

## Venus

It's about time that the veteran Peter O'Toole is finally getting—at 72—a role he can sink his teeth into. It comes in the new film *Venus*, in which he offers a superb acting display.

O'Toole is Maurice, a semi-retired actor (he still gets the occasional bit on the telly) whose best friend Ian (Leslie Phillips) has his niece, a teenager Jessie (Jodie Whittaker), come to live with him. Ian can't cope with her too modern ways, but Maurice is attracted to the girl, who is nothing like him, of course, she being all coarse and unlearned.

The attraction comes for Maurice because, wizened and suffering from prostate problems though he is, he has never lost his belief in the power of the senses, and Jessie—this raw Venus—has aroused those senses in him once again. This is, however, not a dirty old man story, but that of a December-March attraction that is not so much lustful as admiring. And most charmingly, Jessie, under the attentions of a figure so unlike herself, becomes a more complete person because of Maurice's genuine interest.

*Venus* has, in addition, some neat cameos for Richard Griffiths and Vanessa Redgrave (Maurice's ex-wife), and Jodie Whittaker comes off as a natural actress, curious, crude, but also kind as Jessie. Yet the thrill here to watch Peter O'Toole almost lampoon himself as the dotty old reprobate actor wearily spooning out his last lines (he did an earlier, more comedic variation on the fading thespian 25 years ago in *My Favorite Year*). At 72, the actor seems even older, with a face wrapped in wrinkles that resemble the map of the London Underground, but he is just perfect for the dying man he is portraying, and he pulls off the role like a decrepit Cyrano flourishing his panache one last time.

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