan Arkin - keep this from being a one-note comedy.

Groundhog Day (Harold Ramis, 1993) The prospect of repeating the same day over and over for eternity is both a brilliant comic device and a Buddhist means of transcendence in Ramis' exhilarating comedy. The circle of life is first a curse and then a salvation for Bill Murray, whose character journeys from misanthropic TV weatherman to piano-tickling bodhisattva.

Gummo (Harmony Korine, 1997) A small town ravaged long ago by a tornado is the setting for Harmony Korine's episodic tribute to all manner of weirdos, miscreants, and sadists. Even when the movie is numbingly self-indulgent, it is still one of a kind.

Gun Crazy (Joseph H Lewis, 1950) John Dahl and Peggy Cummings are pistol-packing fugitive lovers in Lewis's characteristically barmy but intensely romantic twist on the Bonnie-and-Clyde paradigm, as she, a quintessentially irresistible femme fatale, leads him by the Derringer to a foggy doom in a bleak swamp.

Guys and Dolls (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1955) One wonders what Sinatra and Brando made of each other in this, their lone movie together, and Brando's only musical. (Yes, apparently the boy can dance!) Although many of the stage show's finest songs were dropped, and Mankiewicz was a pedestrian director, somehow, vivacity, Technicolor and Jean Simmons' ethereal presence redeem everything.

La Haine (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995) A powerful, timely drama about racial tensions and police oppression in the impoverished Parisian suburbs, based on the friendship between three young men - Jewish, Arabic and black. Kassovitz's grim portrayal of ghetto life, pumped up by an award-winning French rap score, anticipated the current unrest and riots by a decade.

The Hairdresser's Husband (Patrice Leconte, 1990) A very wacky, romantic-comic fantasy about the fetishistic raptures of childhood transferred into middle age. Jean Rochefort is a 50-something man for whom life's supreme moment came when he was a child: witnessing the partially revealed breast of the attractive woman who cut his hair. He finally fulfils a lifelong ambition by marrying a hairdresser (Anna Galiena) who is evidently content to share his regressive, reclusive lifestyle. A cult oddity.

Hairspray (John Waters, 1988) Waters belatedly ambled into the mainstream with his fond salute to 1950s kitsch. Hairspray stars beaming Ricki Lake as the girl dancer who dreams of winning a TV talent contest. But it's the off-kilter mood and oddball inhabitants (Sonny Bono, Debbie Harry, Divine) that hint at a more subversive pedigree.

Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978) Almost anaemic by today's gory standards, Carpenter created the template for US slasher movies - with a few nods to Mario Bava. It's expertly handled from start to finish with unstoppable bogeyman Michael Myers causing mayhem in a William Shatner mask.

Happiness (Todd Solondz, 1998) The title is ironic: in this deadpan freak show of suburban dysfunction centred on three very different sisters, the most rounded character just happens to be a child molester. Solondz's matter-of-fact misanthropy is impressive for its sheer intensity, but he also offers darkly comic proof that human monsters have souls.

Hard Boiled (John Woo, 1992) Hong Kong cult favourite that brought both director Woo and lead Chow Yun-Fat to international attention. He plays a shoot-first, don't-bother-with-questions-later cop who teams up with undercover officer Tony Leung to bring down a gang of gun-smuggling triads. Woo's trademark use of slow motion shoot-outs hits a career high in the inspired finale set in a hospital.

A Hard Day's Night (Richard Lester, 1964) The definitive rock'n'roll movie, and a perfect example of cinematic larking about. Since its subjects were the Beatles at their most charming, the movie barely needed a script. Instead, Lester set them off with nonsense comedy, verite-style reportage and playful camera tricks, creating the vocabulary of the music video in the process. The soundtrack's not half bad either.

The Harder They Come (Perry Henzell, 1972) Bob Marley was dubbed "the first third-world superstar," but this Jamaican gangster tale was arguably the first "third-world" hit movie, and it brought reggae to international attention before even Marley did. The fact that the soundtrack has eclipsed the film itself is something of a crime, but then again, what a soundtrack, filled with standards like Pressure Drop, Many Rivers to Cross, You Can Get It if You Really Want and the title track. Such cheery, sunny tunes suggest this is an upbeat affair, where in fact it's gritty, violent and all too truthful. It was actually based on a true story, but it's a universal one: a country boy (Jimmy Cliff) who comes to the city (Kingston, definitely not the tourist-office version) with dreams of making it big (as a reggae singer). Instead of fame, Cliff finds greed and exploitation, and sets instead on a path of crime that perversely makes him a folk hero and national celebrity. He ends up killing several policemen, but his notoriety pushes his music to the top of the charts. Henzell, the scion of sugar planters who had started out making commercials began work on a follow up, No Place Like Home, but abandoned it when money ran out. (He discovered the footage 30 years later, and completed it just before his death.) But his debut was a real winner: cheap and rough (the local accents were so thick, it was released abroad with subtitles), it was made with visual flair and revolutionary conviction, and stands as a great cinematic statement against oppression. Or as Cliff sings, "I'd rather be a free man in my grave/ Than living as a puppet or a slave."

Harold & Maude (Hal Ashby, 1971) Ashby takes May-to-September romance to extremes (this is more January to December) by teaming teenager Bud Cort and lovably wizened crone Ruth Gordon (of Rosemary's Baby) in an unlikely love affair enlivened by fake suicide attempts, stylish hearses, and much sexual weirdness. One of the first true campus-and-counterculture cult movies.

Harper (Jack Smight, 1966) Paul Newman's Lew Harper is a private eye in the Raymond Chandler mould: employed by wealthy Lauren Bacall to find her missing husband, he asks dangerous questions, gets knocked about, and finally gets the job done. Smart direction and William Goldman's script keep it tough and pacy. Bacall strikes sparks alongside Newman - just as she used to with Humph.

The Haunting (Robert Wise, 1963) On-again-off-again director Wise at one of his high points, a deeply unsettling spookathon of repressed sexuality and vibrating wallpaper. Shot in austere monochromes, it features a magnificent cast of fragile female players - notably Julie Harris and Claire Bloom.

Haxan (Benjamin Christensen, 1922) A documentary that aims to debunk witchcraft but goes for a cake-and-eat-it scenario by showing recreations of demons and arcane, supernatural rituals. However muddled the message may be, the delivery is undeniably stunning with scenes of black masses and airborne witches that utilise almost every cinematic trick available at the time.

Head (Bob Rafelson, 1968) Bob Rafelson's psychedelic harbinger of the New Hollywood (co-written by Jack Nicholson) jettisons the madcap vigour of the Monkees' TV show for a more surreal tone, and as a result their career soon came to an end. Pondering how Sonny Liston, Timothy Carey and Victor Mature's dandruff ended up here is all part of the fun.

Head On (Fatih Akin, 2004) Heartfelt shout of rage from the Turkish-German film-maker, this is the German answer to La Haine. Two damaged individuals - both Turkish immigrants - come together after ending up in the same Hamburg hospital; their near-psychotic love affair is doomed practically from the start. There's a sense of urgency here that can't be ignored.

Hearts and Minds (Peter Davis, 1974) A daunting double-bill partner for Emile de Antonio's In The Year of the Pig, this less radical, more humanist Vietnam war-denunciation snagged the best doc Oscar in 1975 and producer Bert Schneider read out a congratulatory telegram from the North Vietnamese government at the ceremony. Has much to teach us even, and perhaps especially, today.

Heat (Michael Mann, 1995) Michael Mann's love of ultra-macho face-off dramas between two alpha males is sometimes misjudged, but not here. Al Pacino is the cop who must take down Robert De Niro's career criminal, a man who specialises in armed robbery, conceived by Mann with almost operatic grandeur. The two men's tense summit meeting in a coffee-bar is a tremendously staged moment of testosterone and cold sweat.

Heathers (Michael Lehmann, 1989) Winona Ryder is the odd girl out in her cruel, well-coiffed clique of high school friends, but she gets more than she bargained for when she aligns herself with Christian Slater's juvenile delinquent in this dead-on satire. A generation before Mean Girls, this was the darker and nastier genuine article.

Heaven's Gate (Michael Cimino, 1980) An \$11m western that spiralled up to a \$44m epic and sank a studio - United Artists, who were subsequently bought up cheap by MGM after this legendary flop. It is by no means a bad film - long and meandering but there are certainly worse crimes, and the stunning camerawork and huge sweep of the story absolve such sins. Butchered by a panicking UA, the longer versions available play well and suggest that Cimino might have actually known what he was doing all along.

Heavenly Creatures (Peter Jackson, 1994) Kate Winslet's debut performance in a film that seeks to explain a notorious 1950s New Zealand murder case. She's a precocious teen who draws shy classmate Melanie Lynskey into an intoxicating secret world, that grows from a shared love of Mario Lanza into a dark, sweeping fantasy romance, expertly realised by Jackson's monster-making team.

Hedwig and the Angry Inch (John Cameron Mitchell, 2001) Sex-change surgery gone wrong has left Hedwig with an 'angry inch', which is also the name of her excellent backing band in this rare example of a successful rock opera. Writer-director-star John Cameron Mitchell's irresistible ode to glam rock motors along on a raucous soundtrack and extravagant set pieces.

Heimat (Edgar Reitz, 1984) Is it a movie? Is it a TV series? No-one's quite sure, but Edgar Reitz's 15-hour account of lives of the villagers of Schabbach in Germany, and their descendants, broke new ground. Bolstered by a series of spectacular performances - notably from Marita Breuer - Reitz created a compelling fictional social history spanning 1919 to 1982, which interwove family, economics and politics into a gripping whole.

Hell Is a City (Val Guest, 1960) This jazzy, snappy thriller from Hammer pits lonely, hard-case cop Stanley Baker against escaped criminal John Crawford in smoggy Manchester. Donald Pleasence and Billie Whitelaw also star, but it's cinematographer Arthur Grant's depiction of the city sleazy back streets, bleak factories and horrible boozers that lingers in the mind.

Hellzapoppin' (HC Potter, 1941) When's the last time anyone actually saw Hellzapoppin'? It was a stage show, with two comics (Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson). Done on film, it's full of jokes about the nature of film. Is it Citizen Kane as made by the Three Stooges? Not quite. But a Stooges film made by Welles? Closer.

Henry - Portrait of a Serial Killer (John McNaughton, 1986) The genius of McNaughton's Henry is his refusal to offer any clear frame of moral reference, leaving the audience only able to identify with the soulless killer, who murders robotically, without glee. Unendingly gruesome, bleak as Dostoevsky: utter emptiness is our only emotional reward.

Henry V (Laurence Olivier, 1944) At 37, Olivier could theoretically have joined the army, but his value to the war effort, and to the vital US-UK special relationship, was better served with this romantic and thrilling account of Shakespeare's Henry V. More than mere propaganda, it is bold and intuitive, first showing a 16th-century company performing the play, then leaping into the action.

Hester Street (Joan Micklin Silver, 1975) A real one-off: a mostly Yiddish study of fresh-off-the-boat east European Jews trying to make a go of it in turn-of-the-century New York. Shot in black and white and exploiting silent-era histrionics, it's a tribute to a long-vanished time and place.

High Noon (Fred Zinnemann, 1952) Zinnemann's classic what-a-man's-gotta-do western, with Oscar-winner Gary Cooper as Marshal Kane, who must face the men who hate him on the day he's due to wed Grace Kelly. Tex Ritter's great song racks up the tension as the clock counts down in real time: the townsfolk's refusal to help was seen as a liberal lament for lost integrity in the McCarthy age.

The Hired Hand (Peter Fonda, 1971) Peter Fonda (who also directed) and Warren Oates are drifters who, after the death of a friend, find themselves wending back to the wife and child Fonda long ago abandoned. This beautifully photographed road movie is a very 70s ode to freedom as another word for "nothing left to lose".

Hiroshima Mon Amour (Alain Resnais, 1959) A multi-award-winning New Wave classic whose leitmotif ("You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing!") juxtaposes flashbacks of a French actress' experiences in occupied France with those of her Japanese lover, who survived the atomic bomb. Resnais and scenarist Duras weave chilling real-life footage of postwar Japan into a dreamy, enigmatic drama about love, war and memory.

His Girl Friday (Howard Hawks, 1940) Talk about suspense! Just as he she is about to go up to Albany to marry Ralph Bellamy, Rosalind Russell calls in at the newspaper to say fare-thee-well and kiss off to her ex-husband and the paper's editor, Cary Grant. It's like the umpire ordering "play", having first torn the rule book to shreds. All Cary has to do is to get Ros to think again - about Ralph, journalism, Albany and Cary. He's in luck: there's a death-cell watch in the city so every newspaper is on its toes. What follows is one of the greatest three-set matches ever played, as fast talk, faster manoeuvres and wicked gamesmanship hold sway. It all comes from *The Front Page*, a hit play by Ben Hecht and Charlie MacArthur in which the editor and the reporter were men and it was all about loyalty. (See the orthodox film versions: Lewis Milestone made one before this, with Adolphe Menjou and Pat O'Brien, and Billy Wilder did afterward, with Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon.) Suppose the reporter is a dame, said director Howard Hawks. Suppose they were married once. Suppose we think they ought to get back together again. Suppose ... suppose we wake up and realized that the only reason Ros went into the office was because she was desperate not to go to Albany. All of the above is *His Girl Friday* which you can accept as a comedy or a screwball noir about the disaster of being married. It's one of those films where people enter into divorce just so they can have the fun of wooing each other again. It's 66 years old and about a thousand times faster than anything anyone dreams of today.

A History of Violence (David Cronenberg, 2005) A family man commits a heroic act, but his newfound fame beckons the ghosts of his past to haunt him. Cronenberg's film examines how a single act of violence can infect an entire life, and works equally well as a comedy, a western, an action-thriller, and an icky horror flick.

The Holy Mountain (Alejandro Jodorowsky, 1973) Midnight-movie maverick turned graphic novelist, Alejandro Jodorowsky wowed young cineastes in the 1970s with his hallucinogenic offerings, of which *The Holy Mountain* is his baroque masterpiece. John Lennon and Yoko Ono provided the finance and, while it's glued to their era, the director's mythic imagery mixes the prurient with the profound to transcend hippy cliches.

The Honeymoon Killers (Leonard Kastle, 1970) Composer Leonard Kastle took over from equally unknown original director Martin Scorsese to film, in unsettlingly sleazy black-and-white, the story of the 1940s "Lonelyhearts Killers". Shirley Stoller, proving that not all fat people are jolly, gives a mesmerisingly ill-tempered performance as Beck. See also Arturo Ripstein's remake *Deep Crimson*.

Hope and Glory (John Boorman, 1987) Boorman's semi-autobiographical tale is perhaps a live-action homage to John Betjeman's Slough poem: a reflection on world war two as seen through the eyes of a bored nine-year-old. Though painstakingly recreated, this extraordinary vision of the Blitz-bombed capital is a personal rather than social exercise, drawing painful lessons from the past about the ancillaries of war: brutal changes, the losses and the upheavals.

Horse Thief (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1986) Notorious at the time for its unadorned footage of a Buddhist "sky burial", this near-documentary narrative focusing on nomad clansmen is one of the most remarkable products of the Chinese "fifth generation". Shot in situ on the high plains in Tibet, a fable-like story of a huntsman expelled from his tribe is like a message from another time and world.

Hot Fuzz (Edgar Wright, 2007) A film that treats mundane events like a train journey to the country or police paperwork as if they were the coolest things in the world, with rapid-fire editing of montages. While there are plenty of gags, much of the humour comes from the director having a deep knowledge of the rigid structure of Hollywood action movies and the talent to exploit it.

The Hours and Times (Christopher Munch, 1991) Ian Hart played John Lennon again in the later *Backbeat*, but in his first outing there's plenty to wind up fans of the fab four. Set just before the band broke big, Lennon and Brian Epstein go for a few days rest in Barcelona. Epstein lets his unrequited love get the better of him. For Lennon, like most things, it's just another game.

House of Flying Daggers (Zhang Yimou, 2004) The imagery is so rich here that the story cannot compete, so it ties itself up in pointless busywork with a myriad of double and triple crosses. Who wants to follow a plot when you can just surrender yourself to dizzying fight scenes and strange rituals such as the opening "echo game"?

The House of Mirth (Terence Davies, 2000) Unlike Scorsese's luxurious Wharton adaptation *The Age of Innocence*, Davies' period masterpiece achieves a tragic effect, leaving the audience devastated and harrowed at the fate of Lily Bart as she scales the treacherous upper echelons of fin-de-siecle Manhattan society.

The House of Wax (André De Toth, 1953) A one-eyed director might not be the obvious choice for a 3D extravaganza, but De Toth provided depth to the characters, not just the visuals - there are few gimmicky 3D scenes here, and it plays almost as well "flat". Vincent Price fills up the lavish sets as the museum owner so obsessed with revenge and perfection that only preserved corpses can furnish his ghastly vision.

Howards End (James Ivory, 1992) Oscar-blessed class agonising courtesy of Forsterphiles Merchant Ivory. Edwardian England is painted in sumptuous tones and serves as the setting for an inter-class entanglement as the faux-boho Schlegels befriend and challenge the worst excesses of the wealthy Wilcoxes, while subjecting the struggling Bastos to their philanthropic urges.

Hud (Martin Ritt, 1963) The first great Larry McMurtry movie (*The Last Picture Show* being the second), Paul Newman's finest work, and Martin Ritt's best movie, this tale of an aging Texas cattle baron (Melvyn Douglas) and his treacherous bad-seed elder son (Newman) benefits from striking cinematography by James Wong Howe, and Patricia Neal's Oscar-winning performance.

Hukkle (Gyorgy Palfi, 2002) Originally a film-school graduation project, *Hukkle* has real originality. An intimate swoop through the human and animal occupants of a Hungarian village in which a poisoner may be at work, Palfi's gimlet eye for offbeat detail and earthy sense of humour unite these rural denizens into a captivating visual jig.

The Hustler (Robert Rossen, 1961) Rossen's first movie after the blacklist, and his finest, with Newman's poolhall wizard slowly destroyed by the corruption of his manager George C Scott (then on the most fertile run of his career), by love, and by his own fatal arrogance.

I Know Where I'm Going! (Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, 1945) Powell and Pressburger in their pomp, this begins as a ripping yarn/love story about an ambitious young woman (Wendy Hiller) out to marry money. Once she arrives in the Scottish Highlands for her nuptials and the fog draws in, the film-makers bring lyricism and a mystical undertow to their storytelling. If Compton Mackenzie had collaborated with Isaac Bashevis Singer, this is what they might have come up with.

I Walked With a Zombie (Jacques Tourneur, 1943) That fantastic title doesn't really give away that this is in fact a variant on *Jane Eyre* - with an added voodoo element. It relies on atmospherics rather than cheap jump scares, the creepy nocturnal walks across a shadowy plantation can still chill to the bone if you're in the right mood.

I Was a Male War Bride (Howard Hawks, 1949) A late flowering of the screwball comedy genre, featuring a sparkling combination of Cary Grant and Ann Sheridan. In postwar occupied Germany, he's a suave French officer, she's a bright-as-military-brass US lieutenant, and it requires hilarious tactics - such as Grant in drag - and a barrage of jokes before the pair can unite their forces.

The Ice Storm (Ang Lee, 1997) Insightful adaptation of Rick Moody's novel set in 1970s suburbia. The subtly observed action shows two families adrift in a world of Watergate corruption and sexual experimentation. Tobey Maguire excels as the teenager observing the frailties of estranged parents Kevin Kline and Joan Allen, but Christina Ricci steals the film as his super bright, sexually predatory sister.

The Idiots (Lars Von Trier, 1998) Along with *Festen*, still a defining screed of the Dogme 95 cine-minimalism crusade. A wrong-headed bunch of Copenhagen commune-dwellers decide to throw off the shackles of society by going out into said society and affecting a state of - what, therapeutic infantilism? Or actual mental disability? Bizarre, ambiguous and frequently explicit, there's really nothing else like it.

If... (Lindsay Anderson, 1968) Anderson's public-school rebellion fantasy benefits hugely from a lethal injection of style: part New-Wave briskness, part lyricism lifted from older masters like Jean Vigo. Its idealism, coming in 1968, may have been overtaken by events, but, with Malcolm McDowell irresistible as renegade Mick, it's a gleeful, iconic trashing of establishment deference.

Kiru (Akira Kurosawa, 1952) Sandwiched by *Rashomon* and *Seven Samurai*, this is arguably the most understated masterwork of Kurosawa's golden period. A salaryman finds out he has terminal cancer; at the same moment, he realises he's wasted his life, and has little time to make up for it. Quietly devastating, yet life-affirming all the same.

I'll Never Forget What's'isname (Michael Winner, 1967) If you've ever wondered what the point of Michael Winner was, look up this hip, anti-establishment London satire. Oliver Reed plays an advertising exec who decides to drop out and live life, to the dismay of his Machiavellian boss Orson Welles. Roped into producing one last commercial, Reed/Winner comes up with a stunner.

In a Lonely Place (Nicholas Ray, 1950) Humphrey Bogart is a down-on-his-luck screenwriter, prone to dark moods and excessive drinking, who investigates a murder that he himself may have committed. Toying to superb effect with the viewer's expectations and sympathies, this is a shattering existential noir and one of director Nicholas Ray's best films.

In the Company of Men (Neil LaBute, 1997) Impassive debut from the darkly inclined writer-director, in which a pair of white-collar womanisers make advances towards a deaf co-worker, with the clear intention of nothing less than her ritual humiliation. A stomach-churning tale of vicious office "romance" to sit (un)comfort-ably alongside the horrorshows of *Happiness* or *Roger Dodger*.

In the Heat of the Night (Norman Jewison, 1967) Sidney Poitier was in habitually overachieving super-black-man mode for this gripping thriller about racism in the Deep South, with his unbowed Chicago detective learning the brutal ways of Old Dixie as he reluctantly helps good ole boy sheriff Rod Steiger solve a local murder. Dated but still surprisingly taut.

In the Mood for Love (Wong Kar-wai, 2000) It might be a non-romance between a mutually cuckolded couple, but in terms of "mood", Wong's Hong Kong romance is sensual perfection. The fluid combination of cinematography, costume, music and impeccably smouldering passion results in a feverish dream of a movie. Being cheated on never looked this good.

In the Name of the Father (Jim Sheridan, 1993) Political drama doesn't come any more emotionally resonant than this dramatisation of the plight of the Guildford Four, convicted after a murderous pub bombing in 1974. Though based on actual facts in the still controversial case, Sheridan tilts at the IRA and the British police alike, focusing on the unlikely bonds that result between the arrested men.

In the Realm of the Senses (Nagisa Oshima, 1976) Eros and Thanatos in pre-war Japan: a groundbreaking, controversial shocker, based on a true incident, detailing the dangerous sexual obsession between a servant and her employer that culminates with the ultimate orgasmic act of love. Oshima's stylised lighting and composition bring borderline porn to the status of high art.

In This World (Michael Winterbottom, 2002) Michael Winterbottom's tough, impassive docu-drama about asylum seekers couldn't have been more timely on its release in 2002, as the Iraq debacle gathered pace. Using small digital video cameras, improvisation, guerrilla filming and available light, Winterbottom follows the overland refugee route from Pakistan through Iran, Turkey and Italy up to Sangatte, Dover and beyond. This is a route littered with stolen cash, broken dreams and dead bodies: a sickening reverse of the hippy trail where the poor and unsheltered of Asia head for the prosperity and welfare payouts of western Europe. Winterbottom uses two Afghan non-professionals, Jamal Udin Torabi and Enayatullah, more or less playing themselves as a 16-year-old and his older cousin, and tracks them, as it were in real time, after they bet their borrowings and life savings on a terrifying one-way ticket to Kilburn High Road in London. We are left with the two men's journey itself, during which we must largely intuit exactly what is going on in their heads, because there is little or no dialogue between the two. This World unfolds just as I imagine such a journey mostly would in reality: in grim silence, with occasional frantic arguments with people who can't understand what you're saying. This is a reticent film, both emotionally and intellectually, and for some it may be frustrating. But the harrowingly real picture it paints is a daring and ambitious work. How many other commercially successful directors, at 40-plus, would head off to the Afghan border to rough it with a DV camera?

Independence Day (Roland Emmerich, 1996) Giant mile-wide flying saucers have been a mainstay of sci-fi literature for years, but this was the first time we could properly see them in the movies. The rampant jingoism is as silly now as it was then, but this remains textbook blockbuster entertainment where pets are less expendable than people.

Infernal Affairs (Andrew Lau, Mak Siu Fai, 2002) The Hong Kong original for Martin Scorsese's The Departed: a tight, morally subversive premise - cop infiltrates mob, mobster infiltrates the cops is marshalled here with near-mathematical precision; Andy Lau and Tony Leung originate the deep cover mole roles that later went to Damon and DiCaprio.

The Innocents (Jack Clayton, 1961) An incredibly creepy adaptation of Henry James' The Turn of the Screw that effectively rewrote the ghost story genre - there may not even be a supernatural element at play here and most of the spookiest scenes happen in broad daylight. Deborah Kerr's repressed nanny is certainly haunted by something; not knowing exactly what it is has kept this movie from ageing or diminishing in power.

The Insider (Michael Mann, 1999) "Issue movie" is too cheap a term to describe this account of a tobacco-industry whistleblower (Russell Crowe at his most retiring), and a TV journalist (Al Pacino) finding similar levels of corruption within his own industry. It's a corporate crime thriller as gripping as any cop story, but Mann's dreamlike visual treatment gives it an extra intensity.

Intolerance (DW Griffith, 1916) Attempting to make up for the KKK-promoting Birth of a Nation, Griffith produced a mammoth plea in favour of social and political harmony. Four eras get the treatment - ancient Babylon, Christ's crucifixion, the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, and modern America; the earnestness of his vision carries everything with it.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Don Siegel, 1956) Check the basement for pods! Space-spores steal the minds of a small town's citizens. Does body snatching stand for Eisenhower-era conformism or for lock-step communism? This is Don Siegel, so it's more likely about the folly of surrendering your soul to anyone. Includes the cinema's most bone-chilling kiss.

The Ipcress File (Sidney J Furie, 1965) Hard on the heels of 1964's Zulu, Michael Caine demonstrated ruthless star credentials as Len Deighton's spy Harry Palmer, investigating brainwashed scientists. Palmer is 60s London personified - he drinks ground coffee and everything! Furthering the swinging vibe, the psychedelic direction feels like a mind-control experiment itself.

Irma Vep (Olivier Assayas, 1996) The restless Assayas has hopped between genres and inter-bred them, often scruffily, within single films, so it's no surprise the postmodernist popped out at some point. Irma Vep, about a neurotic director remaking a silent horror classic, settles down nicely into a wry, sexy tribute to cinema, its allure personified by Maggie Cheung's slinky cat-suited muse.

The Iron Giant (Brad Bird, 1999) Based on the Ted Hughes story, this cartoon about a boy who befriends a huge alien robot makes perfect all-ages entertainment. Keeping the giant secret from his parents and the paranoid world of 1950s America proves to be impossible, as the film moves from an innocent study of outsiders drawn together to a crushing, full-scale cold war assault when the military mobilise.

Irréversible (Gaspar Noé, 2002) Firebrand Gaspar Noé may be renowned for filming the longest anal rape scene in cinema history (nine minutes) but his film is so much more than a grindhouse curiosity. Played "in reverse", it is deeply abrasive and shrewd study of male identity, and the tragic corollary of revenge.

It Happened One Night (Frank Capra, 1934) Capra's screwball comedy sees Clark Gable's failed reporter, desperate for a scoop, teaming up with Claudette Colbert's spoiled socialite on the run, for a Depression-era road trip. Sparky dialogue and classic sequences, including the doughnut dunking lesson, helped it to unprecedented Oscar victory in five categories, including for both stars.

It's a Wonderful Life (Frank Capra, 1946) Jimmy Stewart is in despair until an apprentice angel shows him what life in his small town might have been without him. It's Frank Capra just after the war, and it's a great big Christmas festival that narrowly avoids tragedy. In that narrow space, you can find most of the great American movies.

The Italian Job (Peter Collinson, 1969) Swinging London's finest invade the Continent for one last holiday caper before the 70s arrive and everything goes brown and grey and grim again. Michael Caine and co plot a heist in Turin using Mini Coopers for the getaway, whizzing up steps, down sewers and out of trouble. Silly and shonky, but tremendous fun, and endlessly quotable.

Ivan the Terrible (Sergei Eisenstein, 1945) "Thin ice" and "skating on" spring to mind at the thought of Eisenstein undertaking the life of the 16th-century despot who murdered his way to a unified Russia: the first part of a planned trilogy met with Stalin's approval, the second did not. Out of favour and ill, Eisenstein never made another film after this beautifully composed, baroque masterpiece.

Ivansxtc (Bernard Rose, 2000) A Hollywood tragedy made outside the Hollywood system, this fuses a Tolstoy short story with the real-life death of a super-agent to surprisingly moving effect. Danny Huston is by turns charming, loathsome and sympathetic as the amoral but mortal lead, while the light-footed digital video treatment grants us access to once-hidden corners of Tinseltown.

Jackie Brown (Quentin Tarantino, 1997) The follow up to Pulp Fiction is decidedly less violent: it's an elegant adaptation of Elmore Leonard's novel that platforms his storytelling prowess. Plucked from career wilderness, Pam Grier is languidly brilliant as the lonely air hostess with a score to settle, while Samuel L Jackson's drug dealer shows Tarantino's heart is still in the same seedy place.

Jacquot De Nantes (Agnes Varda, 1991) A wonderfully moving tribute to Umbrellas of Cherbourg director Jacques Demy by his film-maker wife, that is documentary, biopic and love letter rolled into one. Footage of Demy himself near death is intercut with recreations of his childhood and clips from his films: a heady cocktail fuelled by a lifetime of affection.

Japon (Carlos Reygadas, 2002) The Latin American renaissance's most zealous aesthete drew admiring gasps with his debut, a beguiling film that hangs luminously in the moment as it follows a lame painter to the countryside to commit suicide. Reygadas uses non-professional actors and spare dialogue to scrape away artifice - unlikely to be directing the next Harry Potter, then.

Jason and the Argonauts (Don Chaffey, 1963) Virtually a one-man special-effects crew, Ray Harryhausen perfected his craft here with such indelible imagery as bronze Talos coming to life, the writhing hydra and the classic battle with seven skeletons. Virtually everyone working in special effects today was inspired by his work. Without him, we'd be living in a greyer world.

Jaws (Steven Spielberg, 1975) After all these years Spielberg's story of a killer shark terrorising a sleepy beach town still has the power to shock and entertain in equal measure. Long takes, clever edits and a menacing score ramp up the tension as local police chief Roy Schneider, oceanographer Richard Dreyfuss and fisherman Richard Shaw head for a showdown with the great white.

The Jerk (Carl Reiner, 1979) Steve Martin's first starring role finds him on a freewheeling odyssey. From his origins as a "poor black child" to spells as a gas-station attendant, a fairground worker and disco-grooving accidental millionaire, it's his resolute stupidity that propels him through the world. Like Forest Gump without the history lessons.

Jerry Maguire (Cameron Crowe, 1996) Crowe pulls out all the stops in his effort to make even a sports agent seem like a decent human being. Resistance is pretty much useless when faced with the Tom Cruise charm offensive, here reinforced by Renée Zellweger's loyal secretary and her impossibly cute kid.

La Jetée (Chris Marker, 1962) Told as a series of still, black-and-white photographs - save for one subtle scene - Marker's time twister tells a deceptively simple story that starts to eat its own tail. Hard science, romance, action, memories and heartache resonate from the compact, 28-minute long work.

Johnny Guitar (Nicholas Ray, 1954) Freudian western; abstract-impressionist western; anti-McCarthy western; feminist western; lesbian western - whatever, it's quite a western: perverse, politically reckless, colorful and filled with romance, hatred and regret. One of Joan Crawford's craziest roles, and perhaps Ray's most experimental movie this side of You Can't Go Home Again.

Le Jour Se Leve (Marcel Carne, 1939) Carne's existential thriller opens with Jean Gabin's murderer holed up in an attic, and dissolves back to show how he got there. Hailed as a parable of French disillusion in the run-up to the second world war, this hard, jaundiced tale later went on to influence a generation of American film noir.

Jubilee (Derek Jarman, 1977) Jarman captures the art-school ethos of punk before the music and fashion became blankly uniform. It's pretentious but has an undeniably raw quality that captures the feeling of the times far more effectively than the cartoon anarchists that followed.

Jules et Jim (Francois Truffaut, 1962) Captivating love triangle involving Austrian Jules, his French soulmate Jim, and their volatile muse Catherine, which begins in turn-of-the-century Paris and ends after the first world war. Truffaut pays poetic tribute to undying friendship as the ménage a trois never looked so innocent - and never will again.

The Jungle Book (Wolfgang Reitherman, 1967) Baloo the Bear and Bagheera the Panther teach man-cub Mowgli how to be more of a man and less of a cub in this classic animated version of the Rudyard Kipling fable. With some of the zippiest offerings in the Disney musical canon, a pair of great villains (slinky Shere Khan and the mesmerising python Kaa) and a real warmth in the relationships, it's a concise successsssss.

Jurassic Park (Steven Spielberg, 1993) Jaws' greatest strength might have been hiding the shark, but Spielberg displayed no such coyness here: the panoramic sweep of a dinosaur-filled prairie represented an early-1990s quantum leap for SFX. Whether blockbuster narrative evolution has since dwindled to a useless stump is questionable; what isn't is that Jurassic Park shows Spielberg on impressive form.

Kanal (Andrzej Wajda, 1957) Wajda cannibalised his own experiences as a resistance fighter for his tough, intense tale of the Warsaw uprising. Kanal is a dark movie, both literally and figuratively, as it chases its desperate fugitives through the city sewers. All of them, we suspect, are destined to end up in a hole.

Kandahar (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 2001) An enigmatic movie from the Iranian arthouse master: part documentary, part parable. An Afghan woman who has grown up in Canada receives word from her sister in Kandahar that she is about to commit suicide: she

makes a dangerous journey through Afghanistan to find her. The film became notorious for featuring Hassan Tantai (formerly David Belfield) who is wanted in the US for the 1980 murder of a pro-Shah Iranian diplomat.

The Karate Kid (John G. Avildsen, 1984) Ralph Macchio stars as a bullied kid who needs to toughen up. Luckily, a martial arts expert is the local handyman, and Macchio becomes his student. After months of training he is ready for the local hardass. The action climaxes at the All Valley Karate Championship with Elisabeth Shue in a cracking pair of knee-high socks.

Keane (Lodge Kerrigan, 2004) The ghost of a missing child haunts Kerrigan's spare, extraordinary tale, shot in the concrete outskirts and transport inter-zones of New York City. The camera sticks closely to its mentally disturbed protagonist (played by Damian Lewis), who forges a fraught bond with a little girl and her troubled mother.

Kes (Ken Loach, 1969) In the absence of an industry, Ken Loach means British cinema ("Mike Leigh" is the other shorthand), and the much-loved Kes is a big part of the reason why. An unaffected tale of a lonely Barnsley boy who finds a taste of freedom when he gets to train a kestrel, it's in the best of spots for British naturalism: halfway between the gutter and the stars.

Kids (Larry Clark, 1995) Larry Clark reworked the teensploitation movie of the 1950s with an unflinching voyeuristic lens, the help of a young skateboarding scripter named Harmony Korine, and future indie queen Chloe Sevigny in the starring role. He tapped serious social neuroses, from drugs and under-age sex to HIV. A vital, moral vision of early 1990s youth that spawned a new generation of dark teen films.

Killer of Sheep (Charles Burnett, 1977) Italian neo-realism, enhanced with bleakly poetic black-and-white cinematography, comes to 1970s Watts in Charles Burnett's UCLA dissertation movie, immediately recognised as a landmark in American (not just African-American) cinema, but lost to us for 30 years over rights issues concerning its stunning sound-track of blues, gospel and 70s black pop.

The Killer (John Woo, 1989) This Hong Kong thriller set a new standard in cinematic gunplay, and claimed many casualties in the process. The plot, concerning an honourable assassin (Chow Yun-fat), has its slushy moments, but otherwise it's relentlessly action-packed, with Woo's much-imitated kinetic camerawork and skilful choreography sustaining the excitement.

The Killers (Robert Siodmak, 1946) Siodmak's noir visions always harked back, more even than those of his fellow emigres, to German expressionism's narrow palate of intensely expressive monochromes: a funeral under black umbrellas, a payroll heist in a 90-second single take, a doomed young Burt Lancaster - and Ava, perfect, perfidious Ava, in all her intoxicating ripeness.

The Killing of a Chinese Bookie (John Cassavetes, 1976) Shapeless yet utterly compelling Cassavettes melodrama about a stripclub owner in hock to the mob for gambling debts, this is the director's male counterpart to A Woman Under the Influence's account of female disintegration, a chaotic discourse on masculine self-destruction. Ben Gazzarra's finest hour.

The Killing (Stanley Kubrick, 1956) The movie that put Kubrick on the map, a geometrically precise, furiously detailed and polished racetrack-robbery thriller that prefigures in miniature all his fatalistic themes. Fifty years later, it still looks like it was made tomorrow. Killer line: Sterling Hayden's last words, "Ah ... what's the difference?"

Kind Hearts and Coronets (Robert Hamer, 1949) Perhaps the most acidic of all the Ealing comedies, dispatching Dennis Price's embittered bastard son on a mission to bump off the heirs to the D'Ascoyne family fortune. Meanwhile, Alec Guinness pulls on a myriad of guises as the various victims, including - most memorably - the imperious suffragette who "falls to earth in Berkeley Square".

King Kong (Merian C Cooper, Ernest B Schroedsack, 1933) Go to Skull Island. Face down the "natives". Survive the ordeal, if you can. And pray for decency's sake that that Kong guy leaves a few clothes on Anne Darrow. This is what innocent sensation was meant to be. Beauty and the Beast with an update - and the most frightening monster is the film producer.

King Lear (Grigori Kosintzev, 1969) A thunderous Soviet adaptation of Shakespeare's politicised tragedy, with the USSR's Baltic coast providing dramatic, beetling backdrops, and veteran Estonian actor Jüri Järvet creating a Lear of unquenchable nobility of spirit.

The King of Comedy (Martin Scorsese, 1983) Robert De Niro is cruelly brilliant as aspiring comedian Rupert Pupkin, who goes to creepy extremes to win a spot on a late-night talk show. It failed to find an audience on its release in 1983, but Scorsese's film is now regarded as a prescient commentary on celebrity worship.

King of New York (Abel Ferrara, 1990) An inscrutable Christopher Walken emerges from prison determined to rule the New York drug trade, the better to start financing hospitals and relief programmes for the city's poor. Part modern Robin Hood, part Pablo Escobar, Walken remains implacably, eerily still as ultraviolence rages entertainingly, perhaps satirically, all around him.

Kipperbang (Michael Apted, 1982) Screenwriter Jack Rosenthal's TV movie for Channel 4 is a lovely gem. An exquisitely funny, gentle coming-of-age comedy about a 12-year-old boy called Alan Duckworth who can't quite summon up the courage to speak to the girl that he adores. As a cricket nut, addicted to the Test Match radio commentary, Alan can hear John Arlott's sorrowing commentary on his dismal performance in his head - an inspired vocal performance from Arlott himself.

Kiss Me Deadly (Robert Aldrich, 1955) The apotheosis of film noir, all insanely skewed angles and hellish chiaroscuro, inventive brutality and leering sexual innuendo. KMD is Robert Aldrich at his aggressive, cynical, ultraviolent finest, marrying the conventional gumshoe flick to the mortal considerations of 1955, principally the atom bomb, or as Mike Hammer calls it, "the big whasit".

Kiss of the Spider Woman (Hector Babenco, 1985) Two-hander set in a cell in a never-named Latin American country, with flamboyant gay movie lover William Hurt escaping dangerous realities by recounting scenes from his favourite pulp movie to his political-prisoner cellmate, radical Raul Julia. Babenco's compelling adaptation of Manuel Puig's novel zeroes in on issues of manhood and heroism, as well as making brilliant use of a movie-within-a-movie structure.

Klute (Alan J. Pakula, 1971) An out-of-his-element Ohio cop and a NYC call-girl (Jane Fonda) comb New York for the man who killed his best friend. A reverse-western in formal terms (like Coogan's Bluff with ice in its veins), it offers a paranoid template for Pakula's 70s thrillers, and an unnervingly static performance from Donald Sutherland.

Knife in the Water (Roman Polanski, 1962) The terse dynamism that would spill out in Polanski's later films is shown in its raw prime in his feature debut, a claustrophobic three-way drama in which a middle-aged couple pick up a hitchhiker and invite him to join them on their yacht. The male-ego psychodrama that follows is a masterclass in tension, heightened by the wide-open waters that surround it on every side.

Koyaanisqatsi (Godfrey Reggio, 1982) Hypnotic portrayal of collective life on Earth in the 20th century, building up from awe-inspiring natural panoramas to the time-lapse insanity of urban life, set to an incantatory score by Philip Glass. Are we a continuation of nature or some disastrous, cancerous offshoot? If we are going down, then at least we produced art like this.

Kwaidan (Masaki Kobayashi, 1964) Japan's most expensive production when it was released in 1964, this portmanteau of four supernatural tales adapted from ex-pat writer Lafcadio Hearn musters eerie strength. Kobayashi intensifies everything by placing meticulously posed actors on expressionist sets - a giant celestial eye rages in the background of one - giving these folktales a grand, mythic resonance.

LA Confidential (Curtis Hanson, 1997) A brilliant feat of compression, neatly gutting, sanitising and arranging James Ellroy's sprawling novel into a neo-noir showpiece. As in Chinatown, something is very rotten in the city of Los Angeles: Russell Crowe's strongarm cop forms an unlikely bond with Guy Pearce's uptight desk-jockey, and they bring home all of Ellroy's flashy cynicism.

The Lacemaker (Claude Goretta, 1977) Before her flair for the dark and the disturbing was disclosed, Isabelle Huppert played the demurely beautiful young hairdresser from a modest family background who attracts the attentions of a young intellectual. Like Hardy's Angel in Tess, he's infatuated with her idealised loveliness (like a 19th-century portrait of a lacemaker). But she is unable to keep up with the smart conversation, and for this reason, and a more complex sense that in reticence lies survival, withdraws into silence.

Lacombe, Lucien (Louis Malle, 1974) Malle's slow-burning account of the political and moral corruption of an affectless French farmboy who volunteers for service in La Milice under the Nazi occupation is the counterweight to Melville's Maquis-centred Army in the Shadows. Evil comes as easily to Lucien as twisting the heads off chickens, and the escalation of his carefree thuggishness is chillingly related.

The Lady Eve (Preston Sturges, 1941) Sturges's evergreen comic masterpiece about a sexy con-artist and a naive beer millionaire (Stanwyck, Fonda) in a tale of ripoffs, mistaken identity, and revenge. Sterling cameos from Sturges' stock company of grotesques, knaves and fools, including Eric Blore ("Why, I positively swill in their ale!") and William Demarest ("Posi-TIVE-ly the same dame!").

The Ladykillers (Alexander Mackendrick, 1955) Delicious Ealing comedy of the blackest hue, featuring Alec Guinness as the crazy professor with a plan for the perfect heist. When things go wrong, he and his gang lie low in a ramshackle London boarding house, under the care of a sweet old landlady, played by Katie Johnson - and they realise that to get away with the loot they are going to have to kill her.

Lagaan (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001) In which downtrodden villagers must win a cricket match or suffer a double lagaan (tax) imposed by their sadistic, mustachioed British rulers. With its extensive song-and-dance routines, as well as nods to Kurosawa and spaghetti westerns, Lagaan bowled over western audiences and critics alike to become only the third Hindi film ever to be nominated for an Oscar.

The Land That Time Forgot (Kevin Connor, 1974) A rollicking adventure that mixes Nazis, submarines and dinosaurs cannot be described as anything other than eager to entertain. From an era when Doug McLure held some box-office allure and special effects only had to give you a vague idea of what was being represented. It could be easily remade, but really, CGI and a teen cast would improve little upon the fun.

Lantana (Ray Lawrence, 2001) Deception, betrayal, trust and loyalty mesh into one big stain of confused emotion when a woman goes missing amid a tailspin of sex, lies and horrible mistakes. An incredibly tight script and terrifically restrained performances from Anthony LaPaglia and Barbara Hershey showcase the rare successful deployment of the red herring device.

Larks on a String (Jiri Menzel, 1968) Menzel's oblique allegory on the failure of socialism was suppressed for 22 years, but it was still a treat when it emerged in 1990. A bunch of "class enemies" are consigned to a (literal) scrapheap, where they while away the boredom by making eyes at the women prisoners across the way. Gentle but pointed, it couldn't survive the crackdown after the Soviet invasion.

Last Days (Gus Van Sant, 2005) You could think of this fictionalised take on the end of Kurt Cobain's life as a nature documentary, filmed through a thick, disorienting cloud of heroin and musique concrète. Here time seems to expand, liquefy, and double back on itself, while protagonist Michael Pitt seems to exist in another gravitational pull altogether.

Last Metro (Francois Truffaut, 1980) A Jewish theatre manager hides in the basement of his own theatre in Nazi-occupied France, while his non-Jewish wife directs a play called Disappearance, working from her fugitive husband's notes - and hires a handsome womaniser and resistance fighter in the lead role. From this material, and with Catherine Deneuve and Gérard Depardieu as quasi-widow and actor, Truffaut creates a resonant film about the political role of the artist, the sublimation of sexuality in performance, and even the philosophical notions of absence and presence.

The Last Movie (Dennis Hopper, 1971) Certainly the last movie that Universal's newly formed Youth Division was prepared to accept from Dennis Hopper. Painfully extruded from a Sargasso Sea of raw footage, Hopper's meditation on a western being filmed in Peru isn't half as half-baked as its detractors claim, and yields up surprising treasures and insights 36 years later.

The Last Picture Show (Peter Bogdanovich, 1971) A double nostalgia trip today, this masterful minor-key study of a dusty dead-end town looked back to the decline of cinema in the 1950s, and heralded the arrival of the then "New Hollywood" generation. Its young stars would become key figures of the movement (Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, Ellen Burstyn), but this was arguably its high point.

Last Resort (Pawel Pawlikowski, 2000) In the story of a Russian mother and son forced to claim asylum in Britain, it soon becomes apparent that freedom is really nothing more than a word. Red tape conspires to put their lives on hold, while the off-season seaside setting presents an almost sarcastic array of cheap pleasures.

The Last Seduction (John Dahl, 1994) Linda Fiorentino sinks her teeth so deeply into her role as an aggressively opportunistic and manipulative femme fatale that it's inconceivable to think of anyone else in the role. The people she targets are such easy marks she can hardly be blamed for exploiting them.

Last Tango in Paris (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) The auteur here is as much Brando as Bertolucci, in one of the rare instances when the actor's inventiveness encountered a director capable of accommodating his volcanic improvisations. Brando - beautiful here for the last time - truly left us no deeper, more wounded or heartbreaking performance.

Last Year in Marienbad (Alain Resnais, 1961) At a rococo chateau, a man tries to convince a beautiful married woman that they met the previous year and had arranged to meet again. Is he telling the truth? Something of a rite of passage for European-cinema neophytes, Resnais' dreamlike film tantalises by posing an elegant question that has no answer.

Laura (Otto Preminger, 1944) The sophisticated hit of 1944, with a detective who is a sociopath, a narrator who is "unreliable", and Laura herself - as pretty as Gene Tierney - but an ordinary girl. Otto Preminger based his career on this and made only one mistake: he wanted Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Lady in the score, not David Raksin's great tune.

The Lavender Hill Mob (Charles Crichton, 1951) The heist movie, Ealing style, with Alec Guinness as the timid worm who turns, Stanley Holloway his oily cohort, and Sid James the requisite working-class spiv. This sharp, slick comedy boasts a wonderfully absurdist streak. Even the best-laid schemes, it seems, are no match for a troupe of twittering schoolgirls.

Law of Desire (Pedro Almodóvar, 1987) Almodóvar's breakthrough film was ground-breaking in its frank, matter-of-fact treatment of homosexuality. With melodramatic plotting, self-reflexive asides about film-making, all kinds of gender confusion and bravura performances from Carmen Maura (as a transsexual) and Antonio Banderas (a jealous lover), this is quintessential Almodóvar.

Lawrence of Arabia (David Lean, 1962) Blue-eyed and beautiful, Peter O'Toole plays the flamboyant first world war hero who united Arab tribes to fight against the Turks in this gorgeously cinematic epic. An intelligent screenplay by Robert Bolt doesn't shy away from TE Lawrence's oddities.

Leaving Las Vegas (Mike Figgis, 1995) Life through the bottom of a bourbon bottle. Arriving in Las Vegas determined to drink himself to death, alcoholic screenwriter Nicolas Cage surprises himself by forming an attachment to local hooker Elisabeth Shue. Refusing feel-good clichés, the unflinching account of their relationship achieves an unusual emotional authenticity.

Leningrad Cowboys Go America (Aki Kaurismäki, 1989) The ultimate Finnish rock'n'roll road movie. After somehow failing to rock their rural hometown, the resolutely awful Leningrad Cowboys are packed off to make it big in America - "They'll put up with anything there". With their enormous quiffs, giant pointy boots, wraparound shades and dead bass player, Kaurismäki's deadpan humour was never deadlier.

Léon (The Professional) (Luc Besson, 1994) Besson's contribution to the momentarily fashionable lone-assassin genre (Nikita was remade the same year) was a showcase for droopy-eyed Jean Reno: he's a "cleaner" who takes a paternal interest in his kid neighbour after her family is wiped out. Everything is constructed on cartoonish lines - including Natalie Portman's ultra-dubious mugging and Gary Oldman's pill-popping villain. It's still a lot of fun though.

The Leopard (Luchino Visconti, 1963) Visconti, the Marxist aristocrat, was destined to bring Lampedusa's story of declining Sicilian aristocracy to the screen, and its grandeur and scope make it an epic for the ages. The climactic ballroom scene is an unrivalled set piece; the last waltz for Burt Lancaster's titular patriarch, and an entire era with him.

Life Is Sweet (Mike Leigh, 1990) Leigh zeroes in on the minutiae of life's mundanities in spectacularly raw form in this study of an ordinary working-class family, whose below-the-surface eccentricities are at odds with the suburban normality of their exteriors. Jane Horrocks shines in an unforgettably graphic role as a kinky bulimic with feminist pretensions.

Lift to the Scaffold (Louis Malle, 1958) Malle's debut film is a masterclass in early Nouvelle Vague style: a pulpy crime story filmed with a liquid, street-level intensity. Owing as much to Jean-Pierre Melville as Jean-Luc Godard, it was also the first of Malle's collaborations with future legend Jeanne Moreau.

Light Sleeper (Paul Schrader, 1992) Schrader's poetic partner to his American Gigolo, with Gere's male prostitute replaced by Willem Dafoe's ex-addict cocaine courier, who thrives in a perpetual midnight of the soul in nocturnal Manhattan, until murder and the resurgence of his long-suppressed moral sense cast him anew into a furnace of guilt and redemption.

Limelight (Charlie Chaplin, 1952) Chaplin's turn as a faded, forgotten clown allows him to explore several of his demons. Old age, love and fame come to the fore and Chaplin's self-obsession and desire to entertain makes the treatment of these subjects both insightful and uplifting. The tantalisingly brief slapstick scene that pairs Chaplin and Buster Keaton simply has to be seen.

The Limey (Steven Soderbergh, 1999) Picking up steam after 1998's Out of Sight, Soderbergh made this gently experimental thriller, enlivening a Get Carter-esque revenge tale with bursts of New Wave nerviness. Terrence Stamp is both brutal and bemused as he ransacks LA in search of his daughter; the narrative flickers back and forth with his moods - a delicate touch.

Liquid Sky (Slava Tsukerman, 1982) Aliens arrive in New York to feed off its downtown heroin addicts, but find they prefer snuffing out humans in the throes of sexual ecstasy. Russian emigre Slava Tsukerman's low-budget fantasy provides an invaluable time capsule of American New Wavers at their weirdest and grittiest.

Little Big Man (Arthur Penn, 1970) An epic anti-western that busily debunks the myths and lays bare a guilt-ridden past. Dustin Hoffman stars as the 121-year-old Jack Crabb, who claims to have been at Custer's last stand and drunk with Wild Bill Hickok. Is he a hero, or a liar? Either way it's a colourful, funny and intelligent tale.

Little Caesar (Mervyn LeRoy, 1931) Like The Public Enemy, Little Caesar depends on its lead performance for its power, rather than its script or direction. Robinson has little of Cagney's swaggering charisma, but his Rico Bandello, remorseless, crude, unstoppable, has not one redeeming feature, making him one of the first all-out anti-heroes in American cinema.

The Little Thief (Claude Miller, 1988) Truffaut's last script, filmed after his death by his former production manager Miller. The central figure is a distaff version of the Antoine Doinel of *The 400 Blows*: a teenage girl whose lapse into petty crime is more a result of a difficult upbringing than any innate nastiness. Serious, frowning Charlotte Gainsbourg is faultless in the role.

Live Flesh (Pedro Almodóvar, 1997) Who said Ruth Rendell adaptations had to be staid British affairs? Almodóvar's version of Rendell's 1986 thriller is gloriously overcooked and very Spanish. We have Javier Bardem as a wheelchair-bound basketball ace, an inspired opening birth sequence, murder, voyeurism, revenge and family secrets.

The Lives of Others (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006) The title works in many ways, as this German Oscar-winner revisits the otherworldly climate of paranoia behind the Iron Curtain and charts a complicated power-play between people who never knowingly meet. On one side, a repressed Stasi officer; on the other, a bohemian stage couple under suspicion. Despite the drab settings, the tension is exhilarating.

Local Hero (Bill Forsyth, 1983) A movie that did a big favour for Scottish tourism (not to mention Mark Knopfler's bank account). Even if its portrait of gentle village life was essentially a fiction, it was one the world was happily taken in by, as sure as Burt Lancaster's big American oil men were.

The Lodger (Alfred Hitchcock, 1926) Subtitled *A Story of the London Fog* and based on the Jack the Ripper killings, this was the most accomplished of Hitchcock's silent films, the atmosphere heavy as the pea-souper air. And you can see the young master working on his signature motif, the question of whether mysterious lodger Ivor Novello is innocent or guilty of serial murder...

Logan's Run (Michael Anderson, 1976) The following year's *Star Wars* not only made the shopping-mall futurism and clunky miniature work seen here seem like yesterday's news, it also put a long-term stop to such intelligent, conceptual science-fiction. The notion of a computer-controlled world that survives by killing its citizens at age 30 is undeniably powerful. Though it presents a heavily revamped and sanitised version of the novel, glimpses of the source material's sex, drugs and robot violence are present throughout.

Lola (Jacques Demy, 1961) Anouk Aimée turns on the charm in Demy's debut film - she plays a bubbly cabaret girl (a sort of New Wave Marlene Dietrich) still waiting for her lover to come back to Nantes seven years after he left her. Like all the best *Nouvelle Vague*, it's slapdash and infectious - and brilliantly communicates its sheer pleasure in cinema itself.

Lolita (Stanley Kubrick, 1962) Adapted by Nabokov from his own novel, this censor-baiting love story features a suavely funny performance by James Mason as the lecturer who romances housewife Shelley Winters to get to her 15-year-old daughter, Sue Lyon. If it doesn't quite capture the glittering facility of Nabokov's writing, Kubrick's movie still works as an enjoyably sinister sexual comedy.

London (Patrick Keiller, 1994) Fascinating curio about one man's attempt to get a metaphysical grip on the capital via a psychogeographical picaresque around town. Presented as a series of long, static shots accompanied by Paul Schofield's burbling, factual-fictional narration, it delves into literary, political and public London past and present, and manages a fair few esoteric revelations along the way.

Lonely Are the Brave (David Miller, 1962) A thoughtful, affecting contemporary western with Kirk Douglas as an old-fashioned outlaw: a lone horseman pursued by sympathetic sheriff Walter Matthau's helicopters and jeeps. The formerly blacklisted Dalton Trumbo's script is an elegy to a vanished time, while Philip Lathrop's stark monochrome photography is bleakly stunning.

The Long Good Friday (John Mackenzie, 1980) A state-of-the-nation movie about the manners and morals of emergent Thatcherism, cunningly disguised as a brutal British gangster thriller. Bob Hoskins' gangland boss completely reinvigorated a stale archetype, and the film, like *Performance* and *Get Carter*, demonstrates the never-ending versatility of the British gangster genre.

The Long Goodbye (Robert Altman, 1973) Altman revamped the detective noir by relocating private eye Philip Marlowe to the drug-addled and materialistic California of the Me Decade, where he's beleaguered by criminal charges, mob entanglements, and a very cranky cat. Altman's whimsical feat of genre deconstruction is a stoned and wondrous dream of a movie.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003) Tolkien's fantasy epic was widely held to be unfilmable, but with advanced special effects, a bit of Kiwi know-how and a country that would double as a stage set, Jackson pulled it off. The scale is breathtaking, but the movies are finely crafted down to the smallest detail.

Lost in La Mancha (Keith Fulton And Louis Pepe, 2002) Strange as it is to see a making-of documentary with no completed film, this shows just how much of a juggling act it is to get a movie made. The story of Don Quixote had previously flummoxed even Orson Welles. Terry Gilliam's giggle turns from joyous to unhinged as his film is brought to its knees by illness, incompetence and, apparently, an angry god.

Lost in Translation (Sofia Coppola, 2003) Two people are lost, and they find each other, albeit briefly. Young bride Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) has tagged along with her antic photographer husband to Tokyo, where she's lonely and adrift. Bob (Bill Murray) feels much the same, with an added dollop of embarrassment, as he's in town to make a cheesy liquor ad. Charlotte and Bob happen to meet one night because neither of them can sleep; they spark a friendship, and then they part on bittersweet terms. That's all there is and all there needs to be in *Lost in Translation*, a gossamer portrait of dislocation, regret, and cautious hope. Sofia Coppola's mood piece captivates because it's hard to pin down. It's not a straight drama, but it's not really a comedy, either. It's romantic, but it's not a romance - at least, not a consummated one. The jet-lagged protagonists seem to regard their surroundings as a strange dream, full of longing. And each stands on a threshold: Bob's midlife impasse is the counterpart to Charlotte's youthful identity crisis, and both of them are struggling to wake up to discover just who they want to be.

The Lost World (Harry O Hoyt, 1925) To give you an idea of both how revolutionary and of how old this film is: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Houdini previewed cuts of the dinosaur footage to an amazed meeting of the usually-skeptical American Magicians Society. The work of animator Willis O'Brien, who later brought King Kong to life, adds immeasurably to what was already an incredibly entertaining adventure yarn.

Loulou (Maurice Pialat, 1980) An early triumph for Pialat, this features the heartstoppingly young and guileless-looking Isabelle Huppert, then 27 years old, but looking far younger. She plays a well-to-do woman trapped in an abusive relationship with an older lover. Defying him, she moves in with sexy wastrel and ex-jailbird G  rard D  pardieu, and begins a new life of passion, anger and self-discovery. Much praised for the raw, risky performances.

Love Is the Devil (John Maybury, 1998) Maybury not only gives us an Orton-esque love story about the unlikely romance between Francis Bacon (Derek Jacobi) and petty burglar George Dyer (Daniel Craig), he also provides a memorable evocation of decadent Soho bohemia in all its seedy pomp. This is the world of Muriel Belcher, John Deakin and Daniel Farson - low-lives, often from high-born backgrounds, railing against the dreariness and hypocrisy of British society.

The Lovers (Louis Malle, 1958) "I know it when I see it, and the motion picture in this case is not that." Thus spake US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in 1960. "It" was obscenity, and the motion picture was *The Lovers*, a still erotic, sexually torrid meditation on what a bored bourgeois Frenchwoman (Jeanne Moreau) really wants.

The Lovers on the Bridge (Leos Carax, 1991) Brash, harrowing and melodramatic, Carax's movie created a sensation at the time. It is about homeless people on Paris's Pont Neuf bridge: Juliette Binoche is Michele, an artist who is going blind; Denis Lavant is the druggie street performer who falls for her, and then fears that a new eye treatment could end her reliance on him. Watching it needs a sense of humour, and a sense of absurdity.

Loves of a Blonde (Milos Forman, 1965) A key entry in the Czech New Wave, exemplifying that short-lived movement's characteristic mix of sly satire and observational camerawork. Hana Brechov   is brilliantly unaffected as the naive girl of the title; thwarted in love, she triggers a cute comedy of embarrassment by following the dashing object of her affections to his family home. One to savour.

M (Fritz Lang, 1931) While others were savouring the novelty of talking pictures, Lang, as usual, was thinking much further ahead, unearthing subject matter that we're still fascinated with today: serial killers and police investigations. What's more, Peter Lorre's child-murderer is almost the hero of the piece, and the rest of society comes in for a pasting: inept police, hypocritical criminals, even neglectful parents.

M Hulot's Holiday (Jacques Tati, 1953) Star, director, producer and co-writer of the *Monsieur Hulot* cycle, Tati launched his revered alter ego in this 1953 satire, set in a stuffy beachside resort. Hulot, a likeable brainless hero whose cheerful enthusiasm gets him into misadventures, unwittingly disrupts the guests' peace and quiet in a series of hilarious dialogue-free slapstick episodes. Physical comedy at its finest.

Mad Max (George Miller, 1979) Miller's future-vision of a barren, petrol-starved Australia run by feral biker tribes still has gut-wrenching throttle, with cop Mel Gibson flipping from tender to brutal when his young family are murdered. The film may have grown out of the 1970s oil crisis, but given current events, it's gaining in relevance once more.

Made in Britain (Alan Clarke, 1982) Stories about charismatic skinhead-fascists are now almost a distinct genre; this is the great original, made for TV by Alan Clarke and featuring a blazingly powerful performance from the 16-year-old Tim Roth as angry, alienated young Trevor, who flaunts rightwing associations, but is not attached to any tribe, and ferociously challenges authority at every step.

The Magnificent Seven (John Sturges, 1960) What a grand example of cultural exchange this is: the iconography of the classic American western of John Ford gets transplanted eastwards by Akira Kurosawa, where it is made over anew as the evergreen *Seven Samurai*, before being reimported into America by studio pro John Sturges as a cold war western. It stands now as an unmistakable product of naive Kennedy-era ideology: the White Man boldly takes up the cudgels of Democracy and Economic Self-Determination on behalf of his Weaker Brethren among the Lesser Breeds. That said, it's still one of those movies whose narrative drive and do-gooding intentions will get under your skin forever if you see it before the age of 10. Shooting around Churubasco Studios in Mexico, Sturges never slackens his hold on the strands of his story and is helped enormously by the kind of once-in-a-decade cast that produces an entire generation of new stars. This was the movie that established Steve McQueen and James Coburn as men to watch; offered an iconic Yul Brynner in Village-People-tight black duds, a dandy-dapper Robert Vaughn (a squeaky-clean proto-Kyle MacLachlan) before UNCLE snapped him up; and made the bashed-in, semi-Mongolian face of the former Charles Buchinski (aka Charles Bronson) acceptable for heroic roles. So we can perhaps forgive Eli Wallach his unpardonable accent (is he Irish or Mexican?) and all those knock-kneed campesinos in their silly white outfits and comical hats. And let's not forget Elmer Bernstein's unforgettable score.

Magnolia (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999) Anderson pushes his propensity for domestic grand opera to the limit for this three-hour ensemble piece. It sustains high note after high note of explosive ardour, grief, and regret - at one point, everyone breaks into song - while the climax of climaxes achieves Biblical proportions.

Mallrats (Kevin Smith 1995) Disaffected youth was never so attractive as embodied in the slick, witty irreverence of Smith's banter between slackers killing time in a suburban mall. The second in Smith's sharp-tongued trilogy flopped at the box office, but remains a cult favourite with fans, with one of the best masturbation gags in movie history.

The Maltese Falcon (John Huston, 1941) "Ah, yes, sir, the stuff dreams are made of." You can still hear Sydney Greenstreet doing the talk, watch the simper on Peter Lorre's face, and see the curl in Bogart's mouth as Mary Astor starts lying again. John Huston's first film, straight from the pages of Dashiell Hammett. Untouchable.

Mamma Roma (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1962) Pasolini's second film, and one custom designed to hold the tempestuous persona of Anna Magnani. In an Italian answer to *Mother Courage*, she plays the allegorical symbol of the Italian capital - a prostitute, what else? - who can't escape her situation whatever spirit she shows. All in all, an early summation of Pasolini's key themes.

Man Bites Dog (Remy Belvaux, Andre Bonzel, Beno-t Poelvoorde, 1992) One of the great Euro-hardcore shockers, a horribly violent satire of reality TV and a prurient, materialist society. An eyewitness news team follows around a freelance assassin-cum-serial-killer who despatches dozens of victims in the most stomach-turningly explicit way, always threatening to turn his attentions to the camera-crew, who finally join in the horror.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (John Ford, 1962) This key Ford western introduces a late note of cynicism to his romantic vision. It's about how idealistic lawyer James Stewart brings law and literacy to the town of Shinbone, his confrontation with the villain of the title (Lee Marvin), staunch rancher John Wayne's part in it, and how the truth gets lost: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

The Man Who Would Be King (John Huston, 1975) Michael Caine and Sean Connery combine to superb effect in this Kipling adaptation; they play two British adventurers heading through the Khyber Pass to points north in search of a mythical kingdom to loot. Rendered with muscularity by he-man director Huston.

Man With a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929) A film whose stated mission was to craft an "absolute language of cinema" - a mission it pursued single-mindedly and largely accomplished. Its restless camerawork, rapid-fire editing and brazen transparency are as revolutionary as its maker's politics.

The Man With the Golden Arm (Otto Preminger, 1955) New ground was broken by Preminger here, with edgy subject matter - heroin addiction - that was released into cinemas without the approval of Hollywood's Production Code. It's also one of Frank Sinatra's most worthwhile film performances - he plays a would-be drummer battling the big H in a manner approximating realism. Saul Bass' pioneering title sequence is the capper.

The Man With Two Brains (Carl Reiner, 1983) Steve Martin perfects his lovable schlub persona in this goofy homage to 1950s sci-fi. He's a neurosurgeon married to ice queen Kathleen Turner, who contrives to refrain from marital relations at every possible occasion. While taking what he hopes will be a romantically-inspiring trip to Vienna he falls for Sissy Spacek. She'd be the perfect woman for him, if only she wasn't a disembodied brain in a jar...

The Manchurian Candidate (John Frankenheimer, 1962) Brainwashed veterans of the Korean war are mere puppets on strings for the political conspiracy that drives this peerless psychological thriller. With endless layers of sinister intrigue, the movie plays mind games with its characters and audience alike - it's a uniquely unnerving experience, as astonishing as it was 45 years ago.

Marat/Sade (Peter Brook, 1967) Peter Handke's intricate, complex play, which Brook had already produced on stage to considerable acclaim, posits the Marquis de Sade guiding a performance by the inmates of a 19th-century lunatic asylum. Brook used most of the original RSC actors in their original roles, and injects a suitable dose of cinematic energy; the result is far more than simply a filmed play.

Marathon Man (John Schlesinger, 1976) After his government agent brother Roy Scheider is killed by Nazi war criminal Laurence Olivier, history student Dustin Hoffman finds himself sucked into an international conspiracy featuring missing diamonds, trust-no-one paranoia and intense toothache. A breathless, tautly-paced thriller with a terrifying torture centerpiece that did for dentists what Jaws did for beaches.

The Marriage of Maria Braun (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1978) There's a Sirkian lustre to this story of Maria (Hanna Schygulla), who marries Hermann (Klaus Lowitsch) as the bombs rain down in wartime Germany, then in his absence builds a life as another man's mistress. It's the travails of postwar Germany, writ small and bitterly personal, in one of the most accessible of Fassbinder's provocative tales.

M*A*S*H (Robert Altman, 1970) Altman's cynical take on the Korean war, as seen through the eyes of a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, broke new ground by mixing graphic medical scenes with tasteless pranks (courtesy of swaggering surgeons Elliot Gould and Donald Sutherland). Their anti-establishment gags may have less shock value these days, but it's still a freewheeling treat.

Mask of Satan (Mario Bava, 1960) Beautifully photographed gothic-horror tale, adapted from Gogol, that still reeks of creepy atmospherics. Barbara Steele made her name in the double role of an aristocratic witch and the hapless descendant she haunts some 200 years later.

Matewan (John Sayles, 1987) Sayles, the original American independent, pays tribute to the inter-war "Wobblies" and their sainted place in the American labour movement, and to the great 1954 blacklist classic *Salt of the Earth*, with his stirring, harrowing account of the mining wars in 1920s West Virginia.

The Matrix (Larry and Andy Wachowski, 1999) Keanu Reeves is the computer hacker trying to make sense of a grim, futuristic world in the eye-poppingly inventive sci-fi actioner. Sleekly styled in suits, skin-tight leather and sunglasses, an athletic cast perform the gravity-defying stunts to perfection. A cult classic.

A Matter of Life and Death (Stairway to Heaven) (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressberger, 1946) An intensely English fantasy starring David Niven and Kim Hunter, about a second world war airman fatally shot down who petitions the heavenly authorities to be allowed to live, so that he can be with the American radio-operator with whom he fell in love, by voice alone, as his plane ditched. A film that is at once a playful miniature of innocent love and grandiose epic.

McCabe & Mrs Miller (Robert Altman, 1971) A characteristically irreverent spin on the western from the late master, with Warren Beatty as the hard-drinking gambler who partners with Julie Christie's opium-smoking madam. The imagery evokes a glowing daguerreotype, backed by Leonard Cohen's melancholy songs and culminating in one of the saddest, most beautiful endings in 70s cinema.

Me and You and Everyone We Know (Miranda July, 2005) Art-world darling Miranda July measures the distances between people in a suburban LA neighbourhood and knits together oddball comedies of attraction and repulsion. Pensive and whimsical, the film imagines a heightened reality where characters verbalise their thoughts and desires without subjecting them to the usual filters first.

Me Without You (Sandra Goldbacher, 2001) The all-absorbing, mutually destructive friendship between two teenage girls is the rich, but rarely examined, terrain that Goldbacher mines here. Anna Friel is the suburban glamour-puss, Michelle Williams her dorky pal; their relationship burns hot, then cold, as they explore what 1970s and 80s London has to offer.

Mean Girls (Mark Waters, 2004) The perfect model of the class divide that is the American high school gets a bitchy facelift and acidic new vocab in SNL stalwart Tina Fey's witty black comedy. A pre-rehab Lindsay Lohan is strangely endearing as the home-

schooled innocent whose squeaky-voiced metamorphosis into a plastic airhead owes a debt to Michael Lehmann's much darker Heathers.

Mean Streets (Martin Scorsese, 1973) Scorsese's autobiographical breakthrough is a breathless trip through Little Italy, where the streets are paved and policed by organised crime. The film asks an urgent and perhaps impossible question: in a corrupt and brutal environment, how do you define a moral code and stick to it?

Meet Me in St Louis (Vincente Minnelli, 1944) A warm-hearted, deeply nostalgic anthem to family values, with Minnelli directing wife-to-be Judy Garland as one of the happy Smith brood of St Louis. There's panic when Dad (Leon Ames) threatens to relocate to ugly New York, but songs such as Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas suggest they'll pull through. Probably the best rainy-Sunday movie ever.

Meet the Parents (Jay Roach, 2000) Snappy comedy that sees male nurse Ben Stiller trying to win over prospective father-in-law Robert De Niro - an ex-CIA agent who still knows his way around a lie detector. De Niro brings the full force of his unhinged screen persona to the role, the perfect straight man to Stiller's slapstick underachiever.

Memento (Christopher Nolan, 2000) A thriller-as-jigsaw-puzzle that gives a clever spin to the revenge tragedy, with a hero (Guy Pearce in his break-out role) whose actions are confined by a severely limited short-term memory, and whose body is accordingly covered in cryptic "reminder" tattoos. You'd think it would beat a Post-It note, but they spell nothing but confusion for the conflicted protagonist.

Memories of Murder (Joon-Ho Bong, 2003) It's not easy to make a film that's both gripping and hilarious, but this superb South Korean thriller pulls it off. Reconstructing the hunt for a 1980s serial killer, it's a tragicomic catalogue of police ineptitude but also a snapshot of the country at its most paranoid, braced for attack from the North.

Memories of Underdevelopment (Tomas Gutiérrez Alea, 1968) When his family leaves Cuba for Miami, a blocked writer stays put, but feels displaced from his rapidly changing society. A landmark of Cuban cinema, the film does double duty as an empathic character study and a political allegory about the intelligentsia's detachment from everyday life in post-revolutionary Cuba.

Men in Black (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997) Shackling the Will Smith roadshow for one of 1997's flagship releases, Sonnenfeld managed a minor subversive miracle for a blockbuster: bringing MiB in trim at just under 100 minutes. The obligatory hardware scene, in which Smith's extra-terrestrial bail bondsman tries out "the Mighty Cricket", a speck of a gun, sums up the film's style: small, with a very hefty kick.

Mephisto (Istvan Szabo, 1981) An actor sells his soul to the Nazi party while pretending to himself that it's all a necessary performance - his most challenging role - in Szabo's Faustian tale. As suits a film about acting, it centres on Klaus Maria Brandauer's multifaceted performance as a man without morals, whose flaws none the less remain recognisably human.

Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927) Straight outta Weimar, the blueprint film for sci-fi spectaculars arrived way back in 1927. Actors (Gustav Fröhlich as a disillusioned scion, Brigitte Helm's gentle revolutionary) are merely pawns in Lang's monumental allegory of the mass-industrial age, freshly forged in incandescent expressionist imagery.

Metropolitan (Whit Stillman, 1990) Whit Stillman's charming, autobiographical debut brings an insider's knowledge but an outsider's critical stance to the university-age scions of the Upper East Side aristocracy, home for an eventful winter break. The movie ribs its wealthy characters for their assorted vanities and juvenile myopia with sharp wit but no cruelty.

Microcosmos (Claude Nuridsany, Marie Pérennou, 1996) Something like Planet Earth meets Koyaanisqatsi, this mesmerising little French-made treat takes a faintly psychedelic approach to the nature doc. Concentrating on insect life, with the zoom apparently jammed at x500 throughout, it's chock-full of psychotropically vivid footage of minuscule beasties that look, cliché or not, weirder than any sci-fi.

Midnight Cowboy (John Schlesinger, 1969) At the vanguard of the raw, disaffected, auteur-led films that saw off the old studio order, Midnight Cowboy is another voguish attack on the American Dream. But the film's real pulse, beating loudly, is the doomed friendship between naive hustler Jon Voight and Dustin Hoffman's lame-footed Ratso Rizzo, devastatingly played.

Midnight Run (Martin Brest, 1988) One of the greatest buddy - and road - movies of all time. Robert de Niro acquits himself admirably but the real challenge of his role was to go up against Charles Grodin, who can turn even the act of ordering a breakfast into a hilarious and dry exchange. And if you ever thought there could be no artistry to swearing, then watch this movie.

Mikey and Nicky (Elaine May, 1976) Peter Falk and John Cassavetes are small-time mobsters and longtime friends, and director Elaine May is less interested in their underworld activities than in their everyday petty annoyances and the ebb and flow of their conversation. Loose and improvisational, the movie has a knack for absurd situations and rich characterisations.

Mildred Pierce (Michael Curtiz, 1945) A murder play, a fevered soap opera and a twisted valentine to the power of motherly love. Joan Crawford - resplendent in big hats and mink coats - won an Oscar for her tour de force in the title role, but co-star Ann Blyth (playing the deadly daughter) easily matches her, step for step.

Miller's Crossing (Joel Coen, 1990) The Coen brothers update the 30s gangster movie with this expert thriller, as sleek and cold as it is tangled with intrigue. The film-makers concoct some terrifically off-kilter noir dialogue for their excellent cast, including Gabriel Byrne as the morally confused anti-hero and Marcia Gay Harden as a firecracker of a femme fatale.

Million Dollar Baby (Clint Eastwood, 2004) Considerably superior to writer Paul Haggis's subsequent directorial debut Crash, Million Dollar Baby is a wrenching emotional masterpiece and a rare deserved best picture Oscar winner. What looks like a standard boxing flick takes a sharp turn into darkness; pugilist Hillary Swank is on no-nonsense top form, while Eastwood sticks to the tragic pathway with unrelenting severity.

Mirror (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975) Tarkovsky's richest and most resonant work recreates his childhood in utterly magical fashion. With its sudden switches between the countryside and the city, childhood and adult, the storytelling is impressionistic, even baffling; what lingers in the memory are the extraordinarily lyrical imagery of the fields and the woods, accompanied on the soundtrack by poetry from the director's father Arseny.

The Misfits (John Huston, 1961) The final outing for both stars, as Clark Gable's ageing rustler falls for Marilyn Monroe's sexy divorcee. Their unlikely love affair is played out in black and white against the unforgiving Nevada landscape, as Monroe rails against her treatment by men and desperately tries to save the mustangs intended for dog food.

Modern Times (Charlie Chaplin, 1936) The swansong of Chaplin's Little Tramp was by no means a forlorn farewell, instead marking his reluctant transition into the world of sound with a mechanical symphony that matched his visual attack on the automated world. The comic mastery remains the same, with a series of sight gags that ensure Chaplin's status as an unparalleled clown, and the sophistication of his thinking prefigures his upcoming *The Great Dictator*.

Mon Oncle (Jacques Tati, 1958) Mr Bean's direct ancestor: a bouncy bumbling bachelor visits his sister's ultramodern suburban home, automated with push-button gadgets and new-fangled plastics, and wreaks havoc. Tati's Oscar-winning satire on the trappings of a technology-driven society is an extravaganza of visual gags, comical sound design and dazzlingly weird sets that still hold up beautifully a half-century later.

Monsieur Hire (Patrice Leconte, 1989) Moody psychological thriller adapted from a Simenon novel, that focuses on lonely retiring bachelor Michel Blanc, an obsessive secret observer of his pretty young neighbour, Sandrine Bonnaire. When a woman in the neighbourhood is murdered, Monsieur Hire's bizarre habits makes him a prime suspect. In this subtle crime film, Leconte masterfully combines Hitchcockian precision with erotically charged voyeurism.

Monsoon Wedding (Mira Nair, 2001) Set among Delhi's burgeoning middle class, Nair's most successful film juxtaposed old and new lifestyles in modern India as relatives from around the world gather to celebrate the Verma family wedding. Beneath the comedy drama, the feel-good bhanga danceathons and pre-wedding chaos, though, secrets and lies threaten to disrupt proceedings.

Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones, 1975) If *Life of Brian* was the Pythons' most fully conceived film, this Arthurian piss-take is where the laugh-o-meter touches the highest before the engine falls out the bottom with a postmodern clunk. From Cleese's frustrated Sir Lancelot to the inscrutable Tim the Enchanter, mock-heroic is as much a command as a genre.

Monty Python's Life of Brian (Terry Jones, 1979) In the petty, crummy atmosphere of 70s Britain, just after the editor of *Gay News* had been convicted on a blasphemy charge, the Monty Python team hit back against the Christian right with a subversive comedy classic. The Pythons got some stick for their sacreligious irreverence - Mervyn Stockwood, Bishop of Southwark, appeared on television wearing an enormous cross to harangue Cleese and Palin - but their film was an instant success despite, or more probably because of the fuss. In this era of Theo Van Gogh and Sir Salman Rushdie, the fuss may seem a little tame, though with authors like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens now venting such fierce rallying cries for the intellectual respectability of radical unbelief, it may be a satire whose time has come again. *Life of Brian* was a bold and ambitious feature, breaking free of the sketch-based comedy more completely than the earlier movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. It was shot on location in the north African desert, and it featured an ordinary bloke called Brian Cohen who is mistaken for the Son of God. ("He's not the Messiah, he's a very naughty boy!" his mum declares.) There is some sharp satire of Middle East tribal politics, as epitomised by the People's Front of Judea and its splinter groups, and a gobsmacking crucifixion scene to finish with. Some defenders well-meaningly insisted that *LoB* was merely a satire on Biblical epics. But friends and foes alike knew in their hearts it was a wickedly funny send-up of organised religion and Christianity itself.

Moolade (Ousmane Sembene, 2004) The final film of Ousmane Sembene, known as the father of African cinema, is a ferocious attack on the tradition of female circumcision. It asks tough questions of the African communities which permit it, and the western liberals too timid and politically correct to challenge it. Fatoumata Couliably plays a woman who refuses to allow her 15-year-old daughter to be circumcised, and offers moolaade - a folk-tradition of protective asylum - to terrified girls from other villages who want to escape the knife.

Morvern Callar (Lynne Ramsay, 2002) An existential mood poem, set between a dead-end Scottish town and the Spanish rave scene, with Samantha Morton exuding an otherworldly charisma as the eponymous amoral heroine who pursues fun in the sun when her boyfriend kills himself. *Morvern* exists only in the moment, and through beautifully textured visuals, Ramsay renders her world extraordinary.

The Mother and the Whore (Jean Eustache, 1973) An experimental marathon drama about a ménage a trois between an unemployed Parisian dandy (Jean-Pierre Léaud), his older live-in girlfriend and a flighty young nurse who shares their flat. Hang in there: after three hours of seemingly plotless rambling and soul-searching pillow talk, Eustache masterfully captures the 1970s twentysomething generation.

Mughal E Azam (K Asif, 1960) Loosely based on the life of Mughal emperor Akbar (whose wayward son falls for the lowly courtesan Anarkali against his wishes), Asif's historical melodrama set the template for modern Indian cinema. Breaking all box office records when it was finally released, *Mughal E Azam* took nine years to make, during which colour film stock arrived in India - allowing two lavish colour musical sequences and the finale to take centre stage in an otherwise black and white epic.

Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, 2001) David Lynch, as anyone familiar with his movies can safely say, is a man with certain fixations. He loves beautiful women in trouble, especially when they're in tears. He adores doppelgangers, split personalities, and freaks of all stripes. He's attracted to clean, pretty surfaces that can be ripped aside to show the filth and depravity lurking beneath. And he's wired for stories with the associative logic of dream-tales that can spiral out into infinite possibilities or double back on themselves. This is his masterpiece: *Mulholland Drive* - a movie of such strange beauty, ingenious structure, and primal power that it transcends all preconceptions. Bonus: it's also very funny. "I just came from Deep River, Ontario, and now I'm in this . . . dream place," says new Hollywood arrival Betty (the astonishing Naomi Watts) to the raven-haired amnesiac who calls herself Rita (Laura Elena Harring). As Betty investigates the enigma of Rita's identity - which is somehow connected to the sinister forces meddling with a film by a young hotshot director (Justin Theroux) - *Mulholland Drive* operates as a detective story, an acerbic Hollywood satire, a passionate romance, and a noir with competing femmes fatales. Famously, the narrative splits open and scrambles itself in midstream - but this puzzle has a solution, one that reveals the movie as a heartbreaking fever

dream built on wish-fulfilling fantasy and the madness of unrequited love. The dream place, as it turns out, is a hallucinatory nightmare, but one of such beauty that it's no wonder that so many are drawn to its devouring flame.

Muriel's Wedding (PJ Hogan, 1994) Quirky Oz humour can often be hit or miss, but this tragicomedy is a weird and wonderful joy, largely down to Toni Collette's marvellously sweet turn as Muriel, who just wants to get married and away from her bizarre family. Rachel Griffiths makes a memorable debut in the spunky best friend role of a lifetime.

My Architect (Nathaniel Kahn, 2003) Supremely affecting documentary portrait of architect Louis Kahn by his (illegitimate) son, excavating both the complicated relationship between the two, and also the sublime public legacy of Kahn's buildings. Personal film-making that draws you into its world.

My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, 1985) Bitter strands of scathing anti-Thatcherism are woven into the fabric of immigrant idealism in this groundbreaking Hanif Kuriishi script. Omar, son of Pakistani intellectual, and his childhood friend and former racist thug Johnny (a phenomenal early performance from Daniel Day Lewis) embark on an illicit love affair as they rebuild Omar's greedy uncle's laundrette, while the elder generation lament their lost culture.

My Brilliant Career (Gillian Armstrong, 1979) Judy Davis gives a complex performance as the precocious feminist resisting marriage in this subtle coming-of-age drama. Set at the turn of the century, Armstrong's film deftly evokes the repressively patriarchal society of rural Australia.

My Childhood (Bill Douglas, 1972) This harsh evocation of childhood in the 1940s Scottish mining village of Newcraighall was the first part of a memorable trilogy by Douglas, the others being *My Ain Folk* and *My Way Home*. It's only 45 minutes long, but with an utterly convincing cast of characters and a defiant air of compassion to soothe the bleak, monochrome photography, it packs a considerable punch.

My Darling Clementine (John Ford, 1946) Not the most accurate, but certainly the most poetic screen account of the gunfight at the OK Corral. Ford turns the historic showdown into an allegory of the civilising of the west, of how the wilderness is turned into a garden. Fine, measured, performances from Henry Fonda as Earp and Victor Mature as Doc Holliday.

My Dinner With Andre (Louis Malle, 1981) Over a lavish dinner, Wallace Shawn and Andre Gregory - but mostly Gregory - talk about life, spirituality, avant-garde theatre in Poland, and other capacious topics. Full of epiphanies, the movie itself almost seems like a dare: can you make a movie out of nothing but two people talking?

My Fair Lady (George Cukor, 1964) Deeply romantic musical, with Audrey Hepburn as the cockney flower girl striving to be a proper-speakin' lady, and Rex Harrison as the arrogant linguist who makes a project of her. Hepburn is wonderful as ever, despite famously lacking vocal talent - her songs were dubbed by Marni Nixon.

My Left Foot (Jim Sheridan, 1989) Daniel Day-Lewis raised the bar for method actors by learning to paint with his foot in this inspiration story of Christy Brown, a writer born with cerebral palsy in the slums of old Dublin. Refusing to canonize the irascible Christy, Day-Lewis inhabits both his crippled body and irrepressible mindset, fashioning a truly inspirational performance.

My Life as a Dog (Lasse Hallstrom, 1985) Hallstrom made his name with earnest homages to Ingmar Bergman in disguised as Abba videos. By 1985 he was ready to move to this sweet coming-of-age movie, set in the rural Sweden of the 1950s. Hallstrom brings the best out of a young cast and perfectly captures the confusions and disappointments of early adolescence.

My Life to Live (Jean-Luc Godard, 1962) Godard seems influenced in equal measure by Brecht and Zola in this stylish but grim study of a young woman (Anna Karina) forced into prostitution. For all the self-reflexive devices (the way the story is told in tableaux, the references to Carl Dreyer etc.), the film is as compelling as any 19th Century melodrama about a doomed heroine.

My Night With Maud (Eric Rohmer, 1969) A devout Catholic (Jean Louis Trintignant) falls for a pretty blonde stranger during mass, but somehow ends up spending the night in an interminable philosophical discussion with her. Rohmer's pithy all-talk-no-action moral tale is a formalist but seductive meditation on Pascal and mysteries of the heart.

My Summer of Love (Pawel Pawlikowski, 2004) Working-class teenager Mona (Natalie Press) forms an intense relationship with boarding school sophisticate Tamsin (Emily Blunt) in an engrossing psychological drama. As the summer progresses, swooning obsession gives way to a building sense of unease. Pawlikowski gets terrific performances from the young cast.

Naked (Mike Leigh, 1993) Disturbing study of misanthropy and misogyny in early 90s Britain. Brimming with bilious intelligence, David Thewlis gives the performance of his career as a mouthy Manc who turns up in London looking for an old girlfriend. His wanderings through the city's underbelly offer a bleak vision of inner-city decay and alienation.

The Naked Gun (David Zucker, 1988) The gag-packed style of David Zucker and his writing partner Jim Abrahams first entered moviegoers' consciousness with their classic sketch-film *Kentucky Fried Movie*. *The Naked Gun* is a zany cop romp, dependent on the deadpan style of Zucker/Abrahams stalwart Leslie Nielsen, as incompetent lawman Lt Frank Drebin.

The Nanny (Seth Holt, 1965) One of Hammer's less blood-soaked productions, *The Nanny* was perhaps its most psychologically effective, a creepy monochrome thriller casting Bette Davis against type as a family nanny who may or may not have a psychopathic bent. Davis plays the ambiguity to perfection, feeding from the paranoia of both the viewer and her accusing young charge to create an atmospheric and queasy study of trust.

Nanook of the North (Robert J Flaherty, 1922) Yes, Robert Flaherty may have cheated: making fly-on-the-wall documentaries about Inuit hunters in the 1920s wasn't easy. Still, even if some scenes are staged, this is a remarkable achievement which shows the harshness and beauty of Nanook's Arctic life. Nanook died of starvation not long after the film was made.

Napoleon (Abel Gance, 1927) What can Abel Gance do with the camera next? Put it in a snowball - or make it three in one of his delirious triptych effects? This is history written in black-and-white lightning, a film as much in love with its medium as with its solemn, diminutive hero. Restored in the 80s, with Carl Davis music, it's close to opera.

Nashville (Robert Altman, 1975) This knits together the lives of 24 characters as they gather for a music festival and a political assassination. All the Altman trademarks are here: overlapping dialogue, a crazy cast of egomaniacs and broken-winged birds, the cynicism, great music. "We must be doing something right to last 200 years..." Altman begs to differ.

Near Dark (Kathryn Bigelow, 1987) The vampire myth is relocated to the American south-west and mixed with the hormonally-exaggerated melodrama native to teenage romance. Full of gory sight gags, this is a movie in which making-out, making curfew and making a good impression with your girlfriend's clique are life-or-death propositions.

Night and the City (Jules Dassin, 1950) Dassin, who created a noir classic with his New York-set *Naked City*, does something similar for London here, to create a truly original thriller. Richard Widmark plays Harry, the whining wrestling promoter stalked by local hoods through an underworld that would do the Big Apple proud: "You're a dead man, Harry Fabian, a dead man."

A Night at the Opera (Sam Wood, Edmund Goulding, 1935) Using gags - some written by Buster Keaton - that they'd extensively road-tested on stage, the Marx Brothers really hit their stride with this revue-style romp. MGM's studio interference resulted in a limp romantic subplot and too many musical numbers, but these just provide a brief respite from the dizzying wordplay and sight gags of the Marxes at full steam.

The Night of the Hunter (Charles Laughton, 1955) Robert Mitchum's famous eyes emit a sleepy brand of pure evil as his murderous "Reverend" gets a family in his crosshairs. Laughton's only directorial job is withering toward religion, Puritanism and anyone who might romanticise childhood, but it also has a primal power - like a child's nightmare rewritten as an ancient fable.

Night of the Living Dead (George A Romero, 1968) The civil rights movement, McCarthyism, Vietnam: the first zombie film, as we've come to recognise them, bends to any and all of these interpretations thanks to single-minded execution. Skipping the garish satire of the sequels, it corrals the principals (ie the meat) in a Pennsylvania farmhouse: a brilliant distillation of a society under attack from without and within.

Nightmare Alley (Edmund Goulding, 1947) A criminally neglected carnival noir, with Tyrone Power playing against type as a phoney mystic set on a ruthless course of self-betterment. He starts off wallowing in fairground squalor, Freaks-style; several dupes later he's spiritualising for the wealthy - though his schtick is destined to come unstuck.

A Nightmare on Elm Street (Wes Craven, 1984) With all the wisecracking sequels that followed, it's easy to forget what a strong and effective idea a killer who could get you in your dreams originally was. Most horror-movie villains rely on their victims being dumb enough to wander into a dark cellar on their own; Freddie Krueger just needed them to fall asleep.

Nights Of Cabiria (Federico Fellini, 1957) Giulietta Masina used to joke that it was her recipe for tomato sauce that enraptured her husband Fellini. Her brilliance as an actress also clearly lured him. Here, reviving a character seen fleetingly in *White Sheik*, she excels as a fiery and resourceful prostitute. Life keeps on knocking her down, but she is always able to pick herself up.

Nil By Mouth (Gary Oldman, 1997) It's telling that Oldman, despite the acclaim for his debut, hasn't directed anything else - the autobiographical *Nil By Mouth* feels like an unrepeatable necessity. An unremitting account of a south London family ruled over by an alcoholic father (Ray Winstone, with his capacity for violence), it's all the more remarkable there are chinks of empathy and forgiveness, too.

Ninotchka (Ernst Lubitsch, 1939) "Garbo Laughs" was the astonishing poster line heralding the glacial Swedish actress's appearance in a comedy. Lubitsch coaxes a wonderful performance from her as the ultra-earnest Soviet commissar who learns there is more to life than five-year-plans on a trip to the decadent USA.

The Ninth Configuration (William Peter Blatty, 1980) According to Blatty, his novel *The Exorcist* wasn't so much about demonic possession as it was an exploration of theology. In that sense, he's correct in claiming this to be a sequel. Set in a military insane asylum, Blatty delivers an intriguing black comedy. Not only does he carry on themes from *The Exorcist*, one of the inmates is the astronaut Linda Blair warned would "die up there".

El Norte (Gregory Nava, 1983) The perilous journey across the Mexican-American border is the subject of this simple-yet-brilliant treatment of the relationship between the US and its Central American cousins. Two Guatemalan kids make their way north with only *Good Housekeeping* magazine to inspire them; theirs is the rough end of the American dream.

North By Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959) Why is everyone chasing Cary Grant - or trying to get him into bed? Because the fate of the world is at stake; or, if not quite that, the happiness of Eva Marie Saint. Hitchcock at his most entertaining, ignoring realism and walking all over George Washington's face.

Nosferatu: a Symphony of Terror (FW Murnau, 1922) Murnau's prototype vampire movie is a rich, strange and alluring creature. Scuttling between the expressionist sets comes Max Schreck's feral, pointy-eared bloodsucker. His arrival paved the way for a procession of refined, dapper counts - yet none were quite as scary as this.

Notorious (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946) One of Hitchcock's nastiest and most effective thrillers sees cynical CIA agent Cary Grant essentially prostituting the woman he's falling for (Ingrid Bergman, luminous) so as to net creepy, mother-fixated neo-Nazi Claude Rains in postwar Brazil. Perhaps his most sexually anguished, emotionally punishing film until *Vertigo*.

Now, Voyager (Irving Rapper, 1942) No actress fought harder to get the parts she said she deserved - and one was Charlotte Vale in *Now, Voyager*, as played by Bette Davis. She's a shy, retiring woman who becomes a mature success. She has Claude Rains and Paul Henreid, and then: "Don't let's ask for the moon, we have the stars."

Nowhere in Africa (Caroline Link, 2001) Unforgettably powerful study of a Jewish family that moves to Africa ahead of the Nazi persecution in the 1930s. Poverty in Kenya flays them of their old certainties - only their young daughter can find a way to grapple with their new life. Lushly shot with opulent, haut-bourgeois interiors giving way to the endless skies, and stirring performances from the leads.

Ocean's Eleven (Steven Soderbergh, 2001) Monumentally enjoyable Vegas caper, based on the Rat Pack movie of the same name. Director Soderbergh basks in kitsch inconsequentiality, flipping out high-stakes action sequences, urbane camaraderie and spring-loaded romantic exchanges like poker chips. Brad Pitt's sunkissed Rusty Ryan seems particularly at home.

Odd Man Out (Carol Reed, 1947) Reed's imaginary Belfast in *Odd Man Out* is as phantasmagoric and filled with menace and edgy comedy as John Ford's Dublin in *The Informer*. James Mason's tragic, wounded IRA man must make it across the night-time city before the RUC closes in on him and his gang. Of special note: a psychedelic hallucination in beer bubbles.

Of Freaks and Men (Aleksei Balabanov, 1998) An elegantly salacious Russian portrait of 20th century decadence that draws uncomfortable connections between pornography, class barriers, voyeurism and cinema itself. It's set in sepia-tinted turn-of-the-century St Petersburg, where a corrupt manufacturer of erotica infiltrates the households of the nobility, accumulating a strange coterie along the way.

Office Space (Mike Judge, 1999) Worker drones fighting stapler wars years before *The Office*. Ron Livingston's efforts to do as little as possible from the confines of his cubicle inadvertently find him targeted for promotion by the powers-that-be in this spot-on workplace satire from the *Beavis and Butt-head* creator. With Jennifer Aniston's McJob waitress as a suitably downbeat love interest.

Oldboy (Park Chan-wook, 2003) After 15 years of imprisonment in a dank room, a man bent on retribution swears to hunt down his assailants in Chan-wook's queasy shocker. It's a gonzo adventure in grievous bodily harm (crimes against teeth and tongue; a virtuoso hammer fight) and a Greek tragedy that erupts with the madness of vengeance.

Oliver Twist (David Lean, 1948) Despite Polanski's recent version, this is still the best screen Oliver, and perhaps the best Dickens of all. Wonderful larger-than-life characters lurking and chirping in a grimy workhouse London: John Howard Davies' angelic, plummy Oliver; Robert Newton's black-hearted Sikes; and Alec Guinness's comic-caricature Fagin.

Los Olvidados (Luis Bunuel, 1950) Bunuel, in Mexican exile from Francoist Spain, had his first postwar international success since the early Dali collaborations with this playful upending of the moral certainties of the Italian neorealist boom. His protagonists are slum children of Mexico City, deserving of our pity, yet never earning it thanks to their frequent acts of guilt-free brutality.

Olympia (Leni Riefenstahl, 1938) In her summing-up of the 1936 Berlin Olympiad, Leni Riefenstahl created the grammar for modern sports coverage: close-ups, low-angle shots, multiple cameras - she did it all first. When you watch the utterly lumpen official film of the 1948 London Olympics, you realise how brilliant she was. It is just a pity that her paymaster was Hitler.

The Omen (Richard Donner, 1976) Coming across like an action-oriented version of *The Exorcist*, this delivers solid thrills and standout set-piece deaths - with still the greatest decapitation scene in movie history. A slick tale of satanic reincarnation with an OTT score and Billie Whitelaw's devilish nanny stealing the show.

On the Town (Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly, 1949) This scintillating musical was the first to be shot (in one madcap week) outside the studio, on location. It fizzles with life and excitement: Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Jules Munshin are sailors on leave in New York and searching for the delectable Ivy (Vera-Ellen), all of them upstaged by gingham-clad Ann Miller.

On the Waterfront (Elia Kazan, 1954) Two brothers in the back of a New York cab, Rod Steiger and Marlon Brando, the smart guy and the one who could have been a contender. It's a classic scene in a strange picture that excuses informing (Elia Kazan had done this before he directed it) and says: don't let your son work in the docks.

Once Upon a Time in America (Sergio Leone, 1984) Leone applies the soaring, operatic approach of *Once Upon a Time in the West* to this sprawling, time-spanning saga of four teenage New York gangsters (Jewish this time, not Italian), and childhood friends who rise to power through violence and guile, but are brought down by treachery and unrequited love.

Once Upon a Time in China (Tsui Hark, 1991) Jet Li cemented his "new Bruce Lee" status with this perfect showcase. Both the lightning elegance of his martial artistry and the coolness of his acting are given full reign in the struggle of reluctant hero Wong Fei-Hung to fight the colonial powers in 19th century China.

Once Upon a Time in the West (Sergio Leone, 1968) More Puccini opera than horse-opera - thanks to Ennio Morricone's score - this Marxist western is one of the pinnacles of the genre, encompassing, by visual and thematic reference, and then subverting almost every other great (non-Spaghetti) western. Leone's enduring masterpiece.

One Eyed Jacks (Marlon Brando, 1961) Originally developed by control-freak Stanley Kubrick for outta-control freak Brando, the latter's erratic work methods meant he ended up directing this violent, oddball Oedipal western himself, with a cast that mixes the Elia Kazan stock company (Karl Malden et al) with Ford/Peckinpah saddle-tramps (Ben Johnson, Slim Pickens). Like no other western.

One False Move (Carl Franklin, 1992) After a gruesome first few minutes, Carl Franklin's sleek and chilling neo-noir settles into a crosscut rhythm, alternating between a trio of criminals on the lam and law enforcement on their trail. With a script co-written by star Billy Bob Thornton, the movie deepens through slow reveals of crucial power shifts.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Milos Forman, 1975) If he'd never made another movie, the cult of Jack Nicholson might have endured on the strength of his turn as Randle P. McMurphy, doomed embodiment of the counterculture in the day ward that is mid-century America. The movie is both comedy and tearjerker, and the ending can still give you shivers.

One Million Years BC (Don Chaffey, 1966) The movie that *Quest For Fire* was meant to obliterate, with absurdly overripe cave-gal Raquel Welch making her first indelible impact on the collective male libido. Equally memorable for Ray Harryhausen's tremendous (albeit anachronistic) stop-motion dinosaur fights.

One of Our Dinosaurs Is Missing (Robert Stevenson, 1975) Disney does London (with help from Derek Nimmo and Peter Ustinov) in a spiffing kids' caper concerning spies, nannies, some secret microfilm and much attendant ballyhoo. OK, the Chinese-baddie stereotypes are rather old hat, but they're not really nasty; and the sight of a dino skeleton's head bobbing along above the London fog is an all-time treat.

Onibaba (Kaneto Shindo, 1964) An artfully macabre horror movie that uses avant-garde flourishes and a primordial reed-bed location to bring an old folk tale to life. The focus is on two women who lure lost warriors into a hole in the ground then plunder their weapons. But a returning soldier, and a strange mask, bring out their savagery.

Orlando (Sally Potter, 1992) An impressively-mounted adaptation of Virginia Woolf that remains one of the high-water marks of British art cinema and gave Tilda Swinton an early high-profile role. With a narrative that starts in Tudor England and races through the centuries, it's still a riveting and seductive watch.

Orphée (Jean Cocteau, 1950) Cocteau's modern interpretation of the Orpheus myth proves that the most poignant magic can be realised with primitive special effects. Mixing classical mythology with his own obsessions, he set this fantastical fable of morbid love in beatnik Paris, resplendent with motorcycle boys and poet-toughs, where smitten lovers are transported into the underworld via magic mirrors.

Osama (Siddiq Barmak, 2003) The first post-Taliban film, Barmak wears the badge of a contemporary Asian film-maker - scrupulous naturalism and emotional fidelity - but with an extra, harrowing note of outrage. Marina Golbahari stars as a 12-year-old forced to disguise herself as a boy. Her unmasking is a clarion condemnation of a nightmare regime.

The Others (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001) A haunted-house movie that conjures terror out of thin air, most of it directed towards a convincingly frazzled Nicole Kidman. As the mother of two photosensitive children, she's a housebound victim of increasingly strange goings-on. There are no special effects, just unbearable tension and unfathomable mystery.

Out of Sight (Steven Soderbergh, 1998) Best-known for putting George Clooney's suave bank robber and Jennifer Lopez's curvy federal agent in the trunk of a car for a smoldering meet-cute, Soderbergh's jazzy, often hilarious caper is more than the sum of its heartthrobs. Toying with linear time, this wry nocturne is cool, sexy, and mysterious.

Out of the Past (AKA Build My Gallows High) (Jacques Tourneur, 1947) The most lyrical of all films noir, thanks to Daniel (Invasion of the Body Snatchers) Mainwaring's exquisitely poetic screenplay, Tourneur's tasteful, unforced direction, and the infernal erotic interplay between jaded idealist Robert Mitchum and manipulative femme fatale Jane Greer, ("I only ever saw her at night..."). The greatest of all B-pictures.

The Outlaw Josey Wales (Clint Eastwood, 1976) Eastwood also stars in this classic American civil war movie, his Josey Wales moving from embittered avenger to peace-seeker, picking up a surrogate family of stragglers - notably Chief Dan George as a not-so-wise old Cheyenne - along the way. Eastwood the director employs a fine eye for landscape and battle and a wry sense of humour.

The Outsiders (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983) Seminal teen angst from Coppola that jump-started the career of many a future A-lister. The nostalgic style enfolds SE Hinton's teen rebels into a full-blooded melodrama, while the visuals are infused with golden hues as a reference to the narrator's literary loves: *Gone with the Wind* and the Frost poem, *Nothing Gold Can Stay*.

Pandora's Box (GW Pabst, 1929) Louise Brooks was more lovely, smart and rebellious than a star when Pabst invited her to play Lulu in his film of Pandora's Box, taken from Wedekind's plays. It's the last great silent film, and still one of the most sensual films ever made. As for Brooks, you can see that she was too hot to handle.

Pan's Labyrinth (Guillermo del Toro, 2006) The end of the Spanish civil war provides the backdrop for a frightening child's-eye fairytale that showcases all the phantasmagoric powers of the director's imagination. Aided by eye-popping effects and cinematography, the film is all the more enchanting for its refusal to draw a distinction between reality and fantasy.

The Parallax View (Alan J Pakula, 1974) The daddy of all the 70s conspiracy-thrillers, from Pakula, the master of this mini-genre. Taking aspects of the case against the Warren Commission and extrapolating from them a gigantic corporate conspiracy to assassinate difficult and popular politicians, Parallax introduced us to the sweet, tangy frisson of pure paranoia.

Parents (Bob Balaban, 1989) A young boy in 1950s America begins to fear his parents may be cannibals. Balaban, best known for his acting in *Close Encounters* and the Christopher Guest comedies, delivers an unfairly forgotten film that plays like a black comedy *Blue Velvet* - a comparison aided by Angelo Badalamenti's score and the wonderful kitsch decor.

Paris, Texas (Wim Wenders, 1984) The climax of the first act of Wenders' career, an American movie made on his own terms, offering his meditations on the Fordian sensibility and male loneliness. Nastassja Kinski was never more lovely; Ry Cooder never made a better soundtrack.

The Passion of Joan of Arc (Carl Dreyer, 1928) Stunning in its power, uncompromising in its severity and seriousness, Carl Theodor Dreyer's silent masterpiece from 1928 represents the martyrdom of Joan of Arc in what is almost a series of painterly close-ups. Its simplicity and procedural asceticism are inspired and effectively turn the audience into congregants at an extraordinary spiritual event.

Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid (Sam Peckinpah, 1973) Peckinpah's *Blood on The Tracks*, his *Exile on Main Street*: a wistful, broken-hearted funeral dirge for the 1960s, or for youth, or integrity, or honour among thieves. The film that finally ruined him and the last masterpiece he found himself capable of making.

Pather Panchali (Satyajit Ray, 1955) Director Satyajit Ray was new to his craft when he made this gentle, beautifully photographed classic about the young Bengali boy Apu preparing to leave his village - the first of the "Apu trilogy". Ray created his own cinematic vernacular with this luminous black-and-white film and a sui generis brand of serious movie-making.

Peeping Tom (Michael Powell, 1960) This was the shocker which ended Michael Powell's career, and it became known as the "British Psycho", though Hitchcock's movie never had anything like its explicit squalor and focus on the production of porn. Carl Boehm is the photographer and serial killer obsessed with capturing the expression of fear on his victims' faces. It's a psycho-thriller classic that still disturbs.

People On Sunday (Curt Siodmak, Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, Fred Zinnemann, 1930) Shot with a borrowed camera over several weekends, this documentary-style study of Berliners from the Weimar era enjoying their Sundays, lounging in the sun and flirting, pooled some extraordinary young talent - all later to go to Hollywood. There is a playfulness and eroticism here that hasn't dated at all.

Pépé le Moko (Julien Duvivier, 1937) A hard-boiled romantic noir, whose spirit was to resurface some years later in the Warner Brothers classic *Casablanca*. Jean Gabin plays a tough-guy thief who has evaded the police's grasp by hiding out in the labyrinthine maze of the Algiers Casbah. A fascinating thriller, giving a psycho-analytic insight into Algeria's role in France's collective consciousness as the centre of criminal uncontrollability.

Performance (Donald Cammell, Nicolas Roeg, 1970) Hedonist Cammell and crack cinematographer Roeg teamed up to brew this amazing gangster flick maudit, a stylistic starburst fuelled by such a toxic rush of ideas it could only be ushering in 1970s comedown. Mick Jagger's jaundiced hipster siphons off thug Edward Fox's identity in a Notting Hill hideaway - peer through the fog of hash and solipsism, and there's a gleaming vein of social comment.

The Philadelphia Story (George Cukor, 1940) Box-office poison at the time, Katharine Hepburn got Philip Barry to write this play for her - and then Hepburn negotiated for the film: George Cukor to direct, and, in the end, Grant and Stewart as the guys in love with her. But the whole thing took the cold edge off Kate. She played someone who makes a fool of herself, and the public began to melt.

Pi (Darren Aronofsky, 1998) A migraine-plagued maths genius is under pressure: a shadowy consortium wants the numerical key to the stock market and a group of Orthodox Jews are convinced he can reveal the name of God. Darren Aronofsky's flashy, low-budget debut mixes hallucination and reality to trace the contours of its anti-hero's addled mind.

The Piano Teacher (Michael Haneke, 2001) Deeply disturbing drama excavating the sado-masochistic relationship between a haughty music teacher and her young student. Kinky sex, power, voyeurism, self-mutilation, and a twisted mother-daughter relationship are all blended with a cool, haunting elegance.

The Piano (Jane Campion, 1993) A period film brimming with obsessive love has often resulted in some pretty standard fare. But Campion's masterstroke is to play this out on an isolated island where the rules of polite society take a real effort to adhere to. The loneliness of all of the characters - mute Holly Hunter, tattooed Harvey Keitel - makes the obsessions flourish.

Piccadilly (EA Dupont, 1929) The beautiful Chinese-American star Anna May Wong found a great starring role in this British silent classic. A harassed nightclub owner sacks his regular dancer and impulsively replaces her with the dishwasher whom he'd witnessed putting on a sultry dance routine for her fellow kitchen slaves. Passion and jealousy ensue. Exoticism and transgression are here in spades, and there is a vivid cameo from Charles Laughton as the boorish nightclubber.

Pickpocket (Robert Bresson, 1959) Bresson's Dostoevskian novella is an intriguing movie of ideas. A would-be writer accidentally discovers crime to be his true vocation: in particular, the intimate, sensual, almost occult thrill of picking pockets in the Paris crowd. Bresson has bravura wordless scenes, showing the choreography of pickpocket gangs passing loot from hand to hand. A gripping, existential tale.

Picnic at Hanging Rock (Peter Weir, 1975) Weir's exquisite movie conveys far more than the mystery of the disappearance of Australian schoolgirls who vanished without trace in the outback in 1900. The sublime mystery of the natural world, of human sexuality and girlhood innocence, and the accompanying horror of the unknown are rendered in through a veil of blossom and lace.

Pink Flamingos (John Waters, 1972) Waters, the self-proclaimed "Prince of Puke", proved himself a scatological, sexually perverse, yet almost tenderhearted (towards his afflicted freaks) homegrown successor to Bunuel in this, the movie whose shit-eating climax branded itself on the collective retina of the counterculture. Barfbags recommended!

Pink Floyd: The Wall (Alan Parker, 1982) Before he set out to save the world, Bob Geldof was surprisingly good as a fried, comfortably numb rock star, withdrawing into paranoid seclusion behind the physical and emotional walls of an indulged lifestyle and paranoid delusions. Originally conceived as a concept album, Roger Waters' vision is brought to life with Gerald Scarfe's scratchy, hallucinogenic animation drawing the parallels between rock audiences and fascist rallies.

The Pink Panther (Blake Edwards, 1963) The real thievery in this film has nothing to do with the eponymous diamond. It's committed by Peter Sellers, who takes a small part in an ensemble cast and runs off with the entire movie "with several sequels to be taken into consideration.

Pirates of the Caribbean: the Curse of the Black Pearl (Gore Verbinski, 2003) It never looked like it was going to be the defining action romp of our times, but all praise to Johnny Depp for hijacking this unpromising theme-park vehicle and steering it into the realms of joyful action comedy. The sequels were destined to disappoint, but the original sailed into the history books.

Pixote (Hector Babenco, 1981) A harrowing tale of a Sao Paulo street kid that offers no answers but exposes the dangers and pointlessness of such wasted lives with great insight and conviction. An extra level of authenticity and sadness is added by the fact the non-professional star Fernando Ramos da Silva not only came from such a life but died after returning to it a few years later.

Planet of the Apes (Franklin Schaeffner, 1968) The best of Charlton Heston's brief 60s/70s sojourn as an unlikely sci-fi kingpin (see also Soylent Green, The Omega Man), in which astronauts crash-land on a monkey-ruled planet that turns out to be our own. A crazed metaphor for racism, or something, and a bleak indictment of man's idiocy ("Damn you all to hell!"), it spawned four successively less interesting sequels.

Platoon (Oliver Stone, 1986) Oliver Stone's grunt's-eye view of Vietnam, concentrating as much on boredom, fear and discomfort as actual action, became a classic of the genre. The movie made a star, almost an indie legend, of Willem Dafoe as the druggie soldier Elias.

Play It Again, Sam (Herbert Ross, 1972) A perfect double-bill with Casablanca, Ross's hysterical adaptation of Woody Allen's play sets a predictably neurotic film critic, and recent divorcee Allen alongside ghostly love-advisor Humphrey Bogart for one of his most lovable, funniest early performances, before his schtick got really, really old. Also the pinnacle of the Bogie-revival of the early 70s.

The Player (Robert Altman, 1992) A movie executive tries to keep his job and stay ahead of a police investigation in Altman's black-comic satire. The film walks fine lines with grace and style: it's full of industry in-jokes and yet totally accessible, and rarely has an entire industry been disembowelled with such a light touch.

Playtime (Jacques Tati, 1967) Tati's magical (if belated) satire of modernism ended being pretty modern itself: no close-ups, no central characters, no proper dialogue, and a single, purpose-built set - a sterile modern office building. The screen is filled with

visitors, workers, strays and eccentrics, running gags, sight gags, sound gags - it's like a cross between Mr Bean, Le Corbusier and Hieronymous Bosch.

Point Blank (John Boorman, 1967) Of all the Englishmen who looked at America with jaundiced, fresh-peeled eyes in the late 1960s (an amazing list that includes John Schlesinger, Nicolas Roeg, Peter Whitehead and Peter Watkins), none made quite so visually energetic and eye-popping an assault as did John Boorman. Based on a brutal crime novel by Richard Stark (aka Donald Westlake), it follows a gangster's anti-Arthurian quest through a primary-coloured, mod-pop Los Angeles in search of his personal holy grail of \$83,000, ripped off by his former partner - a grail that recedes away from him down the inhuman urban corridors he relentlessly tramps. As embodied by Marvin, he is a techno-phobic primitive (in a city of cars, he moves, implacably, on foot) cast adrift in a hellish, soulless, honourless universe in which corporations have eaten up everything honest. This is Boorman's Alphaville and Point Blank is characterised by the aggressive importation of the sensibilities of mid-60s European film-makers as varied as Godard, Tati and Antonioni (whose own LA movie, *Zabriskie Point*, followed two years later). Underneath all that, Point Blank has the spare narrative of a classic western, with corrupt railroad barons replaced by the faceless and unappeasable "Cineplex" corporation, whose managerial tiers Walker must scale in search of his prize ("It's all credit these days! I don't suppose there's more than \$20 cash in the whole building!"). One of Lee Marvin's most extraordinary performances, physically graceful, existentially pained, amazingly threatening. And Los Angeles never looked so good.

Point Break (Kathryn Bigelow, 1991) How's this for a premise (and casting): FBI agent Keanu Reeves infiltrates the surfing subculture and gains the trust of one of its spiritual leaders, Patrick Swayze! Positively lactic with cheesy dialogue, Bigelow's irresistible action caper kicks into overdrive early and often - it's an eminently quotable cult favourite.

Police Story (Jackie Chan, 1985) One of the defining moments in Jackie Chan's bruising career, *Police Story* plays to his strengths with a combination of slapstick Canto humour, snappy action and freewheeling stunts as he races round Hong Kong trying to bring down a triad boss. The glass-shattering finale in a shopping mall is still one of his best.

Poltergeist (Tobe Hooper, 1982) Producer Steven Spielberg took grindhouse hero and chainsaw innovator Hooper from the indie gutter and tamed him with this still astonishingly effective suburban nightmare about the foolhardiness of buying property over an old Indian burial ground (had they learned nothing at all from *The Shining*?).

The Postman Always Rings Twice (Tay Garnett, 1946) James M Cain had written one of the great sexy pulp books in American history. It's too dirty to be filmed, they said. But they tried. They put Lana Turner in white, with John Garfield as the guy she urges to hit her again. Of course, the lovers got their bitter ends. But we got the thrill.

Predator (John McTiernan, 1987) Arnold Schwarzenegger's inflated physique seemed to suit OTT scenarios, and *Predator* is the apotheosis: crack US commandos get stalked by invisible alien big-game hunter in the South American jungle. McTiernan pushes the film at a ferocious rate, and the heat gets to the screenwriters: skinned soldiers, helicopter machine guns and enough un-PC cornball quips to bring down a banana republic.

Pretty in Pink (Howard Deutch, 1986) For a brief, sparkling moment, a red-headed starlet called Molly Ringwald ruled the aspirations of teenagers everywhere. That moment was the mid-1980s, decade of the Brat Pack, and Ringwald's golden screen moment was this, the teen movie par excellence. Set to a soundtrack that includes the Smiths, the Psychedelic Furs, and New Order, it was the movie that made teen angst a hip global phenomenon, before cynicism about the nature of the new teen market set in.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (Ronald Neame, 1969) Here is one of the great comic turns of British cinema: Mr Chips with a sense of subversive fun. Maggie Smith plays the formidable schoolmistress at a Edinburgh girls' school beneath whose genteel exterior beats the heart of a romantic, aesthete and moralist. Robert Stephens plays a local artist and in this dual-casting we see the happy cultural and biological lineage of contemporary actor Toby Stephens.

The Princess Bride (Rob Reiner, 1987) "She gets kidnapped. He gets killed. But it all ends up okay." Thoroughly enjoyable comedy action that playfully subverts the traditions of epic fairytale romps while at the same time never losing sight of what makes them so absorbing in the first place. Stable boy Cary Elwes falls for princess Robin Wright before being whisked off by dastardly pirates, while she finds herself about to be married off to an evil prince. Packed with giants, wizards and villains, it's proper multi-level entertainment.

The Producers (Mel Brooks, 1968) Postmodernism never got more outrageous. Mel Brooks's producer (Zero Mostel) and his cringing accountant (Gene Wilder) hit on a plan to defraud their investors and the taxman by staging a show so bad it would have to flop, and so no one would ask where the money went. A musical about Hitler! But of course it's a smash, with sophisticates praising the primitive power of its bad taste.

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) Described by its director as "a fun picture", this technical tour de force plays mercilessly on audience voyeurism. Janet Leigh is the thief on the lam who holes up at the Bates motel and is dispatched in the shower. Genius editing, knockout performances and twisted Freudian plotting - all shot through with Hitch's slyly sadistic humour. Genius.

The Public Enemy (William A Wellman, 1931) One of the great gangster movies, with James Cagney's star-making performance as New York bootlegger Tom Powers. From the queasy humour of the grapefruit pushed into Mae Clarke's face, to the horror of the shot-up Cagney being delivered to his mother's door, swathed in bandages, its brutal realism remains shocking to this day.

Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) John Travolta made a spectacular comeback as a junkie hitman in this kicking crime caper. As the lurid action moves between boxers, drug dealers, small-time crooks and a whole bunch of LA low-lives, seductive cinematography, playful dialogue and fabulously confident performances sweep you along on a tide of pure pop-culture pleasure.

Pumping Iron (George Butler, Robert Fiore, 1977) Now comes with heightened biographical value after Schwarzenegger's gubernatorial triumph, as well as being a playful portrait of bodybuilding culture. Droll, Machiavellian, and a touch unknowable in pursuit of the 1975 Mr Olympia title, Schwarzenegger became a duff actor nonpareil, and the reason why is here: his greatest creation was Arnie, and there wasn't room for anyone else.

Purple Noon (Rene Clement, 1960) Superb adaptation of Highsmith dark thriller The Talented Mr. Ripley with Alain Delon on smouldering form as a charming conniving mimic, forger, mooch and psychopath, sent to Europe to fetch back a millionaire's idle playboy son. A gorgeously-filmed immoral tale of stolen identity that still shines brightly next to Anthony Minghella's English-version remake.

Purple Rain (Albert Magnoli, 1984) Prince at his most purple - flamboyant, elaborate and bruised - this is pure 80s indulgence. The flimsy story (tortured artist tries to keep his head and band together) is just a vehicle to showcase Prince's sizeable talents. Not just a feature film, this is best viewed as an extended music video.

Quadrophenia (Franc Roddam, 1979) The Who-scored youth film is far more than a mere document of the mods-rockers face-off or a piece of cheap teen-lifestyle advocacy. Roddam invests true guts and grit into this exploration of adolescent angst, with Phil Daniels' disgruntled mod Jimmy a pin-badge emblem of how much postwar identity and authenticity hung on the right clothes and the top tunes.

Quiz Show (Robert Redford, 1994) It's hard to imagine a time quite so innocent, but 1950s America was appalled by the revelation that the hugely popular game show Twenty-One was fixed. Robert Redford's tightly constructed period piece reveals the behind-the-scenes gamesmanship as well as the class and ethnic tensions that fuelled the scandal.

Radio On (Chris Petit, 1980) Perhaps the only British film of the period that captures a sense of the ennui, drift and dejection of the unlamented late 1970s. Bowing towards Wim Wenders' great German road movies, it's also a meditation of the state of the nation's cinema, and a memorable, successful attempt to make a genuine British art movie. Magnificent soundtrack.

Raging Bull (Martin Scorsese, 1980) The artistic high-water mark of Scorsese's career and his remarkable partnership with De Niro. Between them, they transformed the self-serving memoirs of middleweight boxer Jake LaMotta into stunning cinematic art: a sublime, black-and-white study of LaMotta's desperate battles in and out of the ring, with his brother, his wife, his mob sponsors and of course himself. A masterpiece.

Raiders of the Lost Ark (Steven Spielberg, 1981) The first in the Indiana Jones series, and a distillation of pure, old-fashioned Hollywood entertainment for all the family, directed by a master storyteller who creates an easy and effortless-looking swing for the narrative. Harrison Ford reinforced his Mount Rushmore status as Indy, the swashbuckling adventurer who must find the Holy Ark of the Covenant.

Ran (Akira Kurosawa, 1985) Kurosawa was well into his 70s when the project began shooting; the film-maker's eyesight was in bad decline, he'd been battling depression, and his wife died during production. Yet Ran (aka "Chaos") - partly based on King Lear - is undoubtedly the great director's late-career masterpiece, and something of a paradox: an impeccably orchestrated depiction of moral pandemonium. Set in 16th-century Japan, the film looks on uneasily as the aging overlord Hidetora (Tatsuya Nakadai) decides to divide up his kingdom among his three sons. The youngest son protests and is banished for his impudence, but the lord's real sworn enemy turns out to be his eldest daughter-in-law. The weather becomes torrential in tandem with the drama, until Hidetora loses all his senses; Nakadai's soul-scraping performance is just as stunning to behold as the renowned battle scenes. This is a bleak and pessimistic film, one that looks back not just on feudal Japan but on the calamitous 20th century itself, finally stumbling to its end still overshadowed by the threat of nuclear annihilation. The contradiction at the core of Ran only adds to its primal power: it's a visually magnificent film that exposes humanity at its ugliest.

Rancho Notorious (Fritz Lang, 1952) This is a western where the rocks are papier-mache. Who cares? In the hands of Fritz Lang, it's a bitter revenge story, with Arthur Kennedy and Mel Ferrer as the deadly rivals and Marlene Dietrich as Altar, who runs a gambling joint up in the hills and keeps the guys in order.

Rashomon (Akira Kurosawa, 1950) Four storytellers deliver contradictory accounts of an alleged rape and murder in Kurosawa's hugely influential puzzler, which feels almost interactive for its constant engagement of the viewer's judgment. A disquieting examination of the nature of truth and the fallibility of memory: the more we see and hear, the less we seem to know.

Re-Animator (Stuart Gordon, 1985) Every decade or so a film comes along to give the horror genre a much needed shot in the face. Based on an episodic tale from HP Lovecraft, Gordon ladles on the gore and black humour, pulling no punches in either department. Jeffrey Combs gives one of the greatest demented doctor performances of all time.

Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) Surveillance classic from the master. Who but Hitchcock could squeeze so much tension from an incapacitated James Stewart stuck in his apartment with only a telephoto lens and Grace Kelly to keep him company? As a murder mystery seems to appear out of nowhere from the everyday routines of the neighbours he spies on, Stewart's paranoia and frustration builds to a nervous climax.

Rebecca (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) The first project Selznick gave to Hitchcock when the director came to America - and it's a ghost story. Rebecca is dead - and did she deserve it! Maxim is the husband she left behind, a wreck, and "I" is the new wife. But Mrs Danvers stands guard over Rebecca's room, her clothes and her power.

Rebel Without a Cause (Nicholas Ray, 1955) Knife fights, smooching with Natalie Wood, a deadly game of chicken in hot rods - it's hardly surprising that angst, charismatic James Dean became an icon of 50s teen alienation. Ray handles the story of a rebellious boy's long night of the soul, and his youthful cast, with skill and sensitivity, to create a classic tale of teenage alienation.

Red Rock West (John Dahl, 1992) En route to a promised job in Wyoming, Nicolas Cage is mistaken for, and pretends to be, one "Lyle from Dallas," not knowing that Lyle is a hired contract killer. And, of course, Lyle himself soon shows up. The movie that put Dahl on the map, and which he hasn't bettered since.

Red Sorghum (Yimou Zhang, 1987) It's easy to see why Zhang's debut was instrumental in opening up Chinese cinema to a new generation. He manages to tell a remarkably complex and allegory-rich story using surprisingly little dialogue. The stunning cinematography and the presence of Gong Li renders words superfluous anyway.

Repentance (Tengiz Abuladze, 1984) Full-throated satire on Stalinism issuing from glasnost-era Georgia. The corpse of a recently-dead town mayor won't stay in its grave; as the film unspools, we come to understand the sinister events that lie behind this surreal form of vengeance.

Repo Man (Alex Cox, 1984) Punk sensibility, if that isn't an oxymoron, and black humour course through Cox's low-budget trawl through LA. Repo novice Emilio Estevez hunts the city's concrete spaces for '64 Chevy with a shining secret in the boot - looking backwards to Kiss Me Deadly and forwards to Pulp Fiction - and it seems like the whole of Hollywood's broken dreams are lying around as well.

Requiem for a Dream (Darren Aronofsky, 2000) Aronofsky followed his no-budget debut Pi with an adaptation of the Hubert Selby Jr novel about addiction's many guises, embellishing his already itchy visual habits with new surgical precision. Huge dilating pupils, split-screen pill-popping, fish-eye psychosis - the best of New Hollywood's MTV-versed graphic mania hammers home a relentless descent into breakdown.

Reservoir Dogs (Quentin Tarantino, 1992) The brash, young former videostore clerk Tarantino made no secret of his borrowings from other Hollywood and Hong Kong thrillers for this debut movie, and yet he had transformed the influences into something all his own. Its sheer, sexy style made him the face of the 1990s, and he became a cult figure for imitators, admirers and detractors all over the media.

The Return of Martin Guerre (Daniel Vigne, 1982) A well-crafted French costume drama that inspired a Hollywood remake, Sommersby. Gerard Depardieu brings charm and gravitas to his role as the soldier who claims to be Nathalie Baye's husband, back home after years at war. The richness of the film lies not just in the hero's quest to establish his identity but in its painstaking depiction of medieval rural life.

Ride the High Country (Sam Peckinpah, 1962) Peckinpah's marvellous, melancholic western incorporates the themes of The Wild Bunch - the end of the old west, friendship and betrayal - but is more emotionally engaging, thanks to leathery veterans Joel McCrea and Randolph Scott who play friends on opposite sides of the law, reunited by a sack of money and the gallant urge to rescue a young bride.

Riff Raff (Ken Loach, 1990) Loach's treatment of working class and oppressed lives is so sharp that when other films are described "Ken Loach-style" it's never meant as a negative. This is one of his best, with itinerant workers in London using humour and anger to deal with their plight. And it brought Ricky Tomlinson to the fore.

Rififi (Jules Dassin, 1955) Spreading out a barely mentioned robbery from the pulp novel source into half an hour of high tension without either dialogue or music was a risk only a blacklisted director could take. What should have been the last word in such sequences is still regularly copied today. Such a standout has eclipsed the film's many other fine attributes: the gloomy atmospherics and grim code of low-level hoods.

The Right Stuff (Philip Kaufman, 1983) This adaptation of Tom Wolfe's swaggering book chuckles at the absurdities and inanities of the Apollo space programme while maintaining starry-eyed wonder for the astronauts and their forays into the wild blue yonder. A celebration of gung-ho Americana that has its cake and eats it too.

Ringu (Hideo Nakata, 1998) A grainy avant-garde video is killing its viewers in Nakata's instant horror classic, which works so well by withholding visual information and ever so gradually increasing its levels of expertly calibrated dread. There's also a fiendish climax that matches David Cronenberg's Videodrome for uncanny televisual terror.

Rio Bravo (Howard Hawks, 1959) Rather than make a western, let's do a picture about a few friends making a western. So Dean Martin is the drunk trying to reform, Walter Brennan does his old-man jokes. Wayne is the sheriff, watching Martin. And Angie Dickinson is the girl who ties the sheriff up in cross talk and her black tights. It's Howard Hawks - who else?

Risky Business (Paul Brickman, 1983) Yes, it's an adolescent wish-fulfilment movie, but it's also one of the sharpest, smartest films about teenhood out there, and an easy-to-swallow guide to 80s capitalism. Tom Cruise's underwear dancing and escalating crises provide more than enough comedy, but it's also darker and sexier than most grown-up movies of the era.

Rita Sue and Bob Too (Alan Clarke, 1986) Written off as a crude farce on its initial release, Alan Clarke's bawdy sex comedy has grown in stature down the years. It's an angry, funny tale of illicit sex on the estates of Bradford, and a startling portrait of an England rarely seen on screen. Surely no one but Clarke could have caught it so perfectly.

River's Edge (Tim Hunter, 1986) Bleak forerunner to Kids. Slacker teens barely old enough to tie their own laces (let alone roll joints or steal beers) blankly cover up the casual murder of one of their peers. A conspiracy of apathy follows, with dysfunctional role model Dennis Hopper the only adult Keanu Reeves, Crispin Glover and Lone Skye can relate to.

Roberto Succo (Cedric Kahn, 2001) Deeply disturbing picture about the real-life spree-killer and existential bandit Roberto Succo, with a stunning performance from Italian actor Stefano Cassetti. Succo robs, kills, defies the law, stays on the run - and somehow has time to take transient jobs and seduce young women at discos. He is motiveless, utterly unafraid and indeed unaware of the consequences of his actions: which makes him very dangerous indeed.

Robocop (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) Verhoeven's techno-dystopian vision of the critically wounded cop turned into a crime-fighting demi-robot was a brilliant piece of sci-fi satire. It may not have outshone James Cameron's Terminator, but it had its supporters nonetheless. It's genuinely scary and funny.

Rock 'n' Roll High School (Allan Arkush, 1979) Put teenagers and rock music together, and rebellion is never far behind, or generic youth cinema. This transcends its disposable premise, though, and explodes into a good-natured campus apocalypse. Part of its appeal is the way it casts the Ramones as the greatest band ever, and the vivacious PJ Soles as their illicit schoolgirl promoter.

Roger & Me (Michael Moore, 1989) Moore originated his brand of confrontational documentary with this elegy for his working-class hometown, which was devastated when General Motors closed down operations there in the 1980s. The film-maker itemises the human costs of bare-fangs capitalism with varying degrees of snark, whimsy, and focused anger.

Rollerball (Norman Jewison, 1975) In a wacky "perfect, too perfect" future, all international conflicts are settled in the Rollerball arena by teams of murderous rollerskaters-cum-thugs, the greatest of whom is James Caan's existential doubter Jonathan E. Entirely ridiculous dystopian sci-fi that still somehow compels fascination.

Roman Holiday (William Wyler, 1953) We don't have princesses any more, much less stars like Audrey Hepburn. She's a princess on the lam, and Gregory Peck is the journalist who gives her some fun before duty closes in. I suppose Princess Margaret inspired the film - alas, it didn't do the same for her.

Rome Open City (Roberto Rossellini, 1945) Neo-realist masterwork from Rossellini, filming his story of partisan actions against the Nazis while fighting - for real - was still going on in the city. As never since, you see how modern European cinema was forged out of the rubble of the second world war.

Room at the Top (Jack Clayton, 1959) Based on John Braine's novel, this is a key text for the 50s angry-young-man generation, who had decided to stop respecting their betters and grab a piece of the socio-sexual action. Laurence Harvey is Joe, a lowly office worker who joins an amateur dramatic group and finds opportunities to seduce both the boss's daughter and a glamorous Frenchwoman: Simone Signoret. It is somehow both realism and escapism: Kingsley Amis cheerfully mocked Braine's wish-fulfilment fantasy of bedding posh women.

Room With a View (James Ivory, 1985) EM Forster's barbed wit translated to the screen beautifully in a jaunty Edwardian comedy that both celebrates tea-on-the-lawn Englishness and throws off the confines of class like so many constrictive undergarments. Helena Bonham Carter and Julian Sands lead a cream-of-the-crop cast - the etiquette that divides them only adds to the romance.

Rosemary's Baby (Roman Polanski, 1968) Polanski's first Hollywood-backed feature simmers with menace, imagining the birth of Satan as a plot engineered by a woman's nosy neighbours and her reptilian husband. With her Seberg-style crop and chalky pallor, Rosemary is like a phantom in wait, her pregnancy a sexually transmitted disease that will breed a plague.

Rude Boy (Jack Hazan, David Mingay, 1980) It's an overlong and unfocused story of a rootless and near brainless roadie. But as the band he's working for is a height-of-their-powers Clash, which makes this film is pretty indispensable. Between the lines you can see how drab and chaotic Britain was back then, and when the Clash hit the stage it doesn't seem so bad place. The hope they offered is plain to see.

The Rules of the Game (Jean Renoir, 1939) Renoir's masterpiece is set in a stately pile where the great and good gather for a shoot, and where a fatal incident sets the cap on an incisive portrayal of people - both servants and guests - in all their contradictions. A sublime, non-judgmental comedy of manners.

Rumble Fish (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983) The X-rated companion piece to Coppola's *The Outsiders*, *Rumble Fish* (also adapted from an SE Hinton novel) featured a host of cult cameos from Tom Waits to Mickey Rourke and Dennis Hopper. Here, teen angst is cast in glossily aestheticised black and white, with speeded-up cloud formations and clocks without hands all adding to the hipster ambience.

The Runner (Amir Naderi, 1984) One of the first films to come out of postrevolutionary Iran, Naderi's heartwarming drama straddles social-realist documentary and poetic fantasy with effortless grace. Madjid Niroumand plays the young boy eking a living on an abandoned boat in the port city of Abadan; his solace is running - and the sheer, exuberant joy on his face is unforgettable.

Running on Empty (Sidney Lumet, 1988) River Phoenix gave one of his more beatific performances in this subtle meditation on politics and responsibility, in which a pair of 60s radicals, on the run for their part in the bombing of a napalm lab, face the challenge of integrating their son with society. Lumet soft-pedals the radicalism to focus on the family's desperate attempts to stay as a unit, which their outlaw status threatens to sabotage at every turn.

Rushmore (Wes Anderson, 1998) The loopy love triangle at the heart of Anderson's bittersweet comedy consists of a primary-school teacher and two guys who don't deserve her: Bill Murray's self-loathing industrialist and Jason Schwartzman's industrious teenager. Goofy and unexpectedly haunted with pain and loss, the movie hums along to an invigorating mod-rock soundtrack.

Sabrina (Billy Wilder, 1954) One of the all-time great love triangles; chauffeur's daughter Audrey Hepburn, playboy William Holden, and his businessman brother Humphrey Bogart. Which will she choose? You'll have to watch it to find out. So unashamedly romantic it's astounding the normally acid-dripping Billy Wilder had anything to do with it.

Safe (Todd Haynes, 1995) Housewife Carol (Julianne Moore) develops a mysterious illness that begins to seem like an allergy to her very life. As Carol's body dwindles and she falls prey to New Age quackery, she retreats into increasingly extreme seclusion until she is utterly alone - the devastating final shot is a masterpiece of raw simplicity.

Salaam Bombay (Mira Nair, 1988) Set in Bombay's red light district, against a backdrop of Bollywood's dream-laden billboards, Nair's ultra-realist debut is a bleak, harrowing offering that chronicled the lives of Bombay's junkies, prostitutes and homeless. Using real street children as actors Salaam Bombay's understated reportage feel recalled Satyajit Ray at his best.

Salo (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975) Most viewers of this film will have to turn their heads from the screen at some point - if not all points. It is one of the most notorious and shocking ever made, replete with scenes of rape, torture, coprophagy, mutilation and general degradation. It's certainly not a film anyone could profess to love, and if they did, you'd probably want to recommend them an analyst. But to dismiss Salo as mere trigger-happy taboo-breaking would be to deny the questions it raises. Certainly, only an outsider like the Marxist, homosexual Pasolini would even contemplate adapting the Marquis de Sade's already-infamous *120 Days of Sodom* and fusing it with the last days of Mussolini's fascist regime: Salo was the Italian resort town where Mussolini briefly set up a government after the Nazis rescued him from the hands of the partisans. The basic story involves four powerful men - "The Duke", "The Bishop", "The Magistrate", and "The President" - who round up a group of young peasants, male and female, and subject them to an onslaught of horrific acts. No conventional narrative is followed: we are offered a series of tableaux, Sadean discussion interspersed with brutal torture. A blunt political allegory, maybe, but Salo aims at wider targets: the social rituals we hold dear, human compulsions; greed, consumption, even corporate culture. It confronts our society in a way few art forms ever have or will. And as if in a coda to this ultimate act of cinematic brutalisation, Pasolini himself was murdered shortly before its release.

Le Samourai (Jean Pierre Melville, 1967) Melville's first film in colour, Le Samourai tracks Alain Delon's doomed assassin through the Parisian night as he tries to slay the beautiful witness to a botched contract-killing. Ice-cold and existential, trapped in muted, crepuscular hues, it's as much about mood and tone as about plot or noir conventions.

Sans Soleil (Chris Marker, 1983) A dreamy, freeform contrivance from Marker, as an anonymous narrator recounts an absent traveller's poetic meditations on his roamings, mostly around Japan. Part anthropology doc, part photographic tone poem, it's perhaps only occasionally as profound as it thinks it is, but there's great pleasure to be had in surrendering to its tyranny of image.

Sansho the Bailiff (Kenji Mizoguchi, 1954) "Without mercy, a man is like a beast. Be sympathetic toward others," the young protagonist is told early on in Kenji Mizoguchi's heart-rending epic, set in feudal Japan. The lines sum up the film's themes in a nutshell, as a mother is forced into prostitution while her son and daughter become slaves of the villainous Sansho. This drama about a family torn apart is on a Shakespearian scale.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960) A groundbreaking slice of social drama, adapted by Alan Sillitoe from his acclaimed novel: working-class passions were uncharted territory, but this actually showed a couple in bed. It also made the names of Reisz, and of a young Albert Finney, whose cocky Nottingham factory worker Arthur Seaton seduces married woman Rachel Roberts.

Saturday Night Fever (John Badham, 1977) Don't let the disco throw you: John Travolta's breakthrough movie is much grittier than people give it credit for. It might be best remembered for the soundtrack, the suits and the sashays, but at its heart is a bleak tale about American working-class hopelessness.

Savage Nights (Cyril Collard, 1992) Collard's savagely anti-sentimental, autobiographical movie about HIV-AIDS, based on his own novel Les Nuits Fauves, now looks like a pre-emptive counterblast to the more cautious liberal approach of Hollywood in Philadelphia. Collard played a version of himself in the 1980s, a bisexual author and film-maker who engages in promiscuous, unsafe sex, even after he discovers he is HIV-positive. Many were affronted by this bacchanal of self-destruction, and the destruction of other people. Collard himself died shortly after the film came out.

Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg, 1998) No glamour or heroics for Spielberg in this relentlessly gripping war movie. The opening combat scenes achieve a rare horror and immediacy, as jerky camerawork captures GIs landing on the beaches at Normandy only to be cut down and blown apart. The subsequent search sees Tom Hanks and his tiny squad set off in a gruelling search for missing soldier Matt Damon.

Scarface (Brian De Palma, 1983) De Palma's biggest hit, Pacino's craziest performance and to this day a model piece of career counselling for goons, thugs and wannabe rappers of every stripe. Chainsaws, incest, mountains of cocaine, guns-a-mundo and Cuban racist stereotypes by the dozen: "Say hello to my leeeeeetle friend!"

The Scent Of Green Papaya (Anh Hung Tran, 1993) Favouring placidity and tenderness over plot histrionics, this beautiful Vietnamese film refreshes the senses. Through the eyes of our heroine, an angelic orphan sent to work in a wealthy household, the world becomes a place of delicate little pleasures "until she grows up, at least.

The Science of Sleep (Michel Gondry, 2006) Directing his own script for the first time, Gondry's prodigious visual imagination runs free in the home-made dream sequences for this tale of a flaky young artist ineptly chasing his next-door neighbour. It's daffily indulgent, but with Gael Garcí-a Bernal a charming surrogate for his director, it also bears the invaluable imprimatur of a unique mind.

Scorpio Rising (Kenneth Anger, 1964) Inter-cutting fetishistic images of leather-clad Tom of Finland-style bikers, James Dean, gleaming souped-up hogs and shots of Jesus from cheesy religious epics, all overlaid with aching rock-n-roll songs and ballads. Anger homoeroticised the biker demimonde for evermore, and revolutionised the use of rock music in movies a decade before American Graffiti.

La Scorta (Ricky Tognazzi, 1993) Tough-nosed, riveting account of a Mafia judge's bodyguard unit in modern Sicily - the "escort" of the title - with a magnificent central performance from brooding Enrico Lo Verso. Both a film swimming in topicality and a counterpoint to the stylizations of the traditional organized-crime movie.

Scream (Wes Craven, 1996) Wes Craven's career has come back from the dead more times than his hard-to-kill dream-hunter Freddy Krueger. His 1970s high-tide, which produced such barnstorming horror hits as The Hills Have Eyes and Last House On the Left, ebbed long before his second act was inaugurated by the first A Nightmare On Elm Street in 1984. Eight or so sequels later, Wes was once again treading water, this time in the ceaselessly self-referential age of Quentin Tarantino and Kevin Smith, when he might have had cause to feel a bit past it. So it was a good day when Kevin Williamson's smart, violent and very witty script for Scream came in over the transom. Williamson was a diehard fan of the late-70s/early-80s horror-gore boom, and his script was a mash-up of every ridiculous and predictable scenario thrashed out by the blood-merchants in those years. It was clever, funny and best of all, it knew how to be scary when needed. The opening sequence, featuring Drew Barrymore as a woman menaced and murdered by an assailant in an Edward Munch mask, flipped enough people out for opportunistic politicians to demand a screening in Congress. But audiences - primed by the success of Pulp Fiction to mine every new movie for cultural references of every kind - fell hook, line and sinker for Scream, and a newly knowing mass audience came along too. Craven fell back into the sequel game again almost immediately, knocking out 2 and 3 to increasing box-office returns, but none was ever quite as loveably, wittily malign as this original.

The Searchers (John Ford, 1956) Five years back, the Comanche made off with Ethan Edwards's niece. By now she must be a squaw and she might look like Natalie Wood. So is John Wayne's Ethan searching for her to save her, or to stamp out the racial crime? John Ford's finest and most disturbing film, thanks to John Wayne as Ethan "too wild to live in the house.

A Self-Made Hero (Jacques Audiard, 1996) Mathieu Kassovitz turns his delicate touch as an actor to darker ends as a compulsive fabulist who reinvents himself as a Resistance hero after the second world war. A patient, sad character study, A Self-Made Hero confirmed Audiard as a modern French director with something serious to say and the savoir-faire to make you listen.

Serial Mom (John Waters, 1994) The central gag of a suburban homemaker turned serial killer is a good one, and Waters gives it his all with a slew of gags aimed at the hypocrisy of middle-class American life. Kathleen Turner gives an anything goes performance as the wife who acts upon those "oooh, I could kill someone" moments we all get when faced with video tapes that aren't rewound or uncaring neighbours.

The Servant (Joseph Losey, 1963) A claustrophobic battle of wills in a posh Georgian house in Chelsea, with Dirk Bogarde the valet who gradually enslaves diffident, upper-crust James Fox. The allegory looks a little obvious now, with its heavy symbolism (look deep into the much-polished distorting mirror . . .), but it's a breathtakingly savage portrait of the English class system by the US outcast Losey.

The Set-Up (Robert Wise, 1949) Wise has to be one of the most underrated and versatile of Hollywood directors - his CV includes *The Haunting*, *The Day The Earth Stood Still* and *The Sound Of Music*. This boxing noir unfolds in real time as Robert Ryan's failing fighter refuses to take a dive and has to face the unpleasant consequences.

Seven (David Fincher, 1995) Although the success of *The Silence Of The Lambs* had flooded the market with serial killer movies, Fincher's film managed to offer something new - not only for the viewer to enjoy but also something for less imaginative filmmakers to copy. Unlike the imitations that followed, the darkness here is not just cosmetic; it has real impact and resonance.

Seven Samurai (Akira Kurosawa, 1954) For decades in the west, Kurosawa simply defined Japanese cinema: his muscular, accessible dramas were massively influential here, and none more than this story. A poor village, continuously under attack by bullying bandits, pools its resources to hire seven unemployed samurai for a last, desperate stand. The villagers are redeemed by their courage, and the rackets swordsmen-for-hire by their fight for the underdog. Tremendously exciting and affecting.

The Seventh Seal (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) "Bin to Atlantic City a million times - ain't never [ITAL] seen Death walkin' on the beach!" says Steve Guttenberg in *Diner*, but here he is, playing chess with the young and fearsomely blond Max von Sydow. Ponderous but unforgettable high-water mark of Ingmar Bergman's international career.

Sex, Lies and Videotape (Steven Soderbergh, 1989) A frigid housewife, her adulterous husband, her deceitful sister, and an impotent voyeur: these are the ingredients of the film that won 26-year-old Soderbergh the Palme d'Or. Cerebral and dense with talk, it's mostly devoid of cheap thrills - despite that fabulous title.

Sexy Beast (Jonathan Glazer, 2000) An intelligent, lucidly-shot rebuff to the Guy Ritchie school of gangsterism, you realise *Sexy Beast's* loyalties are a little closer to the weirdness of *Performance* when one character hallucinates an Uzi-toting bunny. Ben Kingsley's demented turn as the unwelcome interloper on the Costa del Crime is on the same surreal level, and, as his reluctant host, Ray Winstone is intriguingly soft; feminine even.

Shadows (John Cassavetes, 1959) A family portrait and an interracial love story, this was the sensational debut of the man who would become the godfather of indie film. With a fantastic jazz score and fluid on-location photography, the movie also introduces the volatile domestic dramas and identity crises that would become touchstones of Cassavetes' career.

Shaft (Gordon Parks, 1971) Blaxploitation starts here, with esteemed Time photographer and novelist Gordon Parks making his biggest hit and branding into our collective retina Richard Roundtree's two-fisted loverman detective and mean-ass mother, in a world where the white man's taxicab won't stop for a brother.

Shane (George Stevens, 1953) Buckskin-clad Alan Ladd is the reluctant gunfighter who rides in to town to defend the homesteaders against a ruthless rancher and his hired gun - grinning Jack Palance. What elevates the film is *Shane's* emotional ties with honest-toiler Van Heflin, his wife Jean Arthur, and their boy, Brandon de Wilde: it's among the top fistful of westerns.

Shaun of the Dead (Edgar Wright, 2004) George A Romero comes to London's Crouch End in this funny zombie movie. Simon Pegg stars as the slacker trying to win back his girlfriend while apocalypse rages, but Nick Frost steals the film as his laidback drinking buddy helping to fight the undead with a very British armoury of cricket bats, shovels and mug trees.

The Shawshank Redemption (Frank Darabont, 1994) Stately melodrama, based on a Stephen King novella, that is a moving study of hope and friendship. Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman are the convicts who find redemption through acts of common decency. Sentimental, for sure, but also a gripping, well-acted yarn.

She's Gotta Have It (Spike Lee, 1986) Lee's effervescent debut, telling the polysexual adventures of Nola Darling with great wit and faultless sense of authenticity. It seems a long time ago now, but it was a genuine breakthrough in independently-envisioned African-American cinema.

The Shining (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) Kubrick's last masterpiece, a deeply pessimistic consideration of modern man's capacity for violence and bloodshed, underpinned by a soundtrack filled with threnodies to the dead of Auschwitz and the gulag, and powered by a demented Nicholson performance. Also the first great SteadiCam movie.

Shoah (Claude Lanzmann, 1985) Overwhelming 500-minute documentary that sought to record eye-witness testimony of the Holocaust - no archive footage is used at any point - while the participants are still alive. In its simple accrual of detail, it's a devastating riposte to anyone even flirting with the obscenity of Holocaust denial.

Shock Corridor (Samuel Fuller, 1963) A journalist feigns mental illness to get himself admitted to a psychiatric hospital in order to solve a murder. It's an ill-conceived plan on his part and Fuller's stark direction does a great job of creating a world where madness permeates everything.

Sholay (Ramesh Sippy, 1975) The most popular Indian movie ever made, and one that has acquired the same iconic status as *Star Wars* or *Gone With the Wind*. The presence of future superstar Amitabh Bachchan has a lot to do with that, but it's a great crowdpleaser all round, filled with vivid characters, rousing action and a classic score.

Shoot the Piano Player (Francois Truffaut, 1960) After his groundbreaking debut *Les 400 Coups*, Truffaut retreated from autobiography to embrace *serie-noir* genre film-making as a breather before the ambitious *Jules et Jim*, upending many of the crime movie's stylistic conventions in adapting David Goodis's pulp classic for the screen. Energetic, wistful and fatalistic, and Aznavour's gloomily sardonic presence is a bonus.

Short Cuts (Robert Altman, 1993) Altman interweaves Raymond Carver's short stories (and one original thread of Altman's own) for a poisoned valentine to Los Angeles. The bitterly funny mosaic that results is so full of standout performances and subtle textures that it rewards repeat viewings even at three-plus hours.

A Short Film About Killing (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1988) The best-known, and best, of Kieslowski's extraordinary Dekalog, 10 films based on the 10 commandments, enacted on a dour Warsaw housing estate. This is a masterly account of two murders: a youth's whimsical, hideous killing of a taxi driver, and the state's equally brutal revenge/execution.

Shrek (Andrew Adamson, Vicky Jenson, 2001) Infectious animation that inverts the stereotypes of its fairytale cast to great effect. Mike Myer's Shrek is a less-than-jolly green giant, forced into uncharacteristic heroics after his swamp is invaded by exiled fable characters. Irrepressible sidekick Donkey is one of the best fits for Eddie Murphy's motormouth skills since Beverly Hills Cop.

Sideways (Alexander Payne, 2004) Two barely mature adults - one a sad-sack alcoholic, the other about to be married - take a bachelors' road trip through California wine country with disastrous results. Payne's wry buddy movie confronts self-loathing and despair while rarely neglecting the laughs - particularly memorable is the pair's messy encounter with an amorous, ample-bodied couple.

The Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991) Anthony Hopkins' breakthrough into the super-league was secured by his wildly enjoyable impersonation of the imprisoned serial killer - a performance only Olivier could have topped. He is Dr Hannibal Lecter, whose expertise in the psychology of compulsive killers is nervously sought out by FBI cadet Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster). He vouchsafes crucial insights in return for being allowed inside her head: a terrifyingly dangerous bargain.

Silent Running (Douglas Trumbull, 1972) Special-effects maestro Trumbull really stretches his meagre budget here to deliver a great-looking, ecological science-fiction film. Bruce Dern plays an unsympathetic misfit who protects the Earth's last few forests - which have been transplanted from our polluted planet onto huge domed spaceships near Saturn. The charm is provided by the green message and the cute robots, whose un-anthropomorphic design clearly inspired R2-D2.

Silkwood (Mike Nichols, 1983) The best in the mini-tradition of one woman raging against the machine, this is the fact-based story of Karen Silkwood, who mysteriously died while challenging the working conditions at a nuclear power plant. It avoids worthiness with a deftly paced, thrilling screenplay, and a feisty performance from burgeoning chameleon Meryl Streep that puts Erin Brockovich to shame.

Singin' in the Rain (Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly 1952) This musical has a story! It's Hollywood as sound comes in. Gene Kelly is the star who survives, but that's Debbie Reynolds dubbing Jean Hagen who sounds like the Bronx zoo. Cyd Charisse is great in one set-piece. Gene does sing in the rain. Donald O'Connor makes us laugh. And the whole thing has that Hollywood air of easy come, easy go.

Sir Henry at Rawlinson End (Steve Roberts, 1980) Vivian Stanshall's attack on the class system is both withering and dithering. The decaying stately-home setting and sepia-tone cinematography compliment Stanshall's deft, surreal wordplay. A boisterous Trevor Howard brings the whole thing to swaggering life - "I don't know what I want, but I want it now."

The Sixth Sense (M Night Shyamalan, 1999) Steering 90s mainstream cinema back towards the classical arts of character and story, the eerie Sixth Sense staked a premature claim that Shyamalan might be a new Spielberg. Even if you guessed the totemic twist, Haley Joel Osment's scarily nuanced turn is still worth savouring, and his audiences with his dead chums a great spin on the therapist-patient relationship.

Slacker (Richard Linklater, 1991) Shot with non-professional locals in director Richard Linklater's hometown, this is an era-defining daisy-chain that wends through Austin, Texas guided only by a tangential stream of conversation. Both hilarious and ominous, the movie poses timeless questions on life, work, and self-worth; despite giving a name to a generation, it hasn't dated a day.

Sleepy Hollow (Tim Burton, 1999) Burton's rollicking take on the classic story of the headless horseman is a triumph of horror jolts, action staging and gothic production design (replete with creepy, creature-like trees). As the somewhat faint-of-heart constable Ichabod Crane, Johnny Depp is delightful as both the film's hero and its squeamish comic relief.

Sleuth (Joseph L Mankiewicz, 1972) Laurence Olivier takes on Michael Caine in some vicious game-playing in a very barbed comedy-drama. It's a clash of acting styles and generations, with the older man's showy histrionics pitted against Caine's uncanny knack for stealing scenes. We should shortly be seeing Kenneth Branagh's remake, with Caine in the older man's role and Jude Law as his antagonist.

Slums of Beverly Hills (Tamara Jenkins, 1998) Acutely observed teen comedy centering around the mammary obsession of "burgeoning" adolescent Natasha Lyonne; her sexual curiosity is only sharpened by her deadbeat family's transient lifestyle, hopping from one temporary accommodation to another. A long, long way from 90210.

Small Faces (Gillies Mackinnon, 1996) British realism got a punch-in-the guts reboot in this period teenage gang drama, set in the working-class highrises of Glasgow, 1968. Refracted through the lives of three brothers, it centres on the story of the youngest, Lex (a sensational Iain Robertson), whose journey through this gruelling teenage wilderness of street-level Scotland is a rite of passage rife with the risk of peer pressure, beatings and much, much worse.

The Small World of Sammy Lee (Ken Hughes, 1963) Anthony Newley in an X-rated thriller? It happened, with the Laughing Gnome man playing a strip-club compe needing to raise £300 to save himself from a beating. Amazing verite shots of early 60s Soho punctuate Newley's sweaty quest for salvation.

Smiles of a Summer Night (Ingmar Bergman, 1955) Belying his reputation as a Scandinavian gloom-monger, Bergman made this delightful country house drama. It is as light and playful as The Seventh Seal is dark and portentous. Bergman being Bergman, though, there are some very caustic observations about love and relationships amid the fun and frivolity.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarves (David Hand, 1937) The great personal, hands-on masterpiece of Walt Disney's career, based on the Grimm fairytale, was also the first commercially successful feature-length animation in the English-speaking world, a glorious piece of Technicolor film-making which astonished and entranced everyone who saw it, including Chaplin and Eisenstein. The 33-year-old Disney created his Snow White by first acting out the story for his 50-strong animation team in a private one-man

show which has passed into legend, lasting over three hours, doing all the characters' movements and voices and expressions himself - a performance so vivid that it was the only template the animators needed for three years' work. The resulting film was revolutionary. Every frame of it was alive with detail and movement, and Disney developed the "multi-plane camera" technique of many levels of drawing to create the illusion of movement and space - still basically in use until superseded by computer-digital work. Although Disney delegated the drawing work to his subordinate animators (almost like a Renaissance master with studio assistants), he was passionately involved in every detail. Snow White's sisterly, motherly care for her seven little friends is beautifully conceived, and each of these characters is an individual creation, with a delicate, unthreatening kinship to the merry little animals, the birds, fawns, rabbits and squirrels, with whom they are surrounded: giving rise to the inspired, anthropomorphic concept of nature and the world that coloured almost every Disney cartoon, and every other cartoon, that came afterwards.

Solaris (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972) Tarkovsky's 160-minute science-fiction fable is generally regarded as part of a kind of cinematic cold war - the Soviet answer to Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey - and there are undoubtedly grounds for comparison, mostly to do with the lofty intellectual ambitions that both films pursue. But where Kubrick's film investigates technological development, Tarkovsky turns his gaze inward, avoiding the space-tech fetishism in which sci-fi has traditionally indulged. The film's source is the popular novel by Polish writer Stanislaw Lem, who introduces the concept of "Solaristics", a future-science devoted to understanding a mysterious star system with apparently untapped powers. Far from embroidering upon Lem's pseudo-science, Tarkovsky uses it as a crutch for philosophical discussion: his film starts out with a lyrical evocation of a natural landscape, then jumps abruptly to the ghost-like hallucinations on board a remote space station. His protagonist, Kelvin (Donatas Banionis), is tortured by apparitions of his dead wife; he reacts to these visions first with hostility, but then with gratitude and love - expressed through one of Tarkovsky's great coups du cinema, a floating embrace as the space station momentarily enters zero gravity. All this is outlined at a glacial pace - which appears to be Tarkovsky's way of telling us we need to do a bit of hard work for the spiritual rewards on offer. Nevertheless, it's also the method by which Solaris accumulates its thematic weight: the slow accretion of images and ideas takes on an unstoppable momentum.

Some Like it Hot (Billy Wilder, 1959) One of Hollywood's all-time great comedies arranges for Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon to run from the mob in full drag, encountering both Marilyn Monroe's cream-puff voluptuousness and a (male) millionaire who's sweet on Lemmon. "Nobody's perfect," as the famous last words go, but this is as close as it gets.

Sonatine (Takeshi Kitano, 1993) Evolving away from his early directorial efforts, Kitano's unique voice sounds exhilaratingly in this film about a group of yakuza forced to lay low in Okinawa. No gangster braggadocio here - Kitano on screen stays enigmatically withdrawn, and off screen contributes a mood of florid lyrical fatalism that lingers for weeks.

Songs from the Second Floor (Roy Andersson, 2000) Fusing deadpan northern European humour with moments of surreal grandeur, this astounding Swedish comedy laughs in the face of looming apocalypse. It's a succession of unforgettable set pieces: a failed magician's act; a terminal traffic jam; a bitter crucifix-seller; a parade of penitents, and much more.

Sons and Lovers (Jack Cardiff, 1960) Finely drawn adaptation of DH Lawrence's loosely autobiographical novel, with Dean Stockwell as the hapless Paul Morel, torn between his possessive mother and his own socio-sexual needs. Cardiff, himself an award-winning cinematographer, hired Freddie Francis, who won an Oscar for his camerawork.

The Son's Room (Nanni Moretti, 2001) Moretti's multi-award-winning drama studied the effect of a teenage boy's death on his psychologist father and close-knit family. Departing from his quirky social comedies, Moretti tackles trauma and loss, and avoids sentimentality by getting stunningly low-key performances from his cast.

The Sorrow and the Pity (Marcel Ophüls, 1969) Landmark four-and-a-half-hour documentary chronicling France's harrowing Nazi occupation through the testimony of collaborators, resistance fighters and lucid or blasé survivors. More than a grandiose historical fresco, the superb editing of archives with interviews makes for a tour de force in storytelling.

South (Frank Hurley, 1919) Who would have imagined a film even existed of Ernest Shackleton's expedition to the South Pole, let alone one of such superb quality? The polar landscapes are haunting and luminous, and what begins as a jolly, straightforward travelogue becomes a grim slog, as Shackleton's ship gets frozen in over a long, hard winter.

South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut (Trey Parker, Matt Stone, 1999) Canada, Saddam Hussein, military recruitment, political correctness, the Baldwin brothers, self-help books, overprotective parents, championship figure skaters: Parker and Stone apply the carpet-bombing approach to satire in their uproarious musical version of the TV series. You might call this nihilism, if it wasn't so damn funny.

Soy Cuba (Mikhail Kalatozishvili, 1964) Astonishing hybrid of a movie, filmed by a team of Soviet Russians invited to make propaganda for Castro. What they came up with may be politically compromised, but aesthetically it's undeniably wonderful. Sinuous, elegant tracking shots that even modern film crews, with all their gadgetry, would balk at.

Soylent Green (Richard Fleischer, 1973) In the 1970s, even the old stagers went nuts. Not just latecomers like Altman and Peckinpah, but studio vets like Fleischer, whose bizarre 70s gamut ran from 10 Rillington Place via Mandingo to this creepy and overwrought little masterpiece of dystopian futurism.

Spanking the Monkey (David O Russell, 1994) One of the best of the 1990s US indies. One hot summer, a sullen college student has to drop a prestigious internship to care for his mum after she breaks her leg. Their shared feelings of claustrophobia and muffled ambition boil over into forbidden lust and morning-after revulsion in Russell's discomfiting black comedy.

Spartacus (Stanley Kubrick, 1960) Later disowned by Kubrick, who hated not originating his projects, Spartacus does often look more like the epic late work of original director Anthony Mann. But there is enough of Kubrick's distinctive, large-canvas feel for violent action - revisited in Paths of Glory and Barry Lyndon - and his hatred of fascism (Crassus!) to make him its proper auteur.

Speed (Jan de Bont, 1994) Nerve-racking high-concept idea - if bus slows down, it'll blow up - that works incredibly well, thanks to straight-faced performances and full-throttle direction from one-time cameraman de Bont. Keanu Reeves was the lead, but Sandra Bullock, as the passenger who has to take the wheel, got the most out of the film's success.

Spider-Man (Sam Raimi, 2002) The former horror maestro pulled off the coup of his career at the helm of this entertaining comic-book adaptation, which became one of the most lucrative franchises of recent times. Tobey Maguire was superb casting as Peter Parker, the nerdy high-schooler who becomes Spider-Man and realises a great truth about masked crime-fighters: being one is a tragic burden, and means letting down your friends and family all the time.

The Spiral Staircase (Robert Siodmak, 1945) Still-effective chiller about a mute woman victimized by a serial killer, and holed up the old dark house where she works. The prototype for many a future frightfest (Wait Until Dark, Halloween, et al), this carries a major charge, increased rather than diminished by the rickety black-and-white visuals.

Spirit of the Beehive (Victor Erice, 1973) Erice's extraordinary debut focuses on a post-civil war Spanish village where an enchanting little girl (Ana Torrent) builds a fantasy around a showing of James Whale's Frankenstein. It's both a haunting, poetic exploration of the childish imagination, and a bitter allegory on Franco's harsh, unloving Spain, its indolence counterpointed by the selfless activity of Ana's father's beehive.

Spirited Away (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001) Lost in an enchanted forest, and with her parents turned into pigs, a little girl lives by her wits amid spirits and monsters. A crossover anime smash, the movie sparkles with unstinting visual invention - it's a delicious feeling just to wait and see what Miyazaki will conjure next.

Spring Summer Autumn Winter... and Spring (Ki-Duk Kim, 2003) Take a trip on the wheel of life with this unique Korean Buddhist parable, set on a tiny floating monastery in idyllic woodland surroundings. Beautifully structured to track this location through the seasons, and a wayward disciple's life, it's a sumptuous visual treat that's doesn't pull its punches. After all, life is suffering.

The Spy Who Loved Me (Lewis Gilbert, 1977) A resplendent feather in the cap of Roger Moore apologists, Bond romp No 10 has many a highlight. From the absurd, glorious Union Jack-parachute kick-off, via fish-faced baddie Stromberg's submarine-city HQ, to titanium-toothed titan Jaws, it's all here; and Barbara Bach's triple-crossing Russian spy could be the most complex, complete Bond girl of all.

St Elmo's Fire (Joel Schumacher, 1985) If The Breakfast Club was the birth of the Brat Pack, St Elmo's Fire was its slightly seedier older sibling. Capturing the essence of post-collegiate apathy with humour and pathos, it's notable for embodying the 80s zeitgeist which created the sizzling chemistry between this infamous group of up-and-coming actors.

Stand by Me (Rob Reiner, 1986) In this smooth adaptation of a Stephen King short story, a journey to find a dead body deepens the connections between a ragtag group of pubescent boys. Crucial to the movie's emotional pull are the charming performances by the young actors, especially a heartbreaking turn by River Phoenix.

Star Wars (George Lucas, 1977) Nothing divides filmgoers and writers more than the Star Wars movies: some see in them a superb blast of delirious entertainment, others a soulless piece of kitsch that ushered in the juvenilisation of Hollywood. None the less Star Wars is a tremendously enjoyable picture, with irresistibly catchy language, music and visuals.

Starship Troopers (Paul Verhoeven, 1997) On the face of it an entertaining alien-bug movie, but has any movie more accurately predicted the war on terror? Verhoeven sacrificed much of his goodwill in the US for the sake of a merciless satire of the military and the media. We should thank him for it.

Steamboat Bill, Jr (Charles Reisner, 1928) One reason why we don't get too much slapstick comedy these days is that Buster Keaton pretty much perfected the art decades ago. The gag where the wall falls over him in this film is one of the few moments in cinema that no one can ever fail to be impressed by. No one. Ever.

The Sting (George Roy Hill, 1973) The combined star power of Robert Redford and Paul Newman conspires to relieve villainous gangster Robert Shaw of his wealth via an elaborate scam. It's a story that could easily be played out as grim and gritty, but Hill delivers all the twists and turns with an impressive light touch - with Scott Joplin's jaunty theme accentuating the charm of the cast.

La Strada (Federico Fellini, 1954) Fellini's moving, Oscar-winning parable, set in a seedy travelling carnival, about a simpleminded servile girl (Giulietta Masina) sold by her poor mother to a brutish strong man (Quinn). He mistreats her, but she's unable to leave him for the gentle clown. A masterwork on the vicissitudes of love, filmed with poetic simplicity.

Stranger Than Paradise (Jim Jarmusch, 1984) Dubbed by Jarmusch as "Yasujiro Ozu directs an episode of The Honeyymooners", Stranger From Paradise was shot on short ends donated by Wim Wender and is a series of blankly deadpan single shots, as its jaded immigrant protagonists take a directionless road trip to Lake Michigan. Cramped, wistful and oddly beautiful.

Strangers on a Train (Alfred Hitchcock, 1951) Robert Walker's suave psychopath approaches Farley Granger's pro-tennis star with a novel approach to murder; Hitchcock, in easy command of his powers, unwinds the homoerotic tension of Patricia Highsmith's novel. The obsessive psychological set-up constantly surfaces in astute imagery and unleashes a sickening momentum, skidding along the edge of a moral precipice.

Straw Dogs (Sam Peckinpah, 1971) Unfairly bracketed with gore-worshipping shockers of the period, Straw Dogs' stance on violence is still undeniably slippery. As Cornish locals cosy up uncomfortably to Susan George, wife of wimpy American academic Dustin Hoffman, Peckinpah uses the setting to make his atavistic worldview even more palpable. The reckoning is brought home with compelling force.

A Streetcar Named Desire (Elia Kazan, 1951) The elemental entity that was Marlon Brando got first acquainted with the public in this electrifying adaptation of the Tennessee Williams play. Virile, sullen, thoughtful, brutish: his performance is an instinctual artistic coup that dragged screen acting forward. The film - a hothouse character study with beautifully embroidered lyrical flourishes - isn't bad either.

Strictly Ballroom (Baz Luhrmann, 1992) The story of an aspiring ballroom dancer who finds little success in competition with his flashy, innovative technique sounds like a tale best left to the 1930s. But Luhrmann's exuberant take adds enough comedy and romance to make this story work anywhere. Even in 1990s Australia.

Sullivan's Travels (Preston Sturges, 1941) Sturges gave us his comic philosophy here, in one of his five comic masterpieces. A comedy director (Joel McCrea) is anxious to get serious with his doomy "O Brother Where Art Thou?" and finds that, in the Depression, and "with death gargling from every doorway", the world still needs laughs more than lessons.

Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans (FW Murnau, 1927) German director Murnau came to America and made Sunrise, a film that still seems set in Germany, about a man and his wife and the other woman. It had atmosphere and moving camera shots and enormous sets like no other film. It was the film of the future, and it's still regarded as a milestone.

Sunset Boulevard (Billy Wilder, 1950) In Billy Wilder's procession of Hollywood masterworks, Sunset Boulevard is the masterpiece. Gloria Swanson rules each second of screen time as a has-been silent-picture queen, locked in a decaying ivory tower of self-obsession, who believes she can be rescued by a gigolo scripter, who in turn is trapped by his own heedless opportunism. Sex, death and human folly are laid bare.

Superfly (Gordon Parks Jr, 1972) If Gordon Parks's Shaft was the exemplary blaxploitation hero, then Priest, the coke-dealing anti-hero of Superfly (directed by Parks's son) was its direst warning, prompting certain recently revolutionised young urban gang-members to see their future in terms of cocaine-commerce, not consciousness-raising. Curtis Mayfield's historic soundtrack is almost frame-by-frame refutation of the film's theme.

Superman (Richard Donner, 1978) Fawned over by Bryan Singer in last year's remake, the original Superman is more succinct and more harmoniously in touch with the primary-coloured American values that drive the story. It's hard to imagine anyone else than Christopher Reeve in the tights, exuding the perfect blend of kiss-curl authority and humanism.

The Sure Thing (Rob Reiner, 1985) A refreshing reflection on dating mores that is more than its 80s teen movie trappings suggest. John Cusack is gawky charm personified as the college student on a road trip towards a no-strings sexual encounter, but Daphne Zuniga makes her mark too as co-hitcher Alison, the chalk to his cheese; she sparks his contempt, first, and ultimately his desire.

Suspiria (Dario Argento, 1977) Set in a ballet school that is secretly a coven of witches, this is Dario Argento's best-known film. With tropes filched from Hitchcock but only the barest interest in plot, its extreme aestheticisation of violence and the panting, whispering rock soundtrack by the Goblins confirmed Argento's status as a visionary in the realm of macabre surrealism.

Suture (Scott McGehee, David Siegel, 1993) Ingenious but disorienting thriller that is a film theorist's delight. Dennis Haysbert is the hero Clay who loses his memory and identity after his car is booby trapped. When the surgeons stitch him back together, he - and seemingly everyone else - believe that he is half-brother Vincent. The fact that Clay is African-American and Vincent is Caucasian only adds to the confusion. Why shoot in black and white? As the filmmakers explained, this is a story about racial difference.

The Sweet Hereafter (Atom Egoyan, 1997) A small community suffers the loss of all but one of their children in a bus crash, attracting an ambulance-chasing lawyer with parental sorrows of his own. Illuminated by wintry light, Egoyan's plangent film eventually rests on the shoulders of Sarah Polley, who is wise and faintly spectral as the sole survivor.

Sweet Smell of Success (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957) A coruscating rat-fink ballet, between Burt Lancaster's icy master-manipulator New York columnist JJ Hunsecker and amoral, bottom-feeding press agent Tony Curtis, offers career-best performances from both, and white-hot blank-verse dialogue from Clifford Odets and Ernest Lehman.

Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971) Sweet Sweetback - the first blaxploitation film - was beholden to no one. More political manifesto than actual entertainment, it stars Peebles himself as a black gigolo on the run in LA after killing two cops. Directorially, he plays it savage and experimental, crafting a hoarse rallying cry from the streets.

The Swimmer (Frank Perry, 1968) Burt Lancaster, drinker and madman, "swims" home one Sunday via the pools of his Connecticut neighbours across his own recent history of adultery, cruelty, betrayal and suburban ennui, and ends up howling for the life he somehow pissed away. Not quite John Cheever, but not like any other 60s movie either.

Swingers (Doug Liman, 1996) Smooth-talking lounge lizard Vince Vaughan attempts to get his melancholy mate Jon Favreau back in the dating game in this self-consciously retro-scene comedy. As the pals head for Vegas in search of "beautiful babies", the banter fizzles, and there's some terrific set pieces. Sweet and funny.

The Taking of Pelham 123 (Joseph H Sargent, 1974) In Sargent's ingenious, headlong thriller about a New York subway-train hijack, transit detective Walther Matthau handles things ably above ground, but the real attractions are down below: the gang of ruthless hijackers code-named, Reservoir Dogs-style, after colours, and led by the implacable Robert Shaw in one of his nastiest roles.

The Tale of the Fox (Irene and Wladyslaw Starewicz, 1930) The Starewicz took ten years to complete their astounding puppet-animation fairy tale, Le Roman de la Renard. In essence, it's a very European treatment of the adventures of a deceitful fox - ie, there are no cute moral lessons here. But it's the stop-motion stuffed animals and other strange beasties that make this film so watchable; nothing made since even comes close.

The Talented Mr Ripley (Anthony Minghella, 1999) A psychological thriller with a touch of grown-up class: Anthony Minghella brought his formidable directorial intelligence to this disturbing story of a conman's most dangerous weapon: a capacity, almost like that of a Method actor, for self-delusion. Jude Law is the handsome playboy, into whose affections the unstable young flatterer Ripley (Matt Damon) insinuates himself.

Tampopo (Juzo Itami, 1985) A Japanese one-off that speaks the international language of food and finds the richness of the world in a bowl of noodles. Ostensibly the comic tale of a widow's quest for culinary distinction, this throws all manner of flavours into the mix - from erotic interludes to western parodies - but never over-eggs the pudding.

The Taste of Cherry (Abbas Kiarostami, 1997) Kiarostami produced his masterpiece with this elegant, spare, humanist work. A middle-aged man drives around the itinerant labour-markets of Tehran. What does he want? To commit suicide, and to efface himself utterly from the world. So needs a shovel-wielding labourer to fill in the shallow grave in which he will lie, after swallowing poison. An old man tries to talk him out of it, passionately praising the fruits of God's bounty.

Taxi Driver (Martin Scorsese, 1976) All movie lunatics must be forever judged against Travis Bickle, whose nightly encounter with Gotham's depravity spurs his deranged quest to save a young prostitute from the underworld. The mayhem comes with an ironic coda that almost makes you wonder if it was all a bad dream.

Team America: World Police (Trey Parker, Matt Stone, 2004) Magnificently funny, bad-taste puppet satire on American hubris, and a clever deconstruction of Hollywood action pictures to boot. Team America are the A-team of US foreign policy, kicking terrorist ass. Like the Thunderbirds, they move about in a funny head-bobbing way, but they can fight and have sex. The film has the greatest vomit scene in Hollywood history.

Tears of the Black Tiger (Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000) A recklessly inventive, vibrantly stylised Thai western that looks like it was made by someone who had never seen a real one. But what a beautiful concoction it is, with its saturated colours, ingenious gunfights, 1940s love songs and absurd extremes of melodrama. It's both strange and familiar, like an acid trip at a village fete.

Ten Things I Hate About You (Gil Junger, 1999) Updated Shakespearean teen comedies were the staple of the late 90s, and this one fares well with the pivotal casting of an unknown Heath Ledger in the debut role of arrogant Patrick Verona, whose baiting of the phenomenally hostile Julia Stiles' Kat is worthy homage to the sizzling chemistry between Taylor and Burton (who were paired in the 1967 version of Taming of the Shrew).

The Terminator (James Cameron, 1983) The movie that made Arnold Schwarzenegger an icon, in transition from body-builder beefcake to grade-A action star. He is the implacable cyborg sent from a totalitarian future to kill the mother of a future resistance fighter. James Cameron's direction is virile and stylish and Arnie is magnificent with his absurd body, treacle-thick voice and an infinitesimal touch of drollery that none of his subsequent attempts at out-and-out comedy ever equalled.

Terminator 2: Judgment Day (James Cameron, 1991) He said he'd be back, and here he is: Arnold Schwarzenegger returns as the time-traveling cyborg in a rare sequel that tops the first, with bigger stunts, bigger effects and a bigger story. This time he's been sent back to the 1990s to protect future saviour of humanity Edward Furlong and his long-suffering mum Linda Hamilton from Robert Patrick's new shape-shifting Terminator model.

Tetsuo: The Iron Man (Shinya Tsukamoto, 1989) Industrial-strength metalhead film-making as a salaryman office drone becomes "infected" by bizarre mechanical growths after being involved in a hit and run incident. This short feature practically attacks the viewer with grotesque imagery and a screeching soundtrack, but it displays great imagination and ingenuity at every turn.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1974) "Who Will Survive... and What Will Be Left of Them?" Hooper, in Hitchcock/Jaws style, holds his cannibalistic monsters back for a full 40 minutes of agonising build-up, and then unleashes them with sledgehammer suddenness (and with an actual sledgehammer, naturally). Notable for its lack of blood, its unnerving sound-design, and the best title ever.

Thelma & Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991) The ultimate chick-flick road-trip movie, this one has it all: feisty gun toting Southern women, murder, rape, armed robbery, a Thunderbird convertible on the open road, a killer soundtrack, a high speed car chase, and the world's introduction to Brad Pitt's torso. Teenage slumber parties couldn't ask for a more complete package.

There's Something About Mary (Peter and Bobby Farrelly, 1998) The Farrelly brothers made themselves the kings of the non-PC 1990s with their distinctive brand of outrageous and offensive comedy, which, apparently, they alone were allowed to perpetrate with impunity. A guy finds that he is still in love with a girl with whom he had a catastrophic prom date in high school. This is Mary, played by Cameron Diaz: whose beaming face, framed by a semen-encrusted hairstyle, became a classic image.

These Are the Damned (Joseph Losey, 1963) Unusually bleak sci-fi horror from Hammer studios with American director Losey on board - he, at the time, was living a life of self-imposed exile to avoid the McCarthy witch-hunt. Radioactive kids bring death to whoever they come into contact with. The downbeat ending is memorable as are the twisted Elisabeth Frink statues that populate the scenery.

They Live by Night (Nicholas Ray, 1948) The finest American directorial debut after Citizen Kane, Ray's adaptation of Edward Anderson's 1935 Bonnie-and-Clyde novel Thieves Like Us outlines the poetic humanism and romantic fatalism that would characterise nearly all of his later work. Farley Granger and Cathy O'Donnell are cinema's most affecting doomed young lovers.

The Thief of Bagdad (Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, Tim Whelan, 1940) An English production, with some shooting in Hollywood, this was the Korda Brothers' view of the Arabian Nights. It has Sabu, Conrad Veidt, June Duprez and Rex Ingram as the mythical figures. But it's the magic that touches you, and one of the magicians was Michael Powell.

The Thin Blue Line (Errol Morris, 1988) Morris's riveting and groundbreaking documentary - it ignored all the then-prevalent rules of the form by using speculation and reconstructed sequences - secured the release of its incarcerated protagonist by pressuring the real killer to acknowledge his crimes. The injustice of it all will have you screaming with anger.

The Thing (From Another World) (Christian Nyby, 1951) It's supposed that Howard Hawks directed some of this and Ben Hecht provided some uncredited rewrites; it certainly has some of their fingerprints on it. Snappy, overlapping dialogue fills the air as an isolated team of scientists battle a humanoid alien plant creature - "An intellectual carrot, whatever next?" One of the earliest and best alien invasion movies.

Things to Come (William Cameron Menzies, 1936) It has to be said that some of the actors here aren't taking this as seriously as they should, which partly diminishes the impact HG Wells' predictive science fiction. It's often left to the stunning sets and special effects to carry the movie, a task they handle with great style.

The Third Man (Carol Reed, 1949) Still a contender for the finest British movie ever made, and a home-made film noir to measure up to the best of Hollywood (or France, for that matter) - even if it has American stars and was shot in Vienna. It's filled with unforgettable movie moments - Anton Karas' zither theme tune, Orson Welles' emergence out of the shadows, his famous "cuckoo clock" speech on the Ferris wheel, the sewer chase, the closing funeral scene. Our hero, Joseph Cotten, a pulp western novelist, is repeatedly warned about mixing fact and fiction as he sifts through the rubble of postwar Vienna investigating the death of his old friend Harry Lime (Welles). As Cotten gradually pieces the story together, a very different picture of Lime starts to emerge, along with unpalatable political and economic truths. It's a captivating mystery, soaked in atmosphere, filled with

memorable characters and beautifully filmed in black and white. But beneath the surface, Graham Greene's script engineers a multitude of confrontations: American optimism versus European fatalism; childhood versus adulthood; money versus humanity; friendship versus patriotism; fact versus fiction. Very few films bear so much weight so gracefully.

The Thirty Nine Steps (Alfred Hitchcock, 1935) The classic Boy's Own adventure from John Buchan's novel rattles along at a furious pace. Robert Donat is the innocent murder suspect Richard Hannay, chased by the police from London to the Scottish Borders and back, while he pursues dastardly spies and dallies with Madeleine Carroll: a thriller brimming with wit and verve.

Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould (François Girard, 1993) Endlessly fertile bio-pic of the legendarily eccentric pianist, that takes its cue from Gould's famous Goldberg Variations treatment. Canadian director Girard incorporates animation, radio, and straight recreation to tell Gould's story; Colm Feore puts in a career-best performance in the title role.

This Is Spinal Tap (Rob Reiner, 1984) A gem which went almost unnoticed on its initial cinema release, but accumulated word-of-mouth cult status through video rental. Tap created the "mockumentary" genre with its wonderful homage to ageing Brit rockers in the US, a mix of the Rolling Stones, Black Sabbath and unknown exports like Foghat. Every frame, every line, is a joy.

This Sporting Life (Lindsay Anderson, 1963) Who needs Marlon Brando when you've got Richard Harris? Lindsay Anderson's blistering adaptation of David Storey's novel about a miner-turned-rugby league professional is galvanised by Harris' extraordinary performance as Frank Machin. Harris combines brutality and machismo with an unexpected sensitivity, with excellent support from Rachel Roberts as the widow with whom he has such a destructive relationship.

The Thomas Crown Affair (Norman Jewison, 1968) Though he explored his rugged side in later movies, and his cooler side in earlier movies, Steve McQueen perhaps epitomised his reputation as Hollywood It-Guy in this of-the-moment, groovy 60s heist flick. As millionaire criminal Thomas Crown, he exudes playboy charm with a dangerous edge, seducing stone-faced insurance adjuster Vicki Anderson (Faye Dunaway) with the most famous chess game in film history.

Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines (Ken Annakin, 1965) It's chocks away for a squadron of international comedians in this barnstorming comedy about an aerial race from London to Paris in 1910. Robert Morley is the patriotic lord stumping up £10,000 prize money, hoping that dashing Englishman James Fox will win the dosh, and his daughter Sarah Miles's hand. Fast, slapstick fun, from beginning to end.

Three Colours Trilogy (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1993-94) In two short years, Kieslowski produced three haunting films that form the high water mark of old-style European arthouse cinema. His colour-coded trilogy explores liberty, equality and fraternity using overlapping destinies between characters as a leitmotif: in Blue, a woman (Juliette Binoche) grieves the loss of her family; in White, a Pole plots revenge against his French ex-wife (Delpy); in Red, a model (Irene Jacob) and a judge (Jean-Louis Trintignant) meet through a chance encounter.

Three Kings (David O Russell, 1999) Almost 10 years after the first Iraq war, and a couple of years before 9/11, this was a window of opportunity to make a thoroughly cynical, subversive movie about rascally American soldiers fighting in the Middle East. David Russell's movie is about three dodgy adventurers - George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg, and Ice Cube - who set out to steal Kuwaiti gold. There are some daring comments about hypocrisy and torture: an interesting, underrated movie.

The Three Musketeers (Richard Lester, 1973) Of the many screen versions of the Dumas classic, Lester's exuberant account is the most outright fun: a rousing mix of knockabout action and coarse-grained humour, performed with obvious merriment by a starry cast including Michael York as the artless D'Artagnan, Frank Finlay, Richard Chamberlain and glowering Oliver Reed his trusty trio.

Throne of Blood (Akira Kurosawa, 1957) So many big-screen Shakespeare adaptations are stilted and self-conscious but these aren't charges that can be levelled at Kurosawa's bloodcurdling Samurai-style reworking of Macbeth. The action is transferred to a foggy medieval Japan, and a brutal, arrowy death scene makes it an extraordinary finish.

Thunderball (Terence Young, 1965) Purists may argue over the greatest Bond movie, but the shadow this one cast over the series cannot be ignored. The handmade approach to this film means that sequences such as the fight between dozens of divers not only thrill in the context of the story, but amaze as feats of physical film-making.

THX 1138 (George Lucas, 1971) The story may borrow rather heavily from George Orwell, but Lucas' visuals are quite stunning. A sterile future world populated by drugged-out shaven-headed citizens and policed by robots, it has plenty of stark, interesting detail to engage the viewer - Walter Murch's inventive collage soundtrack adds further layers.

Time of the Gypsies (Emir Kusturica, 1988) A combination of magical romance and down-to-earth realism, Kusturica's epic, set in the former Yugoslavia, fills the screen with unfamiliar sights and sensations, and conjures some moments of cinematic awe. To call it lively is an understatement.

Time Out (Laurent Cantet, 2001) Detached yet emotional, this French drama that makes the ordinary world of employment look like an alien landscape, and captures the desperation and anxiety of economic identity. Aurelién Recoing plays a man too ashamed to reveal his joblessness to his family, and his pretence takes him further and further out of his depth.

Time Regained (Raoul Ruiz, 1999) Ruiz's brilliant account of the final volume of Proust is a brilliant intuition of Proust's passionate journey back into his past and the belle époque. Almost every French character actor was present, including Emmanuelle Béart as Gilberte, Catherine Deneuve as Odette, and Pascale Gregory as Robert Saint-Loup. Superbly atmospheric.

A Time to Live and a Time to Die (Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1985) Arguably the masterwork of modern Taiwanese cinema, a loosely autobiographical account of the generation gap among a family of Chinese exiles from the mainland. Filmed with awe-inspiring humanity, and a luminous visual brilliance.

Timecode (Mike Figgis, 2000) With this boldly experimental picture, Figgis showed that the spirit of questioning, envelope-pushing, cerebral cinema is still alive in the UK. Using a split screen and digital video techniques, Figgis showed four different lives and different narratives unrolling in parallel and in real time, directing our attention from one to the other in the sound mix. They separate and overlap, and the effect is a little mind-fuddling, but fascinating.

The Tin Drum (Volker Schlöndorff, 1979) Allegorical epic set in interwar Germany, revolving around the unusually perspicacious son of a rural couple who receives a tin drum on his third birthday and decides not to grow any older. Schlöndorff's award-winning adaptation of Grass's novel is a savagely funny defiance of Nazism, personified by little drum-banging Oskar and his haunting ear-splitting scream.

Titanic (James Cameron, 1997) Triumphant director James Cameron declared at the Oscars that he was "king of the world!" And for a while he was, with this piece of spectacular hokum, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet as star-crossed lovers aboard the sinking ship. Their story was deemed to have been the Gone With The Wind for a new generation.

To Be or Not to Be (Ernst Lubitsch, 1942) A brilliantly pointed comedy from Lubitsch, bringing the energy and fizz of the screwball genre to political satire. Carole Lombard and Jack Benny play two actors in a repertory company adrift in Warsaw during the Nazi invasion. Disguised as a Nazi, Jack Benny has the sensationally provocative line: "We do the concentrating and the Poles do the camping!" Lubitsch was criticised for this, but this devastatingly non-PC blast has more bite than any of the sentimental nonsense of Roberto Benigni's Life Is Beautiful.

To Have and Have Not (Howard Hawks, 1944) No one doubts that the US fought the second world war with courage, zeal and even justice. But it says so much for the cheek and the cool of the country that the big war effort here is devoted to "You do know how to whistle, don't you?" It's taken from Hemingway, but what counts is Bogart and Bacall meeting under the camera's gaze and following the inner script.

To Kill a Mockingbird (Robert Mulligan, 1962) From the Harper Lee novel, the story of how Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) defends a black man in a southern, country court. Intensely liberal, beautifully written and played, the film is seen from a child's point of view: fathers and daughters are especially passionate about it.

Together (Lukas Moodysson, 2000) Great Swedish feelgood movie. Moodysson's acutely observed comic 70s period piece sees a commune through the young and wonderfully vulnerable eyes of Eva and Stefan. Hippy values are gently satirised while the vitriol is reserved for the hypocritical middle class neighbours. As Eva adeptly observes - all adults are idiots.

Tokyo Drifter (Seijun Suzuki, 1966) A stylised yakuza thriller swinging to the beat of Japan's burgeoning youth culture. The story is mournful in tone - a hitman driven by loyalty; his gang bosses driven by money - but the sets are outlandish and colour saturates the screen. How many heroes could pull off a powder-blue suit?

Tokyo Story (Yasujiro Ozu, 1953) The great Japanese director's masterpiece. Full of the quiet drama of family life, it follows an elderly couple who leave their quiet provincial home to visit their children in chaotic Tokyo, only to find that both their son and daughter are too busily self-centred to care for them: this is simplicity bordering on the magical.

Tom Jones (Tony Richardson, 1963) Henry Fielding's bawdy, big-hearted 18th-century novel, joyously recreated for the swinging 1960s. Albert Finney is Tom, the foundingling who undergoes a variety of picaresque and amorous adventures before finally wedding squire's daughter Sophie (Susannah York); screenwriter John Osborne won one of the film's four Oscars for his brilliant distillation of the massive book.

Tommy (Ken Russell, 1975) The Who's deranged rock opera depicting a deaf, dumb and blind kid who sure plays a mean pinball. Don't let the plot put you off: this is a peculiarly British acid trip (unsurprising with Russell at the helm). As well as the Who, there's Jack Nicholson, Tina Turner, and Elton John to look out for in this strange tale.

Too Beautiful for You (Bertrand Blier, 1989) Satirical romantic comedy about an affluent middle-aged car dealer (Gerard Depardieu) who develops an inexplicable passion for his sweet, frumpy secretary (Josiane Balasko), and cheats on his beautiful trophy wife (Carole Bouquet). Though not as provocative as Blier's earlier films, the classic husband-wife-mistress triangle goes beyond the farce, laced with sombre-edged reflections on love.

Top Gun (Tony Scott, 1986) Testosterone-charged valentine to the macho world of fighter pilots, Tony Scott's slick, bombastic blockbuster is pure 80s gold. Sporting leather flying jacket and aviators, little Tom Cruise grins and struts as he takes on rival hotshot Val Kilmer and romances teacher Kelly McGillis to classic power ballad Take My Breath Away.

El Topo (Alejandro Jodorowsky, 1970) The only way they could sell this hard-to-categorise movie to early 70s audiences was to promise them that they'd be seeing things that they wouldn't see elsewhere. That's a promise that's still valid. Jodorowsky's imagery is cryptic rather than just wilfully surreal, which is why this is still pored over today.

Touch of Evil (Orson Welles, 1958) Sex, drugs, violence, corruption, a lurid border town, a butch gang terrorising poor Janet Leigh, a walrus-sized police captain whose very flesh seems contaminated with vice. Welles' final studio picture swarms with bright light and big sound; its every scene is sensational, onward from the famous first tracking shot.

A Touch of Zen (King Hu, 1969) It clocks in at a fearsome 3 hours 20 minutes and starts with a glacially paced ghost story, but this martial arts epic is worth the effort. Its action sequences have been picked over by later film-makers (notably Ang Lee, for the bamboo-forest fight in Crouching Tiger), and it is conceived and choreographed with a grand scope that builds to an awesome peak.

Touching the Void (Kevin Macdonald, 2003) A gripping true-life story about friendship, survival and the existence of God. Macdonald's drama-documentary recreated Joe Simpson and Simon Yates's climbing expedition in the Peruvian Andes in the 1980s. Simpson broke his leg in zero-visibility snow and wind; Yates, guessing he was dead, cut his rope and carried on alone. Simpson survived - and began crawling back to base camp.

Toy Story (John Lasseter, 1995) Genius computer effects are matched by a witty script and engaging characters in a sweet animated adventure. Tom Hanks is the voice of Woody, a pull-string cowboy who becomes jealous when flashy spaceman Buzz Lightyear supplants his position as top toy. As appealing for adults as it is for kids.

The Train (John Frankenheimer, 1964) Rousing war movie that still stirs the blood. Burt Lancaster is the crafty railway inspector who masterminds the Resistance's plan to prevent the Nazis stealing the cream of France's paintings before the Allies reach Paris.

Trainspotting (Danny Boyle, 1996) Shocking and funny by turns, this exhilarating trawl through Edinburgh's junkie subculture opens with a pounding chase set to Iggy Pop's Lust for Life and never lets up. Emaciated Ewan McGregor is sympathetic as amoral hero Renton, and there's knockout support from all concerned.

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre (John Huston, 1948) On location in Mexico, it looks and feels rough as three men go hunting for gold - it's Tim Holt (solid), Bogart (treacherous) and Walter Huston (the inspired old-timer who laughs like crazy as the gold goes blowing in the wind). Directed by Huston's father, John.

Trees Lounge (Steve Buscemi, 1996) First-time director Buscemi ruminated on what might have been in this poignant, personal story about a barfly loser who learns some serious life lessons the hard way. Buscemi brings a lugubrious authenticity to the downtrodden Tommy, a serial quitter whose days in the boozy gloom of the local bar will resonate with anyone who's ever stood on the brink of a lost weekend.

The Trial (Orson Welles, 1962) Listen for the sound of the typewriters. Orson Welles hired hundreds of typists and filled a factory with desks to convey the soullessness of the office life Josef K (Anthony Perkins) endured. Kafka has rarely been brought to the screen better. Welles described it as his most autobiographical movie. "I've had recurring nightmares of guilt all my life," he claimed.

The Triplets of Belleville (Sylvain Chomet, 2003) Amid the gleaming CGI orthodoxy enforced by Pixar and co, Chomet's loping, surreal 2D animation was always going to stand out a mile. The distended retro world you're pulled through by a Parisian pensioner and her dog as they search for her abducted grandson, a Tour de France cyclist, is detailed, quirky and utterly fascinating.

Triumph of the Will (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935) As much a triumph of Riefenstahl's will as Hitler's, as she had to overcome innumerable technical difficulties to film the 1934 Nuremberg rally. The purpose, she freely admitted, was "the glorification of the Fuhrer", and with all the Nazi crazy gang, plus legions of stormtroopers on show, it remains a potent, disturbing piece of propaganda.

Tron (Steven Lisberger, 1982) When the 80s weren't sending android assassins back in time, they were sucking you into renegade computer mainframes. Disney's 1982 technophobe spectacular foxed audiences who had barely got used to Pacman, but stands as a retro-futuristic wonder now, as Jeff Bridge's hacker makes seamless digital love with the glorious wireframe backdrops.

Twelve Monkeys (Terry Gilliam, 1995) Is he a time traveller or suffering a psychotic episode? Gilliam manages to be both cohesive and cryptic with this expansion of Chris Marker's La Jetee. As with most of Gilliam's imaginative output, you can't help feeling that this managed to slip through while the studio executives weren't looking.

24 Hour Party People (Michael Winterbottom, 2002) Affectionate and evocative drama about the rise and fall of the Manchester music scene from the late 70s to the early 90s. Steve Coogan is enjoyably daft as self-styled music impresario Tony Wilson - a man universally despised by the volatile talent he champions, from Joy Division and New Order to the Happy Mondays.

Two Lane Blacktop (Monte Hellman, 1971) The Driver, the Mechanic, the Girl, GTO: the road-weary gear-heads and "smalltown car-freaks" of Hellman's existential masterpiece (by way of Camus and photographer Robert Frank) are so profoundly alienated that they've drifted away from their own names, as they race for pink slips across the backroads of a vanishing America.

2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) The ambition of Kubrick's sci-fi picture is still breathtaking, and the movie holds up perfectly well, despite CGI advances. In fact, its sheer imaginative boldness towers over other space adventures. A journey into the far reaches of space becomes a parable for man's evolutionary progression into a post-human, or super-human existence. Very few films really inspire awe, but this is one.

Ugetsu Monogatari (Kenji Mizoguchi, 1953) A haunting fable about the vanity of human wishes, as incarnated in two men in 16th-century Japan: a potter and a merchant. One yearns for riches, and is seduced by a phantom princess; the other longs to be a samurai, and leaves for the warrior's life while his wife drifts into prostitution. An absorbing and beautifully photographed tale.

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Jacques Demy, 1964) A wartime romance told entirely in song - something of a first. The pop-art colour schemes and beautiful people (led by the young Catherine Deneuve) might suggest a sugared almond of a movie, but there's a bitter flavour to both the music and story, and a hard centre.

The Unbelievable Truth (Hal Hartley, 1989) Now sadly overshadowed by lead actor Adrienne Shelly's recent murder in New York, this remains a key entry in the American independent scene of the 1980s. Hartley's deadpan comedy about a Long Island girl (Shelly) and her obsession with a mysterious stranger (Robert Burke) is still as smart as a lick of paint.

Under the Skin (Carine Adler, 1997) One of the performances that launched the movie career of Samantha Morton: she plays Iris, a young woman deeply affected by the sudden death of her mother (played by Rita Tushingham). Iris embarks on an odyssey of casual sex, emotional anguish and psychological self-harm. A classic arthouse vehicle for a risky, raw performance.

Unforgiven (Clint Eastwood, 1992) The latest, maybe greatest phase of the icon's career began with an interesting half-retraction from the omniscient death-dealer of spaghetti westerns. Starting with his ageing gunfighter's shaking hands, Eastwood fastidiously debunks America's founding mythology, though the final act of vengeance suggests that maybe there could have been no other way.

United 93 (Paul Greengrass, 2006) Harrowing recreation of the hijacking of the fourth plane on 9/11. Given that we already know its tragic outcome, the story manages to remain gripping by allowing the action to unfold in real time. The sober, unsensational treatment of its subject matter makes it all the more emotionally devastating.

The Untouchables (Brian De Palma, 1987) Incorruptible cop Elliot Ness (Kevin Costner) tries to bring down Robert De Niro's bulked-up Al Capone in this Prohibition-era thriller. Sharp-shooter Andy Garcia, grizzly old-timer Sean Connery and nerdy accountant Charles Martin Smith are hand-picked by Ness to break the Chicago mob's all-pervasive grip on the city through a series of shoot-outs and stand-offs, with De Palma even finding room for a homage to Battleship Potemkin's Odessa steps sequence.

The Usual Suspects (Bryan Singer, 1995) A scriptwriter's tour de force for Christopher McQuarrie - a piece of classic impenetrable noir that talks, talks, then talks some more as, Rashomon-style, it sets into motion one of the best final-act plot swerves ever. Oh, and it introduces Kevin Spacey as 90s cinema's favourite secret weapon.

The Vanishing (George Sluizer, 1988) Sluizer plays most of the typical thriller cards early, yet it's all so skilful that the tension refuses to diminish. A man searches for his missing wife for years. Not knowing what has become of her keeps him in a hell only her abductor can release him from. The film presents evil as disturbingly, credibly mundane, with a final scene that won't budge from your memory.

Vengeance Is Mine (Shohei Imamura, 1979) A brilliantly compelling killer-on-the-run thriller, that delves deep into the roots of its subject's psyche without passing judgment - except on society as a whole. It was based on a real-life case but it goes far beyond the gruesome facts, even to the murderer's childhood. The result is a chillingly credible portrait of criminal psychosis.

Vera Drake (Mike Leigh, 2004) Set in dreary postwar Britain, this impeccably-acted drama has Imelda Staunton giving the performance of her career as the respectable, middle-aged cleaning lady whose world unravels when her second, secret career as a backstreet abortionist is revealed. Atmospheric, morally nuanced and completely gripping.

Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) Vertigo's present prominence within Hitchcock's oeuvre contrasts very pleasingly with the obscurity in which it languished for many decades after its disappointing critical reception in 1958. It simply disappeared for 25 years. If you didn't know a film collector with a bashed-up, bleached-out 16mm college-circuit print, or know someone archive-savvy at Paramount or MCA, then you probably had to wait until its re-release in 1983 to see what all the fuss was about. The simultaneous reissue of five of his Technicolor American films - two of them, Vertigo and Rear Window, certifiable masterpieces - seemed at the time a characteristically Hitchcockian publicity gambit, guaranteeing massive attention for the quintet. And of course you felt like he was speaking to you from beyond the grave, which would have put a smile on his great, pinkly beaming face. And Vertigo - the lost jewel of legend finally disinterred - proved worth the long wait. Now it enjoys the esteem it always deserved, being often cited as one of the enduring masterpieces of world cinema, and one of Hitchcock's foremost achievements. As dreamlike as anything by Buñuel, and quite as fetishy, it tells the same story two times: a man twice falls in love with a woman who isn't there, and twice he causes her death, the first time by abetting her murder; the second time destroying her sense of herself and, with it, his own soul. James Stewart gave his darkest, most disturbing performance, Kim Novak showed depths she never plumbed again, and Hitchcock's technical skills and formal gifts were never more eerily displayed.

Victim (Basil Dearden, 1961) Dirk Bogarde, the "Idol of the Odeons" of 1950s Britain, here transcended his pretty-boy reputation and hinted at his own sexuality by playing a homosexual barrister under the shadow of blackmail. More important as an adjunct to the then forthcoming Wolfenden Report, perhaps, but still a highly compelling drama.

Videodrome (David Cronenberg, 1983) In hiring the young James Woods, Cronenberg had for the first time an actor who could breathe life into his dialogue; he really needed a fine actor to ground this one as it presents some of his most out-there ideas. Woods' sleazy cable station owner is lost in a hallucinatory world of breathing videocassettes, biomechanical guns, cancerous eruptions of flesh and conspiracies. TV is to blame.

Village of the Damned (Wolf Rilla, 1960) With nothing more spectacular than a few blonde wigs and occasional glowing-eye special effects, this flab-free film manages to portray one of the creepiest alien invasions ever. Staging the invasion in the middle of families - in the womb, even - adds a disturbing and claustrophobic level to the usual paranoia that is hard to shake off.

Violent Cop (Takeshi Kitano, 1990) "Beat" Takeshi's directorial breakthrough stars himself, of course, as a blank, bullish cop dealing with his problems very, very badly. As he strides around a grey, cluttered Tokyo in search of drug pushers and crooked feds, there are lots of eerie existential pauses followed by increasingly nasty confrontations, very few of which end well. Quietly, brutally brilliant.

Viridiana (Luis Buñuel, 1961) Invited back to his native, now-Fascist Spain in 1960, Bunuel threw his hosts' (inarguably foolhardy) kindness back in their collective faces with this outrageous satire of the goodly deeds of a naive novice (Sylvia Pinal) cast into the secular realm. It threw the Spanish Catholic establishment into uproar, causing Franco to burn all copies.

Voyage to Italy (Roberto Rossellini, 1954) One of cinema's strangest and most uncanny love stories, made just as Rossellini's own marriage to Ingrid Bergman was beginning to crack. It captures brilliantly the boredom, contempt and irritation clouding the relationship between husband and wife, Alex (George Sanders) and Katherine Joyce (Bergman) as they reluctantly spend time together in the hothouse atmosphere of Naples. What is startling and very moving, though, is their reconciliation.

The Wages of Fear (Henri Georges Clouzot, 1953) Four down-and-outs must drive a convoy of nitro-glycerine through the South American jungle. The slightest bump on the treacherous roads could mean death, but Clouzot's gripping thriller favours psychological portraits over action, exploring the desperate rivalry, greed and ironic fates of his tough-guy characters.

Wall Street (Oliver Stone, 1987) The dependably oily Michael Douglas offers up a time-capsule 80s role as corporate raider Gordon "Greed" Gekko. Stone displays that unnerving talent to have his cake and eat it, filling Gekko's mouth with delectably Mephistophelian patter, while just remembering to fashion Wall Street into a "morality tale". No one quotes Charlie Sheen, of course.

The War Game (Peter Watkins, 1965) A nightmare scenario nobody wanted to think about: a nuclear attack on Britain. But Watkins' "documentary" made it too compelling and too horrific to ignore, with its scenes of firestorms, mass panic, police crackdowns, wounded children, all accompanied by impassive commentary.

Wargames (John Badham, 1983) Ultimate cold war hacker fantasy disguised as a teen movie. Computer whiz kid hacks into the US military's nuclear arsenal control site and decides that a showdown with Russia would be enormous fun. Matthew Broderick and Ally Sheedy lend Brat Pack credibility.

The Warriors (Walter Hill, 1979) Hill's vision of New York youth gangs may not be especially realistic - clown-faced baseball freaks, etc - but he packs enough of a punch to have you rooting for the heroes no matter how silly their enemies may look. The decaying Big Apple of the 1970s has never looked so dark or oppressive.

Way Down East (DW Griffith, 1920) A fantastic, sprawling melodrama that is among most barnstorming achievements of silent cinema. Lillian Gish is almost preternaturally realistic as the betrayed wife doing her damndest to make her way in the world; that climactic scene where she really looks like she's going over the waterfall is still a killer.

Wayne's World (Penelope Spheeris, 1992) Two metal slackers host a cult cable show until they sell out to network TV with dire consequences. You can either pick up some superbly annoying catchphrases (eg, the cruel postscript "Not" to indicate that your previous compliment was not entirely honest), or play spot the filmic reference. This extended Saturday Night Live sketch is chock full of both.

Werckmeister Harmoniak (Bela Tarr, 2000) Hungarian director Bela Tarr is famous, or notorious, for his inordinately long, black-and-white movies of unutterable gloom. His longest, Satan's Tango, clocks in at seven hours. This is manageable, at around two: a mesmeric, dream-like tale of a bizarre circus, consisting of a vast corrugated-iron shed, containing a dead whale, which incites a zombie-like uprising among the townsfolk. Truly strange.

West Side Story (Jerome Robbins, Robert Wise, 1961) There are people who still say the stage show was the only way to see it, but the film won plenty of awards, and the cast boasts George Chakiris and Rita Moreno as well as Richard Beymer and Natalie Wood. Robert Wise and choreographer Jerome Robbins collaborated on direction.

What's Up, Doc? (Peter Bogdanovich, 1972) Bogdanovich's homage to the screwball comedies of the 1930s has klutzy Iowa professor Ryan O'Neal and wacky dropout Barbra Streisand fetching up at a hotel where any number of identical suitcases get mixed up, creating slapstick mayhem. It doesn't match, say, Bringing Up Baby, but it's brimming with witty, cartoonish energy.

Whatever Happened to Baby Jane? (Robert Aldrich, 1962) Following years of public feuding, ageing screen legends Bette Davis and Joan Crawford were paired for the first time on the silver screen, with Davis thoroughly enjoying her sadistic turn as Jane, the decrepit former child star whose jealousy of movie star sister Blanche sees her torture and starve Crawford with (presumably) real-life relish.

When Father Was Away on Business (Emir Kusturica, 1985) Kusturica really put himself on the map with this, his second film: it won the Palme d'Or and got an Oscar nomination. It's a child's-eye view of communist Yugoslavia; father is in fact in a labour camp. Made only a few years before the break-up of the country and the bloody siege of Sarajevo, it now stands as a vision of a harmonious society that's been irrevocably destroyed.

When Harry Met Sally (Rob Reiner, 1989) Arguably the last pitch-perfect romantic comedy made. Every note rings true as a chronically wry Billy Crystal and perky-but-repressed Meg Ryan flirt with the relationship continuum. Sharp dialogue and keen observation on gender difference make this a perfect hetero date movie. Also contains the most fondly remembered orgasm, fake or otherwise, in film history.

When We Were Kings (Leon Gast, 1996) The natural cinematic charisma of Muhammad Ali shines out of this wonderful documentary about his legendary 1974 fight against George Foreman, staged in Zaire: the Rumble in the Jungle. It is about sport, about race politics and about Africa itself. The masterly mix of newsreel footage and talking-head contributions made Gast's film a masterclass in journalism and history.

Where Eagles Dare (Brian G Hutton, 1968) Sneering Nazis, impregnable fortresses, imprisoned generals, cable-car ascents ... Where Eagles Dare takes bullet-riddled plot elements and constructs one of the most rousing of second world war action films. That's mostly due to a sinuous, unusually well-managed plot, lifted intact from Alistair Maclean's novel, allowing Clint Eastwood to chalk up the biggest body-count in his oeuvre.

The White Balloon (Jafar Panahi, 1995) Few films portray kids as single minded as this. As a result it's one of the sharpest attempts from a director to get into the mindset of a child. The young Iranian girl who spends most of the running time trying to retrieve money from the drain so she can buy a goldfish isn't good or bad. Or wise beyond her years. She's just childlike, which is what children obviously are.

White Heat (Raoul Walsh, 1949) Nearly 20 years after his first gangster roles, Jimmy Cagney was back as Cody Jarrett, the meanest and craziest gangster of them all - except for his mother. A superb tribute to self-destruction, with Cagney exploding at the end and shouting "Made it, Ma! Top of the world!"

Who Framed Roger Rabbit? (Robert Zemeckis, 1988) The Chinatown of animation uses the famous postwar plot to rid an increasingly automotive city of its metro trains as the springboard for a million clashing concerns, not all of them exclusively of interest to the under-nines. A technical landmark in the integration of live-action and brilliant animation.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (Mike Nichols, 1966) A censor-baiter that hastened the collapse of the Hays Code, Woolf remade Elizabeth Taylor for her later, blowsier years and found the venom in an atypically retiring Burton, as Taylor's semi-castrated, speccy academic husband George.

The Wicker Man (Robert Hardy, 1973) One to bring out the inner pagan in us all. This horror film - a true curio of cinema - ditches the typical 70s Hammer gothic kitsch, dropping Edward Woodward's pious copper off on a sun-worshipping Scottish isle instead. Something indispensable happens to the tone en route: the atmosphere is queerly heightened rather than just tense, and the gruesome finale bizarrely uplifting.

The Wild Angels (Roger Corman, 1966) Peter Fonda won his counterculture spurs as the out-of-control gang leader of the Heavenly Blues in this exploitation flick about a marauding gang of Hell's Angels. B-movie maestro Corman amps up the irresponsibility, showing the Angels as a brawling, pill-popping, abusive outfit, but their amorality is contagious, as evidence by the line sampled by Primal Scream ("We wanna be free..") for their hedonistic club anthem Loaded.

The Wild Bunch (Sam Peckinpah, 1968) Peckinpah's great western is a strictly a last-chance saloon affair: a gang of hunted outlaws set in the dying days of the free west, made just as late-60s America was losing self-belief. So it breathes elegiac desperation, from the opening scene of kids butchering scorpions to the climactic Gatling-gun massacre, which made the director's name for prettified violence.

The Wild One (László Benedek, 1953) Source of the postwar biker mystique, the Wild One has a lot to answer for. Loosely based on the Hollister biker outrages of 1947, it relies for its power mainly on the effeminate rebelliousness of Brando, then at his most iconic, and benefits hugely from a semi-feral Lee Marvin in support.

Wild Strawberries (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) Opens with one of the best dream sequences in cinema history, and is both utterly frank and very tender in its treatment of its elderly but vain protagonist. Like Scrooge, the professor (Victor Sjöström, himself a noted silent-film director) en route to receive an honorary degree is able to look back on his life and finally to begin to understand just which missteps he has taken along the way.

William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (Baz Luhrmann, 1996) Bardolaters might not approve of the camp excess, but Luhrmann's adaptation captures some of the bawdy zeal of the original (minus the RSC enunciation). A radiant Claire Danes and engaging Leonardo DiCaprio are a perfect centrepiece, but this is an ensemble act. Look stage left for more extraordinary performances.

The Wind (Victor Sjöström, 1928) The pioneer Swedish director Victor Sjöström came to Hollywood and made this magnificent fable about a woman (Lillian Gish) who sees the prairie wind as the sexuality that terrifies her. Silent film at its most powerful and eloquent, with Gish breaking our hearts.

Wings of Desire (Wim Wenders, 1990) Two angels in overcoats watch over Berlin, but are unable to interact with people - until one becomes smitten with a circus acrobat in distress and decides to become human. Shot in a striking mix of black and white and colour, Wenders' elusive modern fairytale includes a sterling performance by Peter Falk, and now stands as a hymn to a divided city.

Wise Blood (John Huston, 1979) The movie that gave us weirdo Brad Dourif in full flight, Wise Blood is fully in the well-worn Southern Gothic tradition that oddball Savannah writer Flannery O'Connor deepened and darkened - she used to knit little jackets for her chickens, you know. John Huston delivers one of the strangest movies about God and religion ever made.

Witchfinder General (Michael Reeves, 1968) Less than a year after this was released, Reeves died of a barbiturate overdose. This is a fine legacy for his talent, a morbid tale of total power wielded by the unjust, and never-better, Vincent Price sniffing out witches in civil war England. The sweeping use of starkly beautiful landscape almost makes this the UK equivalent of a western, but the angry mobs and torture remind you that this is most definitely a horror film.

Withnail & I (Bruce Robison, 1987) The dank cult student favourite seems to have an unlimited capacity for rewarding repeat visits: the creeping poetry of Robinson's script and Richard E Grant's draw-string mannerisms as "resting actor" Withnail soaking in more deeply with every visit. Every character feels like an old friend (or a foe); every line is a peach.

The Wizard of Oz (Victor Fleming, 1939) No matter how many times you've been down the yellow brick road, this children's classic hasn't lost its ruby slipper magic. Sure, there's no place like home, but nothing beats the thrilling moment when Judy Garland, as Dorothy, first steps out of her cyclone-battered black and white room into the dazzling technicolor of Oz.

Woman of the Dunes (Hiroshi Teshigahara, 1964) The sheer macabre strangeness of this erotic Japanese movie pushes it over the line into demented-genius category. An entomologist wanders the dunes looking for rare specimens; he is persuaded to spend the night in a beautiful young widow's tumbledown shack at the bottom of a pit. The next morning the rope-ladder has disappeared, and he must spend the rest of his life there, baling and shovelling the sand that continually drizzles in - and having sex with the widow. Dream-like and compelling.

Women in Love (Ken Russell, 1969) Despite the then notorious naked wrestling match between Oliver Reed and Alan Bates, Russell largely reins in his sensationalist instincts for this adaptation of DH Lawrence's novel. With Oscar-winning Glenda Jackson and Jennie Linden making up the foursome who find more pain than pleasure in love, it's a beautifully acted, highly evocative work.

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (Pedro Almodóvar, 1988) Crazy Spanish farce about three tottering women - Carmen Maura's pregnant, spurned mistress; girl-on-the-run Maria Barranco; and would-be murderess Julieta Serrano - plus an early appearance by Antonio Banderas: the plot is more convoluted than a drunken bullfighter's footwork, but this wildly funny movie made Almodóvar's name outside Spain.

The Women (George Cukor, 1939) Not a man in sight, it's women going to Reno for divorces. It's also a benefit film for actresses denied work on *Gone with the Wind* - Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Paulette Goddard, Joan Fontaine, plus Rosalind Russell. George Cukor directed and the dialogue crackles along.

Working Girl (Mike Nichols, 1988) Feminism with a twist in Mike Nichols' gender politics comedy saw Melanie Griffith embody the helium-voiced blonde role that would haunt her entire career. That the dumb blonde should actually have a brain was less impressive than the ruthless deviousness both Griffith and rival Sigourney Weaver used to rise to the top in a man's world.

X - The Man With The X Ray Eyes (Roger Corman, 1963) Sometimes budget limitations can work in a film's favour. Although Corman does provide brief, effective glimpses at what scientist Ray Milland is viewing after he experiments on his own eyes with his X-Ray serum, much more effective are his harrowing and poetic descriptions of seeing far too much.

X-Men (Bryan Singer, 2000) The all-singing, all-morphing mutant gang might have made this Marvel superhero adaptation into a super-confusing mess. Singer managed to extract the core of the introspective comic-book ethos - in this case, a plea for minority tolerance - and parcel it into a feisty, meaningful vendetta, captained by uber-thesps Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen.

Y Tu Mama Tambien (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001) This superbly made picture re-launched Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón's career, and made a star of Gael García Bernal. It is thrillingly sexy: not just in that it's about sex, but its whole style and feel are sensual. Bernal and Diego Luna go on a road trip with a sexy older woman who is escaping from a failing marriage. Sexual tension burgeons, blossoms, triangulates.

Yaaba (Idrissa Ouedraogo, 1989) The Burkina Faso film-maker composes this folk-tale with simplicity - although several sub-plots are woven in - and he tells it at a walking-pace. A young boy Bila (Noufou Ouedraogo) befriends an old woman Sana (Fatimata Sanga) despite the fact that other village boys torment her, believing her to be a witch. Bila stubbornly befriends her and calls her

Yaaba, or Grandmother, and Sana repays the compliment by finding the medicine which will cure the fever of a friend of his - an achievement likely only to reinforce her "witch" reputation.

The Year My Voice Broke (John Duigan, 1987) The first of a brace of pictures that paired British ex-pat director with his sometime alter-ego actor Noah Taylor, here is a pure and tender but never formulaic evocation of teenage disillusion. The year is 1962 and two childhood sweethearts are ripped apart when young female hormones go crazy, leaving 15 year-old Danny (Taylor) in a jealous fix that every jilted, unrequited lover will recognise.

The Year of Living Dangerously (Peter Weir, 1982) Weir's story recreates the pressure-cooker world of 1960s Indonesia, a turbulent world of violence and suspected coups. Mel Gibson plays a naive Australian reporter, who befriends Sigourney Weaver's embassy official and a Chinese-American cameraman, remarkably played by a woman, Linda Hunt, who received the Oscar that year for Best Supporting Actress.

Yellow Earth (Chen Kaige, 1984) The film that brought modern Chinese cinema to the world's attention, also focused it on the traumas of the Cultural Revolution. A lush, beautifully coloured drama about a Communist soldier's trip to a remote village, it opened up a previously hidden world.

Yellow Submarine (George Dunning, 1968) The acid-drenched visions of hippy-era Beatledom found perfect expression in this endlessly inventive cartoon; luckily enough, since the Fab Four were well beyond doing anything as uncool as acting. Musically, of course, it's the Beatles in their vintage years; the trip to Pepperland is great lark, with or without artificial stimulants.

Young Adam (David Mackenzie, 2003) A brooding adaptation of cult Scottish beat writer Alexander Trocchi's existential murder mystery, set on Glasgow's canals, and finding room for some of Britain's starriest actors. Stirring up the grit are a dour Tilda Swinton, sexually compulsive Ewan MacGregor, and Emily Mortimer, who undergoes a gruelling humiliation by ketchup and mustard.

Young Frankenstein (Mel Brooks, 1974) Unfeasibly funny stuff as Gene Wilder plays the grandson of the original monster-maker, sceptical of gramps's work until he inherits his Transylvanian bolthole and resumes the experiments. Peter Day's monster, fiancée Madeline Kahn, and - perhaps above all - Marty Feldman's Igor ("What hump?") are just perfect. As with all the best, it only ever gets funnier and funnier.

Z (Costa-Gavras, 1968) A political thriller that caused a sensation in the heady days of 1968. Set in an unnamed country, it's a thinly veiled attack on Greece under the generals, and echoes a real-life case in which the investigation into an eminent liberal's murder uncovered endemic state corruption. Costa-Gavras portrays a world of awesome cynicism, and yet retains a sense of hope.

Zatoichi (Takeshi Kitano, 2003) Kitano cast himself as the legendary blind swordsman in this brilliantly deft collision of samurai nobility, earthy humour and expertly choreographed action. The plot's a familiar enough reworking of Kurosawa's Yojimbo, as loner Zatoichi (also an expert masseur and gambler) comes to the aid of a village terrorized by two rival gangs. Kitano's confident direction and understanding of the genre, as well as his comic timing, cuts through cliché with a blade-sharp freshness.

Zazie Dans le Metro (Louis Malle, 1960) The French new wave at its most mischievous, in an absurd, anarchic cartoon of a comedy, full of childish adults and grown-up children - not least eight-year-old Zazie, whose retinue of insults and insights turns Paris on its head when she escapes from her transvestite uncle.

Zero de Conduite (Jean Vigo, 1933) A film of just over half an hour that shows school as a kind of prison from which the kids will escape. The director, Jean Vigo, was an anarchist. The filming is poetic and idealistic, and this small gem has helped enrich nearly every school picture made ever since, from Les 400 Coups to If...

Zoolander (Ben Stiller, 2001) Male modeling takes it on the chin in Stiller's absurd but hilarious farce, in which the vacuous but well-meaning Derek Zoolander (Stiller himself) is unwittingly recruited by a sinister fashion cartel to assassinate the president of Malaysia. Stiller keeps the story - a Rocky-style fall from grace - straight, and the comedy gloriously stupid, adding a superb sidekick in Owen Wilson as gormless hippy renaissance man Hansel.

Zulu (Cy Endfield, 1964) Best remembered for its stunning 19-century Rorke's Drift battle scenes, in which 139 British soldiers face off an attack from 4,000 angry locals, this milestone British film is as memorable for its dignity and restraint as it is for its bravura staging. Periods of quiet before the inevitable onslaught add an eerie expectancy, but it's the terrific stiff-upper-lip cast - Michael Caine, Stanley Baker, Jack Hawkins - that captures the endangered-species mettle of the British Empire.