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Far from the fantastical universe of Oscar Wilde's tale (which the title refers to and on which the story is loosely based), the film focuses on two teenagers, Arbor and Swifty, and on the abusive relationship that ties them to Kitten, a local scrap collector.

Arbor and Swifty have been kicked out of school and, in these days of uncertainty, start finding and stealing pieces of metal that they sell on to Kitten. A backstory looks at the practice of sulking, referring to races in which vehicles are pulled by horses and locals bet on the outcome. Swifty has a gift for horses and Kitten starts to use him in races on which he is betting. Arbor finds this relationship between his friend and his mentor an increasingly difficult one to handle.

The gloomy atmosphere of social intrigue has Ken Loach echoes and Clio Barnard has built a screenplay around two people which asks questions on the borders between help and opportunism. Kitten, the selfish giant, comes across as a distant character, and the presupposed opportunity he gives the two adolescents hides a reality defined by financial self-interest and an ambition to get them involved in illegal activities.

A possible ideological reading (capitalist?) of Kitten's character remains superficial however, even if he was originally intended to be the central character in an early version of the screenplay. After carrying out a number of auditions in schools around Bradford, the director changed the tone of her story, choosing to develop her teenagers' personalities. This included delving into problematic family relationships, the impotence of institutions and the worry of wondering what to do next when you are thirteen and everything seems grey and suffocating – all under the sky of photography director Mike Eley Bsc.

This choice meant that Barnard made two newcomers Conner Chapman (Arbor) and Shaun

Thomas (Swiftly) carry the film on their shoulders with their energetic performances. The two operate as opposing, yet complimentary elements. On the one side, an explosive Arbor, and on the other, a fragile and nice Swiftly. The tension builds until you discover who will succumb and who will reach catharsis. If a rendition is possible, it is up to the spectator to decide on it.

by *Vitor Pinto*

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