

## Happy End [15] 2017 | France/Austria/Germany | 107 min

UK release date **1<sup>st</sup> December 2017**

Director **Michael Haneke**

Screenplay **Michael Haneke**

Cinematographer **Christian Berger**

Cast **Isabelle Huppert** (Anne); **Jean-Louis Trintignant** (Georges);  
**Matthieu Kassovitz** (Thomas); **Fantine Harduin** (Eve); **Franz Rogowski** (Pierre); **Toby Jones** (Laurence)

It hardly needs saying that the adjective in the title is about as accurate as the one in Haneke's *Funny Games*. *Happy End* is a satirical nightmare of haute-bourgeois European prosperity: as stark, brilliant and unforgiving as a halogen light. It is not a new direction for this film-maker, admittedly, but an existing direction pursued with the same inspiration as ever. It is also as gripping as a satanically inspired soap opera, a dynasty of lost souls.

The movie rehearses almost all of Haneke's classic themes and visual ideas: family dysfunction, inter-generational revenge, the poisonous suppression of guilt and the return of the repressed. There is the horror of death combined with a Thanatos-like longing for its deliverance – one line in particular shows how *Happy End* has been inspired by the climactic moment of his previous film, *Amour*.

Often Haneke's cinema is a cousin to conventional horror, conventional thrillers. *Happy End* is no exception. It is almost a genre movie. But the genre is that of Haneke's own invention. It is unmistakably his work, presented with his usual masterly compositional flair, a mosaic of horror, filmed by cinematographer Christian Berger in crystal-clear light, often with icily detached long-shot camera positions. One character's face is in fact never shown clearly at all – a diabolically apposite device. The narrative sometimes takes insidious little leaps forward, allowing us to register with a lurch the awful things that have been passed over.

Isabelle Huppert plays Anne Laurent, effectively the chatelaine of a magnificent house and estate in Calais, having taken over the lucrative family construction and transport business from her ageing father Georges (Jean-Louis Trintignant). He is suffering from incipient dementia, and is waited on like a dispossessed

Shakespearean king by the family's Moroccan servants Rachid (Hassam Ghancy) and Jamila (Nabiha Akkari) – who are periodically subject to racist condescension. Anne herself is getting engaged to the British lawyer handling a new UK deal: Lawrence, played by Toby Jones.

This household is clenched with fear and anxiety. Anne's drunken deadbeat son Pierre (Franz Rogowski), supposedly a site supervisor, has through negligence allowed a catastrophic accident which puts the firm in line for a huge civil suit. Meanwhile, Anne's brother Thomas (Mathieu Kassovitz) has secrets of his own and must now look after the 12-year-old daughter of his previous marriage, the eerily self-possessed and computer-savvy Ève (Fantine Harduin), and accept her into their creepy manorial family compound. And behind all this, the refugees trudge the streets of Calais, waiting to make another attempt at the tunnel.

Of course, with a Haneke movie, we are waiting a final flourish of violence or shock. Inevitably, perhaps, this comes from Huppert. But it is a tiny, almost microscopic incursion, a nasty little assault that perhaps belongs to the schoolyard, in keeping with the register of malign absurdity. And yet when it came, the entire audience in my screening gave a dismayed yelp. And the final images got something between a laugh and a wince. This is a black comedy of pure sociopathy.

After: **Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian, 21 May 2017**

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