

## Misericordia [15]

2024 France

104 mins

UK released **28 March 2025**

Director **Alain Guiraudie**

Screenplay **Alain Guiraudie**

Cinematography **Claire Mathon**

Music **Marc Verdaguer**

Cast **Catherine Frot** (Martine); **Félix Kysyl** (Jeremie);  
**Jean-Baptiste Durand** (Victor); **Jacques Develay**  
(The Priest); **David Ayala** (Walter)

**Alain Guiraudie defies neat categorisation with his shapeshifting eighth feature about morality, crime and queer desire.**

“People seem to think that the final shot explains everything when the contrary is true,” commented the late French filmmaker Claude Chabrol in a mid-1970s interview. “It’s a question mark.” Writer-director Alain Guiraudie seems to share his countryman’s preference for ambiguous endings. His 2013 festival hit *Stranger by the Lake* left its protagonist Franck cowering in the dark in the woods with his life at imminent risk, while his latest idiosyncratic tale *Misericordia* also ends in darkness and without a clearcut resolution.

It begins one autumn with an inscrutable young man Jeremie (Felix Kysyl) returning to a sleepy village in the Aveyron region of southern France for the funeral of his former boss, the local baker. The latter’s widow Martine (Catherine Flot) generously allows the visitor to stay at her house, an offer which antagonises her volatile son Victor (Jean-Baptiste Durand), who was once close friends with Jeremie when they were teenagers. And why does the elderly priest (Jacques Develay) keep materialising, whenever the new arrival explores the surrounding countryside?

Taking its title from the Latin word for mercy, *Misericordia* resists straightforward categorisation. There are echoes of Pasolini’s *Theorem* in its premise of a sexually disruptive outsider figure impacting a

community, and also of Chabrol's numerous dissections of provincial life, in which appearances tend to prove deceptive.

Yet Guiraudie successfully fashions his own singular cinematic world. Music is used sparingly, and Claire Mathon's cinematography is unshowy. The storytelling has a deliberately repetitive quality: the sleepless nights; the 4am visitors to the bedroom; the walks into nature looking for mushrooms. All of which provide both absurdist humour and a dreamlike sensibility. Queer desire circulates among the various characters, who also include Walter, a shambling loner and another figure from Jeremie's past. These feelings of sexual yearning, which in some cases transgress taboos and social conventions, are repressed or displaced or even aggressively resisted.

By focusing eventually on the growing connection between Jeremie and the priest, the film heads off into further unexpected territory. Moral and philosophical issues are raised around notions of crime and punishment. What might forgiveness entail if a life has been taken? Perhaps the cleric might be influenced by his own personal feelings towards the younger man? Yet that doesn't invalidate his querying of our collective responsibility for catastrophes around the world and his assertion of our profound need for love. Questions then rather than answers: one senses Chabrol would have approved.

**Thomas Dawson**, *Little White Lies*, 27 March 2025

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