

On Maren Ade  
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Maren Ade (born 1976) is a German film director and screenwriter. Judging by the two films of hers I've seen the past few days, she is top-of-the line at both directing and writing. If she cast the two films, which I expect she did, add that to her credits—they were wonderfully well cast. The cinematography of both—I assume she selected the cinematographer--and editing, which I presume she did herself in these low-budget films, was superb. I'm a Maren Ade fan.

The two Maren Ade films I saw were “Everyone Else” (2006) and “The Forest for the Trees” (2003), in that order. I was so impressed with “Everyone Else” that I checked to see who directed it and what else she had done, and that took me to “The Forest for the Trees,” which was Ade's first film. I see that she made “Toni Erdmann” in 2016—I'm looking forward to seeing that.

I saw the films on the Criterion Channel, an online streaming service, which I strongly recommend for high quality old films. There is a subscription fee, but then the films are free, and if you are a film buff, I think it is very much worth the cost. You could check Amazon, Vudu, Google Play, and iTunes for the streaming availability of Ade's films. They might be tough to find. Amazon has them if you have signed up for Prime.

The long-ago release dates of the two Ade films prompted me to think, if these truly fine films and this gifted film director and screenwriter were out there and I didn't know about it, what other film excellence is out there that I don't know about, and how can I better stay in touch with what is going on in top-quality film. Signing up for the Criterion Channel has been a good start in that direction. I'm on the lookout for internet sites that discuss and review good films (*Film Comment* is one), and I type in Google questions like “What are the best independent films the last ten years?” and see what comes up.

“Everyone Else” is about a attractive young German couple, Chris (played superbly by Lars Eldinger) and Gitti (Brigit Minichmayer, even better) on vacation in Chris’s family villa in Sardinia. We see a relationship between two fine people who unfortunately are mismatched in basic ways. “The Forest for the Trees” is about Melanie Pröschle, 27, (played brilliantly by Eva Löbau) who moves alone to a new town to work as a teacher of adolescent-age students. She has a tough go of it dealing with unruly students and disapproving older fellow teachers, and she struggles in her efforts to make new friends.

The two films had the same theme: people trying to get their needs met with the wrong people. Ade’s superior screenplay and these excellent actors—not just the leads, right down the line--gave me the experience of what that circumstance is like, and for two hours; my stomach churned. I understand Ade’s work has been called “torture porn,” but her artistry is at too high a level for a crude label like that.

At the end of the two films, Ade has Gitti from “Everyone Else” and Melanie from “The Forrest for the Trees” respond to their realities--draining, demeaning, and unfulfilling--in surprising ways, and fundamentally the same way; in both instances, their (Ade’s) choices were right on the money, true, and I will never forget them. I don’t think it is too much of a spoiler to say that they both chose to shut down their act, as it were. They stopped chasing, stopped trying to make something happen that wasn’t going to happen. It’s not that they left to go to people better suited to them, though that could happen up the line. They simply, right here and now, in this place, no forewarning, no explanations, no long talks, no phase-ins, stopped trying to win with the pair of fives they had in their hand. They didn’t leave the table—they just abruptly quit playing the game.