

BFFS SOUTH WEST GROUP

Poetry (*Shi*)

Cert 12A South Korea 2010 139 mins

Crew

Director/writer Lee Chang-Dong
Cinematography Kim Hyunseok
Film Editing Kim Hyun

Cast

Yoon Jeong-he Yang Mija
Lee David Jong Wook
Kim Hira Mr. Kang
Kim Yong-taek Kim Yongtak
Park Myeong-sin Heejin's mother

Synopsis

South Korea, present day. Mija is a 66-year-old woman who lives with her uncommunicative teenage grandson Wook in a small provincial city.

On the day that Mija is diagnosed with the early stages of Alzheimer's, she also learns that Wook is implicated in the suicide of a local schoolgirl, and is unwillingly drawn into an attempt to hush-up the tragedy.

Trying to make sense of the confusing world around her, she enrolls in a poetry class at the local adult education centre, where she is encouraged to write a poem, and gradually begins to see things in a different light.



- The film's international premiere took place at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival, where it won the award for Best Screenplay.
- Lee wrote the lead character specifically for Yoon Jeong-hee, a major star of Korean cinema from the 1960s and 1970s. She won the Best Performance by an Actress at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards for the role.



Reviews

What a wonderful film is Lee Chang-Dong's *Poetry*. Its general release has been impatiently awaited by those of us lucky enough to see it last year at Cannes, where it won Best Screenplay. Gorgeously photographed and exquisitely acted, it takes a story almost buckling under the weight of its sadness, and from it magics a work at once mysterious and luminous, suffused with anger and patience, endowed with — yes, that most over-used, but here wholly accurate word — poetry....

What makes *Poetry* so involving is that it's never clear how the story will be resolved. The abrasions and vagaries of Mija's life might, in another director's hands, be rendered as melodrama. But Lee's decision to lure Yun out of retirement (she was a well-known actress in Korea during the 1960s and 1970s) proves a masterstroke. Dressed in lovely floral dresses that suggest her eye for beauty, she pulls off the difficult trick of being both plaintive and purposeful, erratic and strong, self aware (of her good looks, of her idiosyncrasies: "I do like flowers and say odd things"), and lost....

Lee recently said that his work is always informed by the question: "What does it mean to be making films at a time when film is dying away?" In its sharp, understated fashion, *Poetry* offers a memorable answer: cinema, dying or not, must aspire to a condition of grace and of humanity.

Sukhdev Sandhu The Telegraph, July 2011

In Mija's first poetry lesson, the teacher holds up a simple apple, telling his pupils, "If you really see something you can feel something naturally." Such naturalism also governs the poetics of Lee's film, where heightened aestheticism, special effects and even a musical score are eschewed in favour of an unfussy focus on the ordinary, leaving us to locate our own feelings in all the blank mundanity of Mija's life.

Korea's best known actress, Yun Jeong-he, returned from a 16-year retirement to play Mija, and her performance anchors the entire film. Yet, paradoxically, the film's final sequence derives its emotional impact from her absence. "Where has she gone?" the teacher asks, when all that remains of Mija is poetry — as with all poetry, this is best appreciated by those prepared to read between the lines.

Anton Bitel, Little White Lies, July 2011