



## Caught in the act

Method man Strasberg: genius or charlatan?

**L**aurence Olivier, who believed acting wasn't a grown-up thing to do, may have reached that conclusion through his run-in with two Method actors – Marilyn Monroe and Dustin Hoffman – both of whom indulged themselves in a way that Olivier considered infantile. Tonight's **'Reputations'** anatomises Lee Strasberg (pictured with Monroe) – the man behind the Method – and asks why he and his protégés inspire adulation and contempt in equal measure.

'There are people like Al Pacino who won't hear a word said against him and there are others who think that he's a fraud and a charlatan,' says director Clare Beavan. 'I found myself feeling torn – like any cult figure you get sucked in and repelled at the same time.' Strasberg himself was a contradiction: rather than founding an egalitarian, non-commercial theatre as he wanted to, his legacy was to define the acting style which was to dominate American cinema.

Strasberg, who died 15 years ago, despised Hollywood, but ironically, Tinseltown made his reputation when a stream of film actors – including James Dean, Montgomery Clift, Paul Newman, Steve McQueen, Jane Fonda and Harvey Keitel – trooped to his New York studio. His idea, inspired by Konstantin Stanislavski's theories of a naturalistic form of acting, was perfectly suited to cinema. His contention

that actors should have interior monologues in character while performing, that they should hold back emotion, and that they should use moments of crisis in their own lives to inform the characters they played, were all ideal for a medium which notices the minutiae of performance.

Beavan's film is the first documentary on the subject to be transmitted, a fact partly due to the difficulty of the subject matter. The problem wasn't getting people like Al Pacino and Harvey Keitel to appear, but reconciling what they had to say with the arguments of Strasberg's detractors. 'People would only agree to talk to me after they had cleared it with Strasberg's widow,' says Beavan. Nonetheless, she has managed to build up both sides of the picture with amateur footage of Strasberg's workshops – where claims that he could be savage are borne out.

The film is engagingly structured, with some great clips and a fascinating analysis of Strasberg's relationship with Monroe, who came to him seeking respectability. To his surprise Strasberg found himself loving the fame and glamour she attached to him. So much so that the man who was supposed to be the century's greatest judge of acting completely lost his head – he dreamed of casting Monroe as Lady Macbeth.

*Alkarim Jivani  
'Reputations', 9pm, BBC2.*

Television

Peckinpah's scuzzball meditation on the quest for selfhood amid the hellhole of bordertown Mexico unfolds with slow-motion violence and gallows humour aplenty. It's his most extreme movie and, significantly, the only one where he had complete control.

### **Prince Of Darkness**

**12.40am-2.30 ITV** (John Carpenter, 1987, US) Donald Pleasence, Jameson Parker, Victor Wong, Lisa Blount. Returning to low-budget horror after vari-



able success with studio projects, Carpenter made a decent fist of this flawed, modest chiller. Father Pleasence and professor Wong work wonders to get the audience safely through the expository context of quantum mechanics and sub-atomic physics which informs the usual Good versus Evil routine, here revolving around a mysterious casket which may possibly contain the anti-God – an embryonic Satan composed of anti-matter. Basically, it's a what's-in-the-box movie and, as ever, the final revelation doesn't quite measure up to all the faffing around we've had to do to get there. Good try, though.

### **Postmark For Danger**

**1.35am-3.05 C4** (Guy Green, 1955, GB) Robert Beatty, Terry Moore, William Sylvester, Allan Cuthbertson.

When his journalist brother is killed while investigating a smuggling ring in Italy, aspiring artist Robert Beatty steps in to clear up the case. The second adaptation of a Francis Durbridge radio serial proves characteristically solid in construction, though excitement levels in former David Lean cameraman Green's film remain moderate throughout. Aka 'Portrait Of Alison'.

Time In 9