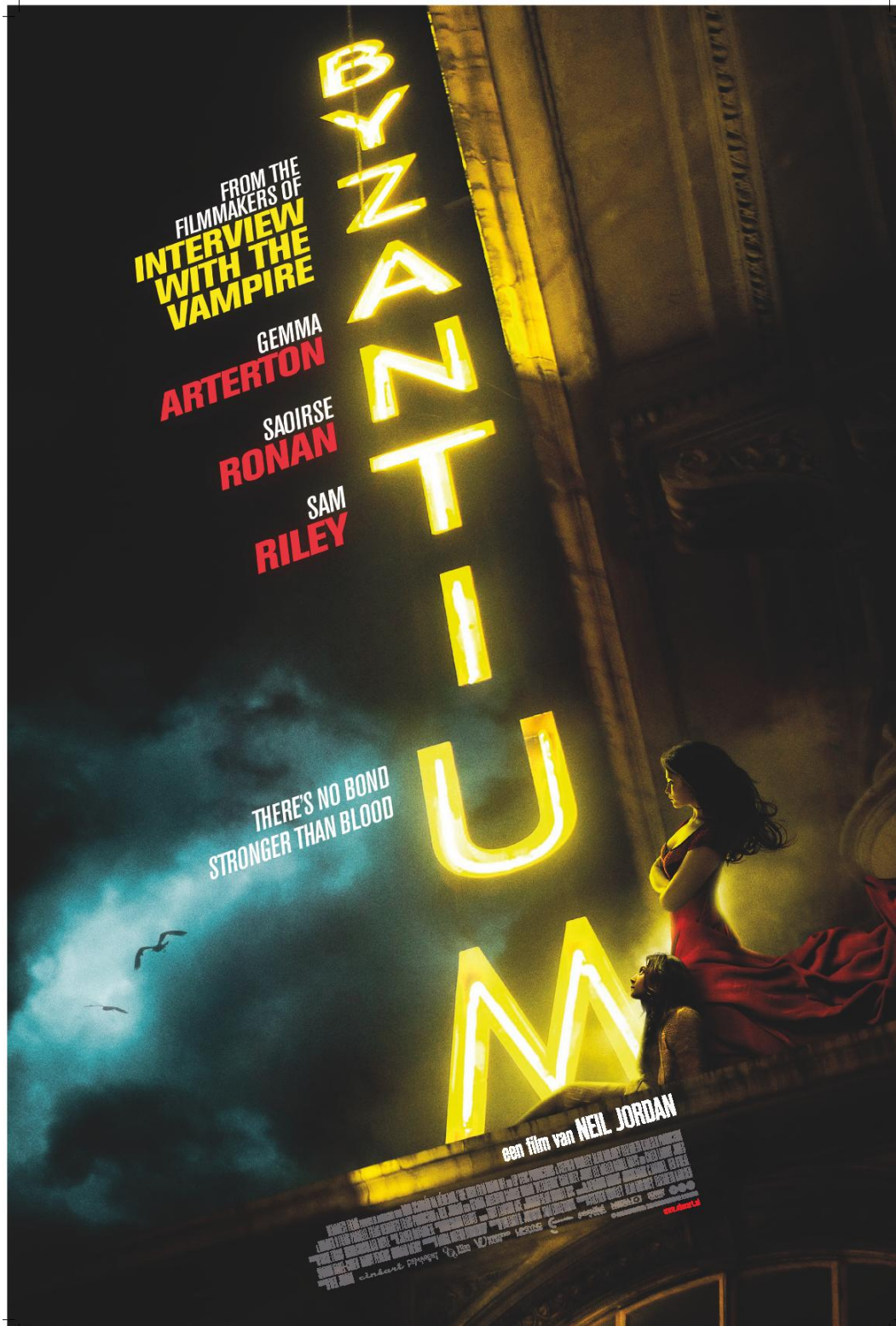


Persmap



BYZANTIUM

Een Film van Neil Jordan

BYZANTIUM vertelt het verhaal van moeder en dochter, die hun toevlucht zoeken in een verlaten badplaats. Clara (Gemma Arterton) is een alleenstaande moeder en werkt als prostituee om voor haar dochter Eleanor (Saoirse Ronan) te zorgen. Clara ontmoet de verlegen en eenzame Noel, die de twee onderdak biedt in zijn verpauperde 'Byzantium,' terwijl Eleonor een vriendschap opbouwt met Frank van school. De twee tieners lijken voor elkaar bestemd en zij vertelt hem het grote geheim: zij en haar moeder zijn ruim 200 jaar oud en overleven op mensenbloed. Wanneer dit verhaal zich verspreid en ze ingehaald worden door hun verleden, moeten Clara en Eleanor vechten voor hun leven.

Land: UK – Jaar: 2013 – Genre: Thriller – Duur: 118 min

Releasedatum: 11 juli 2013

Distributie: Cinéart



Meer informatie over de film:

Cinéart Nederland - Janneke De Jong
Herengracht 328 III / 1016 CE Amsterdam
Tel: +31 (0)20 5308840
Email: janneke@cinéart.nl
www.cinéart.nl

Persmap en foto's staan op: www.cinéart.nl
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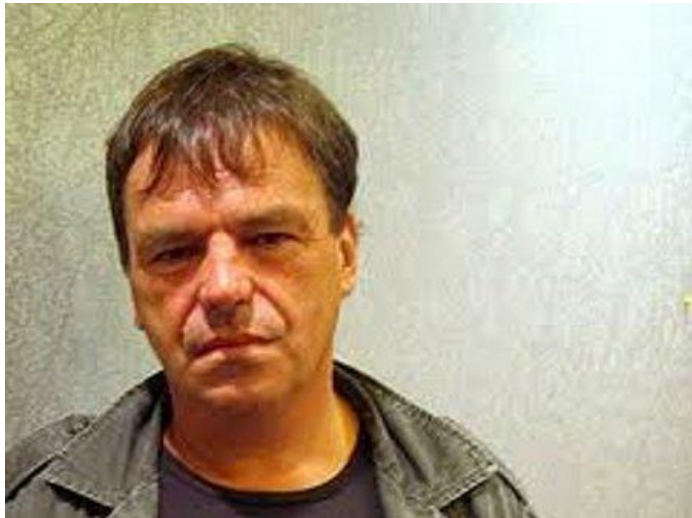
Cast

Clara Gemma Arterton
Eleanor Saoirse Ronan
Darvell Sam Riley
Ruthven Jonny Lee Miller
Noel Daniel Mays
Frank Caleb Landry Jones
Gabi Kate Ashfield
Morag Maria Doyle Kennedy
Savella Uri Gavriel
Werner Thure Lindhardt

Crew

Directed by Neil Jordan
Produced by Stephen Woolley
Alan Moloney
Elizabeth Karlsen
William D. Johnson
Sam Englebardt
Screenplay by Moira Buffini
Based on her play *A Vampire Story*
Executive Producers Mark C. Manuel
Ted O'Neal
Sharon Harel-Cohen
Danny Perkins
Norman Merry
Co-Producer Redmond Morris
Director of Photography Sean Bobbitt (B.S.C.)
Film Editor Tony Lawson (A.C.E.)
Production Designer Simon Elliott
Music by Javier Navarrete
Costume Designer Consolata Boyle
Key Make-up Artist Lynn Johnston
Key Hairdressers Lorraine Glynn
Orla Carroll
Casting by Susie Figgi

Director's biography



Academy Award winner **Neil Jordan** has been making celebrated films for four decades, directing some of the big screen's most iconic stars, including Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Michael Caine, Robert de Niro, Liam Neeson, Peter O'Toole, Jeremy Irons, Jodi Foster and Julia Roberts.

Neil's acclaimed reputation as director and distinguished screenwriter is reflected in the awards success his films have enjoyed around the globe. Highlights include *MONA LISA* (1986), which was nominated for the prestigious Palme D'or prize at the Cannes Film Festival, as well as multiple nominations at the BAFTA & Golden Globe ceremonies the following year.

THE CRYING GAME (1992) garnered many award nominations for writing and direction, including an Academy Award nomination for best direction and BAFTA nominations for best direction, screenplay and film. The film won the WGA Award for best screenplay, BAFTA award for best British film, and the Academy Award for best screenplay in 1993.

THE END OF THE AFFAIR (1999), which Neil adapted from Graham Greene's novel, won the BAFTA for best adapted screenplay in 2000, as well as being nominated for best film and best direction. It was also nominated for best director at the Golden Globe Awards the same year.

Other notable films include *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE* (1994); *MICHAEL COLLINS* (1996), which won the Golden Lion prize at the Venice Film Festival; and *BREAKFAST ON PLUTO* (2005).

In 2003, The Irish Film and Television Awards awarded Neil their Lifetime Achievement Award.

Most recently Neil created Showtime's acclaimed mini-series *THE BORGIAS*. Now in its second series, he has written and directed multiple episodes, and was nominated at the 2011 Emmy Awards for Outstanding directing in a Drama Series.

Director's selected Filmography

- 2011 THE BORGAS
Gemini Award – Best Dramatic Series – 2011
- 2005 BREAKFAST ON PLUTO
- 1999 THE END OF THE AFFAIR
BAFTA award – Best adapted screenplay – 2000
- 1996 MICHAEL COLLINS
- 1994 INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE
- 1992 THE CRYING GAME
Academy Award – Best original screenplay – 1993
BAFTA Award – Alexander Korda Award for Best British Film – 1993
- 1986 MONA LISA
Golden Glove Award – Best actor – 1987
BAFTA Award – Best actor – 1986
Cannes Film Festival – Best actor – 1986



Cast biographies

GEMMA ARTERTON – CLARA

Since graduating from RADA in 2007, Gemma Arterton has already garnered an Empire Film award for 'Best Newcomer' and a nomination for the 'Orange Rising Star' award at the 2011 BAFTAs. Gemma is currently filming Brad Furman's thriller *RUNNER, RUNNER* in Puerto Rico in the leading female role of 'Rebecca Shafran' alongside Ben Affleck and Justin Timberlake. Gemma will next be seen in the lead role of 'Gretel' opposite Jeremy Renner in *HANSEL AND GRETEL: WITCH HUNTERS*, directed by Tommy Wirkola, due for release in January 2013. Gemma has also recently finished filming the London-set comedic drama *SONG FOR MARION* alongside Vanessa Redgrave and Terence Stamp. Gemma has recently been announced as part of the cast for 2013's Jeff Buckley biopic *MYSTERY WHITE BOY* and comedy thriller *THE WRIGHT GIRLS* directed by Andy Fickman.

Last year, Gemma voiced the character of 'Shelley' in *A TURTLE'S TALE: SAMMY'S ADVENTURE*, an animated feature including voices from John Hurt and Dominic Cooper. She also starred in the title role in *TAMARA DREWE* directed by award-winning director Stephen Frears, opposite Dominic Cooper, Luke Evans and Tamsin Greig. In 2010, Gemma appeared alongside Sam Worthington as the goddess 'Io' in Louis Letterier's remake of the 1981 epic *CLASH OF THE TITANS*, based on the classic Greek myth. She also played the lead female role of 'Princess Tamina' in Disney's *PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME*, directed by Mike Newell, starring alongside Hollywood stars Jake Gyllenhaal and Sir Ben Kingsley. In 2009, Gemma starred in J Blakeson's independent film *THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ALICE CREED*, a thrilling tale of kidnapping and intrigue in which she played the title role alongside Martin Compston and Eddie Marsan.

Amongst her other film credits, Gemma starred in Richard Curtis' *THE BOAT THAT ROCKED*, a period comedy set in the 1960's co-starring a host of greats such as Philip Seymour Hoffman, Kenneth Branagh, Bill Nighy and Emma Thompson and in 2008, Gemma starred as iconic Bond Girl 'Strawberry Fields' in *QUANTUM OF SOLACE*, directed by Marc Forster and starring Daniel Craig and Dame Judi Dench. Her other film credits include Guy Ritchie's gangster film *ROCKNROLLA*, *THREE AND OUT*, directed by Jonathan Gershfield, and the classic remake of *ST TRINIAN'S* directed by Oliver Parker and Barnaby Thompson for which she was nominated for an Empire Award and won a National Movie Award.

For television, Gemma's heartrending portrayal of the heroic 'Tess' in the BBC adaptation of Thomas Hardy's novel *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES* co-starring Eddie Redmayne and Hans Matheson earned her rave reviews and numerous award nominations. She also played the role of 'Elizabeth Bennett' in ITV's costume drama *LOST IN AUSTEN*. In 2007 she also starred in the BBC's *CAPTURING MARY*, directed by Stephen Poliakoff, in which she played the character 'Liza' alongside Dame Maggie Smith, David Walliams and Ruth Wilson.

For theatre, in early 2010 Gemma made her West End debut at the Garrick alongside Rupert Friend and Tamsin Greig, in Douglas Carter Beane's Award-winning Broadway comedy *THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED*. She also returned to the stage in November 2010 at the internationally renowned Almeida Theatre in Henrik Ibsen's *THE MASTER BUILDER*, for which Gemma's performance earned her critical acclaim for her 'spellbinding' turn as 'Hilda Wangel'. Her previous theatre credits include the role of 'Rosaline' at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in *LOVE LABOUR'S LOST* directed by Dominic Dromgoole. After gaining an award for 'Best Supporting Actress for Kent', she gained a full scholarship to RADA where she took lead roles in productions such as *AN IDEAL HUSBAND*, *TITUS ANDRONICUS* and *THE BEGGAR'S OPERA*.

SAOIRSE RONAN – ELEANOR

Saoirse (pronounced "sear-sha") Ronan is probably best known for her starring role in the feature film *ATONEMENT*, directed by Joe Wright, starring opposite Keira Knightley and James McAvoy. Ronan was 13 years old when she earned an Oscar nomination as well as Golden Globe and BAFTA nominations for the critically-acclaimed performance.

She will soon be seen in *THE HOST*, the film adaptation of Stephanie Meyer's popular novel. Ronan will star as the title character 'Melanie Stryder,' who fights daringly against aliens who have taken over Earth. *THE HOST* is scheduled for release by Open Road Films on March 29, 2013.

She is currently in production for *HOW I LIVE NOW*, about an American girl who goes on holiday in the English countryside only to find herself fighting for her life as a war breaks out. Directed by Kevin Macdonald, Ronan will play the title role of Daisy opposite George MacKay, Tom Holland, and Harley Bird.

Ronan was most recently seen in 2010 starring in Focus Features' action-thriller *HANNA*, directed by Joe Wright. Ronan played the title character, a teenage girl trained from birth to be an assassin. The cast includes Cate Blanchett and Eric Bana. She was also seen in *THE WAY BACK*, directed by Peter Weir and starring Ed Harris, Colin Farrell and Jim Sturgess. Inspired by Slavomir Rawicz's novel, "The Long Walk: The True Story of a Trek to Freedom", the film tells the story of a small group of multi-national prisoners who escaped a Siberian gulag in 1940 and made their way across five countries.

In 2009, she starred in *THE LOVELY BONES*, directed by Peter Jackson, and based on the popular novel. Ronan portrayed 'Susie Salmon' a young girl who is murdered and watches over her family. Ronan was honored for the performance by the Santa Barbara International Film Festival and was nominated for a BAFTA Award in the Leading Actress category.

Among her previous credits are *VIOLET & DAISY*, *CITY OF EMBER*, starring Bill Murray, Tim Robbins, and Toby Jones; Amy Heckerling's *I COULD NEVER BE YOUR WOMAN*, starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Paul Rudd; Bill Clark's *THE CHRISTMAS MIRACLE OF JONATHAN TOOMEY*, and Gillian Armstrong's *Death DEFYING ACTS*, starring Catherine Zeta-Jones and Guy Pearce.

Ronan currently resides in Ireland with her parents Monica and Paul.

SAM RILEY – DARVELL

Sam Riley is currently filming Disney's *MALEFICENT*, in which he stars alongside Angelina Jolie in the title role. Sam takes the role of "Diaval".

Sam's upcoming films include the highly anticipated *ON THE ROAD*, directed by Walter Salles and adapted from the seminal novel by Jack Kerouac. Sam plays the lead role of "Sal" in a cast that includes Viggo Mortensen and Kristin Stewart. The film was selected for competition at The Cannes Film Festival of 2012.

February 2011 saw the release of the gangster thriller *BRIGHTON ROCK*, based on the novel by Graham Green. Sam takes the lead role of "Pinkie". This feature is directed and adapted for the screen by Rowan Joffe. The film also stars Helen Mirren and John Hurt.

Sam made his debut as a leading actor in *CONTROL*, a film by Anton Corbijn. His extraordinary performance earned him many awards, including Best Actor at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Newcomer Award at the British Independent Film Awards, the British Breakthrough

Award at the London Film Critics' Circle Awards 2008 and a BAFTA Orange Rising Star 2008 nomination. The film won the Directors' Fortnight Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007.

His other credits include leading roles in *13 TzAMETI* directed by Gela Balbuni and co-starring Mickey Rourke, and *FRANKLYN* directed by Gerald McMorrow and co-starring Eva Green and Ryan Phillippe. Sam has also appeared in German language films, including a cameo role in *RUBBLE DIE KATZ*.

JONNY LEE MILLER – RUTHVEN

JONNY LEE MILLER has been recognized for his work in feature films, on television and on the stage. In 2011, Miller starred in the world premiere of *FRANKENSTEIN* a new play based on Mary Shelley's classic story, presented at London's National Theatre under the direction of Danny Boyle. Miller won an Olivier and Evening Standard Award for his performance, shared with Benedict Cumberbatch with whom he alternated in the roles of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature.

Later this year, he will star as Sherlock Holmes in the CBS series *ELEMENTARY*, a contemporary take on the famous detective, with Lucy Liu as Watson. Miller was most recently seen in Tim Burton's *DARK SHADOWS* opposite Johnny Depp.

Miller first gained international attention with his performance as the drug-addicted punk Sick Boy in Danny Boyle's drama *TRAINSPOTTING*, with Ewan McGregor. He more recently starred in the true-life drama *THE FLYING SCOTSMAN*, receiving Scottish BAFTA Award and London Film Critics Circle Award nominations for his portrayal of the innovative but troubled racing cyclist Graeme Obree. His additional film credits include Alan Rudolph's *AFTERGLOW*, Gillies MacKinnon's *BEHIND THE LINES*, *PLUNKETT & MACLEANE*, *MANSFIELD PARK*, Woody Allen's *MELINDA AND MELINDA*, and *ÆON FLUX*.

On television, Miller had a memorable multi-episode arc on Showtime's hit series *DEXTER*, and shared in a Screen Actors Guild Award® nomination as a member of the show's 2010 cast. He also starred for two seasons in the title role of the critically acclaimed ABC television series *ELI STONE*. His other television work includes the miniseries *DEAD MAN'S WALK*, based on the Larry McMurtry novel, such BBC projects as the four-part adaptation of Jane Austen's *EMMA*, the miniseries *CANTERBURY TALES*, and the telefilm *BYRON*, and the Emmy nominated *ENDGAME*, which premiered on PBS.

Miller made his Broadway debut in 2009 in *AFTER MISS JULIE*, opposite Sienna Miller. His theatre work also includes the West End productions of *SOMEONE WHO'LL WATCH OVER ME*, *FESTON*, and *THE PLAY WHAT I WROTE*.



About the production

Moira Buffini, the playwright and screenwriter behind the adaptations of *Tamara Drew* and the recent *Jane Eyre*, had always wanted to write a vampire story.

“I was probably about eight or nine and I did that thing of creeping down and watching Christopher Lee in one of those Hammer horrors, and I was so terrified that I wouldn’t go to the loo in the night on my own for years afterwards,” she recalls. “Then vampires went from being this object of horror to this object of fascination as I grew up.”

In 2007, Buffini finally crafted her tale, ‘A Vampire Story’, aiming it at teenagers and writing it as a play. “I am quite drawn to the Gothic generally and I was reading all the early vampire stories,” continues Buffini. The John Polidori story, ‘The Vampyre’, which was huge in its day, Byron’s fragment, ‘Augustus Darvell’, and Sheridan Le Fanu’s short story, ‘Carmilla’, which is the first female vampire story, all fascinated me.”

“They are fantastic,” she adds, “and I was thinking a lot about Carmilla and a lot in general about these Gothic vampires because they are quite different from Bram Stoker. They don’t turn into dust in daylight, they don’t need coffins to sleep in, they don’t become bats, they don’t have visible fangs, they are much more invisible and they just move through society like everyone else.”

Buffini’s play came to the attention of producer Stephen Woolley. “My daughter Edith dragged me off to see a play entitled ‘A Vampire Story’,” explains Woolley who had enjoyed success in the gothic fantasy-horror realm with the likes of *The Company of Wolves* and *Interview with the Vampire*. I was consciously looking round to make another movie that was gothic and supernatural.”

At the heart of ‘A Vampire Story’, and Buffini’s screenplay for *Byzantium*, is a mother-daughter relationship. Here, however, they’re both vampires and are both immortal. “That was fascinating to me,” Woolley adds. “*Daughters of Darkness*” (1971), which was a Harry Kümel film with Delphine Seyrig, was probably one of the only movies that have explored the tensions between older and younger female vampires.”

The vast majority of vampire stories, notes Woolley, focus on men. Women are usually the prey. “The idea of female protagonists in this genre was interesting.”

The women in the movie are Clara (Gemma Arterton) and Eleanor (Saoirse Ronan), a mother and daughter who are not that many years apart. Each was turned immortal at different stages of life, leaving a mother in her mid-20s and a daughter in her mid-teens. The central conceit of a mother-daughter vampire relationship, where they are only a few years apart in age also excited producer Elizabeth Karlsen.

“A mother’s relationship with her teenage daughter is raw with emotion of the best and worst kind,” says Karlsen. “There’s adolescent angst and loathing which competes with parental despair and longing for the innocence of youth. When the child is 16 and the mother a beautiful 24-year-old, the natural order is turned on its head. A fantastic, twisted and confused relationship takes its place. It is at once familiar yet totally alien.”

The title of Buffini’s original work was altered when adapting it into a screenplay, as well as changing some of the themes. “It just deepened,” she says. “Having a second go at anything always makes it better. The tone of the play was deliberately humorous in places. The tone of the film has become much darker.”

As *Byzantium*, the story has lengthened, too, “so you get to know the girls much better,” says the writer. “Also, the adults in the play were all monstrous, but in the film they are not. And the world on view in the film is now this marriage between a gritty, realistic, modern world and what we hope is a view of the past which doesn’t quite feel like costume drama.”

The writer goes on to say that she was a huge fan of Anne Rice’s vampire stories of the 1990s, and it perhaps comes as no surprise that when Woolley recruited a director for *Byzantium* he turned to a long-time collaborator, and the director of both *The Company of Wolves* and the Anne Rice adaptation *Interview with the Vampire*, Irish filmmaker Neil Jordan.

“Neil and I hadn’t worked together for about four or five years,” recalls Woolley, “After we’d made *The Company of Wolves* (1984) we had considered doing another Angela Carter project, which was also another female vampire film, which was based on the Carmilla story, and so that was a talking point for us. I told Neil about this project and then he rang me immediately after he had read it and said that he would love to do it.”

Karlsen adds, “For me, this is the last in the trilogy of Stephen and Neil’s work starting with *The Company of Wolves* and then on to *Interview with the Vampire*. *Byzantium* was so clearly a natural fit for Neil.”

Jordan has explored mythic concepts and different ideas of reality throughout his 30-year career as a writer and feature film director. “When Stephen sent me the script I couldn’t believe it,” he remembers. “It was so wonderfully complex and subtle.”

“And it was strange because there were a lot of issues in there that I had dealt with in other movies. There were stories within stories, and stories about stories, and a constantly shifting narrator. It was set in a downbeat holiday town, although in England not in Ireland, this time. Also there was a reinvention of the vampire legend. I loved it.”

For producer Alan Moloney, the chance to make a vampire film with Woolley and Jordan was too good a chance to pass up. “One of the really attractive bits for me is getting to work with Stephen and Neil again,” he says. “Neil and I did *Breakfast on Pluto* together, which was a wonderful film. And to get to do a vampire film with the guys who made *Interview with the Vampire*, for me, I’m getting a bit of a kick out of that - it is quite an exiting thing to do.”

With a time frame stretching across the centuries, Jordan says that he regarded the script as “two centuries of stories. I loved that and also the fact that there was this mother and daughter pair and that their ages were so similar—they appear to be sisters. That relationship really attracted me to the film as a whole.”

He adds that *Byzantium* “is about two people that have to live together forever. With that framework in mind, I saw a wonderful opportunity for a reinvention of all the vampire films. I made a vampire movie before with *Interview With The Vampire* and since then there’s been the *Twilight* franchise, and the comedy vampire stuff coming up everywhere. It’s almost become child’s play. And with those kinds of films vampires have these supernatural qualities that they just develop for convenience, and thrilling storytelling. Today’s vampires can run fast and fly.

“The vampires in *Byzantium* are just two women that bond—because they’ve survived their cross with death. I just thought this was a great opportunity to bring vampires to life again, to make them real—because the story was rooted in realism. It actually feels like it could happen.”

When Jordan read the original draft he says that the story felt “softer than a traditional horror film”, and that the filmmakers had to decide whether it was “a mood piece, or a theatrical kind of piece or whether it should be a true horror movie.” He adds, “I tried to push them to introduce the dynamic and bloodier elements that are appropriate to the genre, and the script developed from there and became this wonderful thing.”

“It’s about people who are condemned to live forever, and it’s about vampires, obviously. They’re called something quite different in the script – they’re called souciantes — and in a way I wanted to avoid the word ‘vampire’ in the movie, because they don’t conform to any of the traditional rules of the vampire genre.

“They can go out into the sunlight, they don’t have the sharp teeth. Initially Moira had them kill people with a long thin knife, but I introduced the idea of their thumbnail growing [into a talon] when they get hungry and they use that to slit their victim’s throat. They’re different creatures from traditional vampires.”

Ultimately, Jordan says that what appealed above all was the mother and daughter relationship. “And they’re a mother and daughter who are immortals. Because they were turned into vampires at different stages of their lives they’re almost like sisters, and that confusion is great,” notes the director.

“There’s a great contradiction among the characters. Clara is full of sexuality and immediacy and violence and protectiveness and Eleanor is far more cerebral and guilt-ridden. They’re a bit like Louis and Lestat in *Interview with the Vampire*, in a way. The Clara-Eleanor dynamic was absolutely wonderful and it was one of those scripts that just attracts talent. Both Saoirse and Gemma loved it. They’re both wonderful actresses.”

“Clara is such a great role,” begins English actress Gemma Arterton. “It is everything I have wanted to do. You don’t tend to find scripts for women like this. Moira Buffini, the writer, is amazing. There aren’t many female screenwriters but she writes films for women.”

Arterton, of course, starred in the Buffini-scripted *Tamara Drew*. “Continually I read scripts where the woman is there to serve the man in some way, or to make him look better, his support. In this it is total subversion. Totally. The men are the prey, the weak ones.”

The character of Clara, we discover, was born in the 18th century and thrown into prostitution by a powerful and conniving man called Ruthven (Jonny Lee Miller). She then has a daughter, whom she abandons at an orphanage, knowing she can give her no kind of life in her low situation. A chance arrives, however, through the enigmatic character of Darvell (Sam Riley), who reveals to Ruthven that he’s found the secret of eternal life.

Darvell leaves Ruthven with a gift that reveals the source of the secret. Clara, however, steals this, steals immortality, reclaims her daughter and sets in motion the exhilarating set of events that unfold in the film.

“It has been great for me” continues Arterton. “I have done action stuff before and had to be very physical but usually there is a guy who is more physical and he gets to do all the cool stuff. But here I get to do it and I love all that — being able to be physical and committed and fearless. It is just brilliant and Clara, I feel, is such a feminist icon.”

Indeed, after suffering a life of abuse at the hands of men, Clara employs her powers to exact vengeance upon them. As an immortal she needs to feed on human blood and takes relish in

destroying pimps and misogynists and other general, male, lowlife. As a mother, she is also viciously aggressive in the protection of her offspring.

“So I remember when I first read the script I thought, ‘I have just got to do it’,” beams Arterton. “I really, really wanted it because not many roles like this come up.”

While Clara seems to delight in her vengeance, things are very different for her daughter, 16-year-old Eleanor, played by Irish actress Saoirse Ronan. “Eleanor is a young girl who has been raised in an orphanage until the age of 16 and was then turned into a vampire by her mother, Gemma’s character,” explains Ronan.

“We find them at the start of the film 200 years later when their relationship has become very deep and it is just the two of them against the world. They travel from place to place and can’t really settle anywhere. They constantly have to keep moving on.”

Immortality, in the way it’s earned by Clara, Eleanor and handful of others in the story, comes at a price. The mother and daughter have to feed, they have to kill, and hence they have to murder, and move on. The film finds them set to wandering again, and they arrive in a small English seaside town, itself a relic of former glories.

“It’s interesting because you see a change in the Clara-Eleanor relationship through the film, and I think that change has been a long time coming, from my character’s point of view,” Ronan says.

“That is the difference between her and Clara. Eleanor is quite compassionate and sensitive when it comes to her prey. She chooses older people who want to go, and the ill and dying. Whereas Clara isn’t so compassionate.”

Ronan goes on to note that because “she has this dislike towards their situation, and who they are, Eleanor is constantly craving to tell the truth, but never can”.

The story is told, in part, through Eleanor’s narration. She is a keen writer, finds solace in spilling the truth about her life onto the page, but always destroys her stories, because those that read them must die.

Director Neil Jordan explains, “There’s a dynamic to horror films and a sense of terror and immediacy and things happening. We introduced more of these bloodletting elements into Moria’s first script and it really adds to the drama. Moira really leapt on that and came up with the whole theme that anyone who reads Eleanor’s story has to die. That’s an incredibly dynamic thing to work with and it’s a great plot-hanger and hook.”

Buffini says that she loved the melancholy that Eleanor’s situation provokes. “That’s the vampire’s dilemma,” she says. “It is enough to turn you melancholy. You are still human but you must feed on human blood. You don’t quite ever lose your humanity yet you are ‘other’.”

“I think vampire stories are brilliant because they give us that twisted prism through which we can view humanity. I think all good vampire stories aren’t really about vampires but about us. That is why I love them.”

For Eleanor, her desire to settle down and to be accepted comes through a boy she meets in the seaside town, Frank (Caleb Landry Jones). “At the very centre of this film is this teenage love story which almost operates like every teenage love story in the world,” says Jordan. “It’s this boy, he’s

shy, he's kind of awkward, and he's kind of an outsider. And they're not really meant to be together at first, but they're bound for each other.

"I just thought that was lovely. I remember saying to everyone 'Look you've got to remember, there is talk about a vampire movie or a horror film, but at the centre of this film is a love story between two teenagers.' Caleb Landry Jones did a test for me—he's a very passionate man and he read the script for me and he did this amazing, amazing reading that just sent me over."

Landry Jones says that the quality and honesty in the script ensured that it was unlike anything else he'd seen. "I was being sent so much typical Hollywood crap," says Landry Jones, "and this script was everything that those other scripts were not. This was honest, and I felt Frank was an interesting character that I could do something with."

The young actor says that in some ways he is the "audience's way in to this world. Anyone can relate to this story and find themselves in all these characters. For me, this was a great opportunity to share the truth with someone else. I found that in the script and with Neil I had to be a part of it.

"I fell in love with Frank very quickly. I really enjoyed being him and the story is such an important one - it should reveal something about young love."

Ronan agrees, pointing to the fact that, in a way, Eleanor and her newfound friend are both suffering similar fates. "When she meets Frank she sees another lost soul and that is why they relate so well together," says Ronan.

Unlike Eleanor, Frank is mortal, very much so — he has a blood disease. "He is dying himself and, in a way, Eleanor is living a sort of static death," Ronan notes. "That's what draws her to him and she knows that she has to help him.

"The best stories are simple stories about straightforward relationships," continues the actress. "There is a lot going on around them and at the end of the day Byzantium is a mother-daughter relationship and it is a romance as well.

"The romantic relationship that Eleanor has with Frank and how that develops and how she wins his trust — she is an outsider but he accepts her — these are all human qualities."

Ronan, like Arterton, says she relished the fact that women take centre stage in a world more usually dominated by men. "That is always very appealing to an actress," she says. "This story has two lead characters and they are both female and that is the first attraction, and the fact that they are the violent ones makes it more interesting.

"Here the older female lead is a very strong woman but it is not about her sexuality; it is about the strength that she has."

That strength is tested all the way by a mysterious group of men, including Ruthven and Darvell along with Werner (Thure Lindhardt) and Savella (Uri Gavriel), men of varying degrees of corruption, who, as a collective, have not taken kindly to women trespassing on what they consider their sacred territory. The brethren are hunting Clara and her daughter down.

"The wonderful way these vampires are portrayed is that they were kind of beyond morality," notes Jordan. "They were kind of pitiless and yet they lived. There was also elegance to them and total control. They have this wonderful quality of gentleness and mastery at the same time."

Ruthven is determined to punish Clara. "The brethren seem to have missed out a whole section of history when women got the vote and equal pay," says producer Stephen Woolley with a smile. "They won't have seen *Made In Dagenham* and they didn't know Emmeline Pankhurst. Their origins in the story are mysterious but there is a sense that this brotherhood really did rule the world once upon a time."

The most intriguing, and seemingly the least iniquitous, of these men, is Darvell, played by Sam Riley. "Sam was just fantastic casting for this role because he has this kind of stillness," says Woolley. "He also has strange depths to him as a human being and certainly he can project that as an actor."

"For us he was perfect casting because we wanted someone who comes from the past, and is in the past. We needed somebody you feel could be 200 years old, too, and Sam can project that really well."

Karlsen agrees. "From the moment I saw Sam's extraordinary performance in *Control* I have wanted to work with him," she says. "He has an utterly compelling physical presence and is such a fine actor. He has a troubled demeanour - both deeply emotional and chilling, which seemed perfect for the part."

Riley describes his character: "I play an old naval Lieutenant, Darvell, who falls ill in the 1800s and is desperate to stay alive, so he starts investigating old books and ancient parchments to try and work out a way of prolonging his life. He's heard rumours about this coven of men and is willing to sacrifice other people to continue his existence."

It is Darvell who allows Clara to get her hands on the gift of immortality. "And women aren't really allowed to be vampires so she's been on the run for more than a hundred years while me and my brotherhood are coming looking for them," Riley continues.

"Darvell has more of a conscience and he doesn't see that there should be a particular problem with women becoming vampires. But the brotherhood are a bit like a golf club who don't want women in there, messing up their fun." He laughs, "I suppose he's a progressive vampire!"

The actor concludes that he found the script very unusual, as one doesn't often see two women as the leads, "and the men playing a part in their lives, rather than the women just being a love interest or whatever. Certain subjects often become popular, and we're not friendly vampires which seem popular at the moment!"

For the look of the vampires, make-up artist Lynn Johnston (Oscar nominated for Albert Nobbs) says that beyond their pale complexion and extending thumbnail (the latter a blend of CGI and prosthetics), they look pretty much like us. Only Jonny Lee Miller's Ruthven demanded a lot of extra work.

"The Ruthven character has syphilis and starts off in 1803 looking quite healthy but then by 1810 he has a few spots and bumps and by 1820 he looks worse, with bad teeth," she says. "For the oldest of his looks he has a bald cap with the wig, but once they become vampires they don't change that much. They have pale faces, but that's about it."

The film takes inspiration for its title from two different poems by William Butler Yeats, a few lines from one, 'Byzantium', appearing in the film. "I think they are both two wonderful poems, which I found completely inspirational in writing the play and the film," says Buffini, "because they are both about the quest for eternity."

She called the last scene of her play Byzantium, “because it is a timeless place that both exists and doesn’t and it is a place for and of the imagination”. In the film Byzantium is the name of the seaside hotel in which the girls find a temporary haven. “And I loved the really earthy, material, seedy way we have used that word as the name of the hotel, bringing it down to earth with a lovely seaside tawdriness.”

Much of the film was shot in Hastings. Neil Jordan explains, “We wanted a haunted feel to a rundown seaside town. We looked at several in the Southeast of England, Margate, Hove and Brighton. But Hastings had this really haunted quality — there’s a fishing community that still works from the beach, there’s loads of closed down boarding houses, and this wonderful hotel we found that we used for the Byzantium interior. The whole place had that sense it was haunted by a past that no longer exists.”

Production designer Simon Elliott says that the Byzantium hotel almost feels like a mid-point between two worlds — between the 19th century realm in which Clara and Eleanor were born and the 21st century world in which now they exist. “It’s this weird and crazy contemporary but not quite modern kind of place,” he says. The hotel in the film is owned by a lonely young man called Noel (Daniel Mays).

“The contemporary stuff is pared down and bleak and urban and we had to make sure that the period stuff was as well,” continues Elliott. “It is not a lush grandiose environment. It was quite stark and bleak. And then sitting between the two periods is the hotel in which the girls stay, Byzantium.”

“Stylistically the whole film feels urban and bleak and nothing about these girls is fancy. It is all pared down and decayed.”

The filmmakers also shot on mainland Ireland and just off the coast, as the film moves backward and forward in time. Jordan says that the 19th century sections of the film have a totally different feel from the present day. “The past we give a different photographic quality by its compositions and by the presence of grime and smoke in the atmosphere,” says the director.

Acclaimed cinematographer Sean Bobbitt is the director of photography. “Reading the script I really thought a naturalistic approach would aid the storytelling because we want to stress that these are real people, who have become vampires, and live in the world that we live in.” he says. “The lighting is heightened in places but essentially it is naturalistic. Compositionally it is very considered. We place the characters in the frame rather than the frame moving the characters around.”

Jordan concurs. “The physical beauty of the costumes and the setting, they have more of a storybook quality than the contemporary stuff,” he notes. “The latter is not cinéma vérité-style, though, with handheld cameras and found-light and grab-as-you-move photography. It’s quite rich and quite considered and the images are very strong and very decided.”

The director says that he revelled in the material and the environments in which they shot. “I love imaginary beings,” he smiles, “and imaginary creatures and worlds, and I love to set and photograph things in a situation that is apparently real but which has all this subterranean stuff going on. And this film gave me such an opportunity to do this.”

“Vampires have the smell of eternity about them,” continues Jordan, “and also reflect what people miss from religion. They have this assumed elegance, too. People are attracted to vampires in the way they’re attracted to all mythology — whether they want to see a movie about a Minotaur, or Pan,

or the Irish fairy tradition, it's all the same need: a dissatisfaction with the real world." He smiles. "People basically hate reality!"

Producer Stephen Woolley has waited almost a decade to shoot another horror film and he's delighted with *Byzantium's* look, and also its breadth of appeal.

"Anyone who likes a good old horror film will have a lot of fun with this," he says, "and anyone who likes to think about movies will also have good fun. They might occasionally get a fright but we will keep subverting that and I think that's what is interesting about this film."

"Of course, there is lots and lots of horror — it is a vampire film — but there is also quite a lot of tenderness and there is a lot of beauty in terms of the relationships."

Karlsen, meanwhile, hopes "that the audiences see what I see — a hugely original and unique piece. It is visually and emotionally poetic with two women at its centre who are together; intelligent, strident, stunning, strong and utterly, completely compelling. It is a vampire film like we have never seen before."

The film is much darker, more frightening and more violent than some modern vampire films, says Woolley, although he believes that *Twilight* fans will find something in it for them.

"It's like, 'You used to like *Twilight* and now you will like this, because it will be like *Twilight* but real'," he says. "It has the adolescent love affair but it is not that easy, and in fact it is skewed not towards the male character and the female victim. This has the female character and the male victim and I think it'll feel like a strong and fresh take on the vampire movie."

