



**BIG SCREEN
COMPETITION**

INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM
2024

PAULO BRANCO PRESENTS

THE WORST MAN IN LONDON

A FILM BY **RODRIGO AREIAS**

ALBANO JERÓNIMO

Edward
ASHLEY

Victoria
GUERRA

Scott
COFFEY

Christian
VADIM

Carmen
CHAPLIN

with the special participation of
**Simon
PAISLEY DAY**

and the friendly participation of
**Jean-François
BALMER**



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2024 | LANGUAGES: ENGLISH, FRENCH, ITALIAN, PORTUGUESE | 127'



Synopsis

Inspired by historical characters, *The Worst Man in London* is a remarkable portrait of the world of the Pre-Raphaelites in Victorian England. Great artists, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne and Elizabeth Siddal, who lived and created their art in an atmosphere of freedom, vice and amorality, and the famous art critic John Ruskin... Among them, the intriguing Charles Augustus Howell, whom the writer Arthur Conan Doyle called *the worst man in London*.

THE
WORST MAN
IN LONDON

Inspiration

The Worst Man in London and the inspiration of the director Rodrigo Areias

I have long admired the art of the Pre-Raphaelites. From Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Holman Hunt, to Millais and Burne-Jones, they all fascinated me as artists, but their organization as a “brotherhood” fascinates me much more. The insistence on creating a reform movement, even if not avant-garde, defending art for art’s sake back in the 19th century, based on the appropriation of the past, is something I really admire and, in a way, a recurrence in my cinema. I see myself at the beginning of the appropriation of genres or styles from another time transposed to today.

As a director, the intention of appropriating a painting style for the film’s photography is fundamental. Here, I couldn’t help but try to use as a palette of tones and colors the same one that Millais and Burne-Jones used to paint nature, the one that Rossetti used for the faces, the golden contrast with Lizzie’s flaming hair...



When Jorge Luis Borges, in his film critical texts, compares *Citizen Kane* to the Pre-Raphaelites, he highlights not only the nature of the frames but mainly the revolution from the point of view of the use of focus. I see the film as a little more narcotic, from the point of view of the action, and the contrast of the hyper-decorated and dark interiors with the bright exteriors dominated by gardens and the nature that the Pre-Raphaelites knew how to portray so well. It is, however, a film of faces marked by the harshness of the time, of life, of laudanum, and of the weakness of the lives of artists of the past, as of today. And Howell is essential to penetrate the Victorian carapace of “good manners” of a self-absorbed London. How was he able to influence so many crucial episodes of an era that decided to omit him or make him a villain?

Rodrigo Areias



**Who was this figure
whom the English
called *The Portugee*?**

The figure of Charles Augustus Howell traversed the English imagination of the second half of the 19th century in a mysterious way. He was a business agent of artists and poets, an art dealer and alleged master blackmailer. He was the one who convinced Dante Gabriel Rossetti to exhume the coffin of his beloved Lizzie Siddall, seven years after her death in 1862, to retrieve and publish the book of poems he had dedicated to her and that he had buried her with.



Little is known of the origins of Charles Augustus Howell. He was born in Porto, in 1840, to an English father, Alfred Howell, and a Portuguese mother. He boasted of the aristocratic origins of his Portuguese ancestry: his mother, Henriqueta Amélia, was a descendant of the Marquis of Pombal.

In London, where he arrived in 1857, whenever the formality of the circumstances required it, he wore the Latin cross of the Portuguese Order of Christ, which he said was a family commendation. It is unknown how he settled and how he rose in the city's artistic scene. What is certain is that in 1864 he was already secretary to John Ruskin, the most influential art critic of the time.

Some time later, he became a business agent for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, for whom he had first been a model. He was the secretary of Whistler, and socialised with Ford Maddox Brown. He had the reputation – did he actually get the advantage of it? – of having blackmailed illustrious people from the high-class of London. Arthur Conan Doyle honored him as a villain in a Sherlock Holmes adventure: Howell is neither more nor less than Charles Augustus Milverton, the master blackmailer immortalized by the actor Robert Hardy in the Granada TV series (1992) and Charles Augustus Magnussen, played by the actor Lars Mikkelsen in the series *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010).

The Worst Man in London – the first film to focus on the figure, history and methods of Charles Augustus Howell – offers some clues. Led by the director Rodrigo Areias, Albano Jerónimo gives body and soul to the figure that Conan Doyle immortalised as *the worst man in London*.

Eduardo Brito, writer

Rodrigo Areias

Director's biography

Film director and producer Rodrigo Areias began his professional life as a musician and music producer at the label Garagem and in cinema as Sound Designer for directors such as Paulo Rocha and Edgar Pêra.

He studied Management at the Portuguese Catholic University and graduated in Sound and Image at the School of Arts. He took a specialization in film Direction at the Tisch School of Arts at NYU and attended the "Production Eurodoc Program" and "Venice Biennale College".

In his early career, Rodrigo developed creative work in fiction and documentary, video art and video clips for some of the best bands in the Portuguese rock scene (The Legendary Tiger Man, Wray Gunn, Mão Morta, Sean Riley and the Slow Riders, etc.).

Areias has directed 8 feature films and several shorts that have been awarded in more than 40 festivals, including Karlovy Vary, for the feature *Hay Road*. His latest feature documentary, *Blue Breath*, premiered in Locarno FF First Look and won the Festivals of Ismailia, Pristina and Kalajoki.

Since 2001 he has produced and co-produced over 150 short and feature films: fiction, documentaries, and animation, by international directors such as FJ Ossang, Gabe Klinger, Teddy Williams, Lois Patiño and Matias Piñeiro, and the Portuguese Edgar Pêra, João Canijo, Ana Rocha de Sousa and André Gil Mata.

As a producer he won a Golden Lion in Venice and a Golden Leopard in Locarno. His productions premiered in the most important festivals: Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Rotterdam, Locarno, Clermont Ferrand, Annecy.

He was responsible for the Guimarães 2012 European Capital of Culture film production and produced the films of Jean-Luc Godard, Aki Kaurismaki, Peter Greenaway, Manoel de Oliveira, Pedro Costa and Victor Erice, among many others.

The Worst Man in London is his latest feature, premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam 2024 – Big Screen Competition.



Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Fic, 128', 2024

Down by Life, Fic, 66', 2021

Surdine, Fic, 75', 2020

Blue Breath, Doc, 78', 2018

Ornament & Crime, Fic, 90', 2015

1960, Doc, 70', 2013

Hay Road, Fic, 90', 2012

Thebes, Fic, 80', 2007

THE
WORST MAN
IN LONDON



Cast

Albano Jerónimo - *Charles Howell*

Edward Ashley - *Dante Rossetti*

Victoria Guerra - *Lizzie Siddal*

Scott Coffey - *John Ruskin*

Christian Vadim - *La Rothière*

Carmen Chaplin - *Lady Posselthwaite*

With the special participation of

Simon Paisley Day - *William Rossetti*

and the friendly participation of

Jean-François Balmer - *Comte Henri de Pourtalès*

THE
WORST MAN
IN LONDON

Albano Jerónimo

Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Rodrigo Areias, 2024

International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition

The Nothingness Club, Edgar Pêra, 2023

International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition

Remains of the Wind, Tiago Guedes, 2022

Cannes Film Festival – Official Selection – Special Screenings

El Presidente, Armando Bo, TV Series (Amazon), 2022

The One, Jeremy Lovering, Catherine Morshead, Brady Hood, TV Series (Netflix), 2022

The Domain, Tiago Guedes, 2019

Venice International Film Festival – Competition | TIFF – Special Presentations

Mysteries of Lisbon, Raúl Ruiz, 2010

San Sebastián Film Festival – Silver Shell – Best Director

Victoria Guerra

Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Rodrigo Areias, 2024

International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition

The Nothingness Club, Edgar Pêra, 2023

International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition

The Domain, Tiago Guedes, 2019

Venice International Film Festival – Competition | TIFF – Special Presentations

Cosmos, Andrzej Zulawski, 2015

Locarno Film Festival – Silver Leopard – Best Director

Casanova Variations, Michael Sturminger, 2014

San Sebastián Film Festival – Competition



Edward Ashley

Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Rodrigo Areias, 2024
International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition
The King, David Michôd (Netflix), 2019
The Lost City of Z, James Gray, 2016
Berlinale – Competition
Sense8, Michael Straczynski, Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski
TV Series (Netflix), 2015-2018

Scott Coffey

Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Rodrigo Areias, 2024
International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition
Twin Peaks, David Lynch, TV Series, 2017
Cannes Film Festival
Mulholland Drive, David Lynch, 2001
Cannes Film Festival – Best Director
Lost Highway, David Lynch, 1997

Jean-François Balmer

Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Rodrigo Areias, 2024
International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition
The King's Favourite, TV Series, 2022
Cosmos, Andrzej Zulawski, 2015
Locarno Film Festival – Silver Leopard – Best Director
Time Regained, Raúl Ruiz, 1999
Cannes Film Festival – Competition
Madame Bovary, Claude Chabrol, 1991

Christian Vadim

Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Rodrigo Areias, 2024
International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition
The Man Who Sold his Skin, Kaouther Ben Hania, 2020
Venice International Film Festival – Orizzonti – Best Film
Les Âmes fortes, Raúl Ruiz, 2021
Cannes Film Festival – Out of Competition
Time Regained, Raúl Ruiz, 1999
Cannes Film Festival – Competition

Carmen Chaplin

Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Rodrigo Areias, 2024
International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition
The Serpent's Kiss, Philippe Rousselot, 1997
Cannes Film Festival – Competition
Ma Saison préférée, André Téchiné, 1993
Cannes Film Festival – Competition

Simon Paisley Day

Selected filmography

The Worst Man in London, Rodrigo Areias, 2024
International Film Festival Rotterdam – Big Screen Competition
The Crown, Peter Morgan, TV Series, 2016-2023
Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker, J.J. Abrams, 2019
Sherlock, Mark Gatiss, Steven Moffat, TV Series, 2010-2017
Victoria & Abdul, Stephen Frears, 2017



Crew

Produced by Paulo Branco

Cinematography Jorge Quintela

Written by Eduardo Brito

Executive Producer Ana Pinhão Moura

Editing Tomás Baltazar

Art Director Ricardo Preto

Costume Designer Susana Abreu

Original Soundtrack Samuel Martins Coelho

Sound Pedro Marinho, Elsa Ferreira, Pedro Góis

A Leopardo Filmes production

In association with

APM Produções

Alfama Films Production

Viva Devagar

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THE
WORST MAN
IN LONDON

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