

Here's looking at you, *Hallam Foe*

When British Director of Photography Giles Nuttgens BSC (*The Deep End*) read the first draft of *Hallam Foe* he was pleased with its appealing narrative and emotional elements. He and Director David Mackenzie had worked together on *Young Adam* and *Asylum* and their latest collaboration bore marked similarities. Both stories related to people living on the edge of the moral strictures of society and each focused on an individual who let his or her sexual needs or deviations take control.

In *Young Adam*, which starred Ewan McGregor as a man living outside of the prevalent rules in 1950s society, Nuttgens used the images to describe the texture of working-class Glasgow without being heavy handed in period detail. *Asylum*, set in the same period, explored a woman's demise after she transgressed the social and moral barriers of English society by consenting to a sexual relationship with a prisoner who brutally murdered his wife.

Hallam Foe is played by Jamie Bell who starred in *Billy Elliot*. "He's a post-adolescent with his own sexual weirdness, but he lives in 21st century Scotland where the taboos are not so evident," remarks Nuttgens. "He launches himself into an expectant liberal world and although he eventually conforms in his own way, he has a socially unacceptable pastime. He is a voyeur."

When Hallam's mother dies in what he believes are mysterious circumstances, he retreats to a tree house on his father's

country estate. From there he spies on the locals, including his beautiful new step-mother. After a disastrous sexual encounter with her, he leaves for Edinburgh where he spots a young woman called Kate who bears a close resemblance to his late mother. He follows her to a large hotel where she works and secures a job there for himself. Driven by obsession, he sets up home in the hotel's clock tower, a vantage point from which he spies into Kate's apartment.

"David and I pushed each other to avoid slipping into any of the cinematic ground we'd already covered in *Young Adam* and *Asylum*," comments Nuttgens. "In our early discussions we talked about constant camera movement in the context of working out dolly moves that repeatedly introduced new frames and relationships timed with the actors' dialogues. Our most radical decision during the shoot was the escalating use of a handheld camera. David wanted a variety of camera angles from take to take as well as numerous set-ups covering the same dialogue or action. Fortunately we had a very close relationship with the Editor, Colin Monie,



Above (L to R): DP Giles Nuttgens, BSC and Director David Mackenzie on the set of *Hallam Foe*.

which made our scene construction a three way process."

"We wanted to maintain very close contact with the lead character and sustain an energetic narrative. Our intention was to keep the audience on Hallam's side all the way, irrespective of his naive breaking of social taboos," continues Nuttgens. "The actors responded to the flexibility of the handheld camera, particularly Jamie Bell with whom I developed a close rapport in terms of how he would move and at what speed. We permitted a lot of cross-overs so he could open up when necessary or block me when David and I felt it suited the story better. The immediacy of the handheld camera and the involvement of the actors in the technicalities of the camera bound us together."

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Nuttgens shot on Super 35 in 2.35 aspect ratio. "We decided that the squeeze for the release prints would be done digitally; we knew we would have flexibility in the DI to increase contrast, blow the whites and twist some of the colouration into the hues that we were looking for. "He used KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 for daylight exteriors and day-for-dusk scenes. "It was important to achieve a very sharp look as I knew we would lose a little on the 2K DI," he says. "KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 was my choice for interiors, night exteriors and day exteriors when the light was flat. I have great faith in the stock's ability to hold the blacks even when underexposed. In fact David and I talked about leaving a large part of the frame at night in complete darkness and only lighting objects relevant to the story."

an unwanted outsider comes through after the edit. It's sometimes rough, but it has a resonance with the emotions of the characters."

The most difficult scene for Nuttgens in the 37 day shoot was Hallam's escape onto the roof of Kate's fifth floor apartment. "David and I decided to shoot the first part of the scene at dusk which gave us a window of just eight minutes in which to capture up to four shots a night. We shot Hallam exiting the window at the Edinburgh location, then cut to the exterior studio set as he climbs onto the roof, returning to the set interior to observe him looking in from the outside and finally to a wide shot of the real skyline, to which Hallam will be added in post-production". The apartment's seven foot high ceiling forced Nuttgens to use only practicals to light the interior as

phone as he walks down a hill over very uneven ground. "We shot in soft cold light at the end of the day and started with a 50mm lens, then we went tighter – 75mm, 100mm. I told Jan Pester, the Steadicam Operator, to put Hallam on the edge and not worry if he went out of frame. On the subsequent take I told him to put Hallam hard on the other side of the frame so he jumped across the frame in the cuts. Everybody loved the energy of that sequence."

Hallam Foe is co-produced by Sigma Films and Lunar Films and is financed by Film Four, Scottish Screen, the Glasgow Film Festival and Ingenious Film Partners. It will be premiered early next year at a major European film festival. ■



The intimate love scene between Hallam and his step-mother (Claire Forlani) in a ten foot by six foot tree house was shot night-for-day in a wood. While most of the crew were standing outside in freezing temperatures, Nuttgens, the 1st AC and the boom swinger joined the actors in the tiny space, several feet from the ground. "I burned out small slits for windows on one side with a single 6kW then shot wides, tights and reverses without changing the lighting. Each take was different and the major problem was trying to find a place to stand between the actors' legs as they scabbled on the floor. They sensed where I wanted to be, so the camera ceased to be voyeuristic and became part of the frenetic action between them," he explains. "I hope that the search for a frame and our determination to find contact with the actors in a moment of intimacy when the camera is effectively

there was nowhere to hide any lamps. "The trick was to ensure the studio wasn't over lit as it would have made matching impossible," he remarks. "But I couldn't maintain the stop of T1.5 that I'd used at the real exterior roof; I needed a reasonable depth of field as the camera was swinging around on a 40ft crane and it would have made it tricky for the 1st AC to judge the focus on Hallam who was on a set roof 25 feet in the air. I also needed sufficient depth of field to maintain both the set and action elements in focus to facilitate a clean matte line on the various sections of green screen around the set where we would be plating in the real Edinburgh background. We lit up to a stop of T3.5 maintaining a very precise balance between the interior and exterior lighting."

Nuttgens used a Steadicam for the scene of Hallam talking on his mobile

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