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CAST

WINONA RYDER Veronica Sawyer
CHRISTIAN SLATER J.D.
SHANNEN DOHERTY Heather Duke
LISANNE FALK Heather McNamara
KIM WALKER Heather Chandler
PENELOPE MILFORD Pauline Fleming
GLENN SHADIX Father Ripper
LANCE FENTON Kurt Kelly
PATRICK LABYORTEAUX Ram Sweeney
JEREMY APPLEGATE Peter Dawson
JON MATTHEWS Rodney
RENÉE ESTEVEZ Betty Finn
CARRIE LYNN Martha "Dumphtruck" Dunnstock
PHILL LEWIS Dennis

CREW

Directed by MICHAEL LEHMANN
Written by DANIEL WATERS
Produced by DENISE DI NOVI
Executive Producer CHRISTOPHER WEBSTER
Associate Producer IYA LABUNKA
Director of Photography FRANCIS KENNY
Editor NORMAN HOLLYN
Music by DAVID NEWMAN
Casting SALLY DENNISON CSA and JULIE SELZER CSA
Costume Designer RUDY DILLON
Production Designer JON HUTMAN



THE SCHOOL CORRIDORS OF POWER

by Bidisha

An ostracised young man wants to enact murderous revenge against the popular boys and golden girls who make his school life a misery. A promising young woman wants to explore her sexuality but encounters violation, coercion and shaming. *Heathers* came out in 1988 – initially a flop, although soon after acclaimed as a classic – but is just as pertinent today.

Snappily written by Daniel Waters and directed with great style by Michael Lehmann, who were both relative unknowns, *Heathers* portrays a wealthy Ohio high school as a hotbed of backstabbing, bullying and ambition. The social hierarchy is topped by three beautiful monsters, all called Heather, plus their conflicted but equally privileged friend Veronica, played by Winona Ryder. The school's entrenched archetypes and laws of supremacy are upended with the arrival of a new student, J.D., a beautiful and dangerous young man played by Christian Slater. The film combines social realism with social mockery and blends absurdist, B-movie, thriller, Gothic melodrama and stylised noir elements.

It is impossible to watch *Heathers* now without thinking of the countless films it has inspired, from *Clueless* (1995) and *Legally Blonde* (2001), *Mean Girls* (2004), *Twilight* (2008) and *Damsels in Distress* (2011) to *Lady Bird* (2017) and *Thoroughbreds* (2017); all quotable, stylish, sometimes satirical high school or early college stories which focus on young women trying to find their integrity within brutally judgemental environments. It opens with a lavish, slow-motion shot of one of the most 80s fashion signifiers, up there alongside pastel Jane Fonda high leg leotards, big plastic neon earrings and stirrup legwarmers: a giant red luxury scrunchie being worked into a ponytail of luscious WASP hair that's been highlighted with Sun-In.

The scrunchie is a motif of supremacy worn like a crown by the most dominant Heather, Heather Chandler, who we first see walking in immaculate slow motion across a croquet lawn with the two other Heathers and Veronica. The young women are a vision of preppy, part-prim, part-pert power dressing, equal parts little girl and Eleanor Roosevelt. It's not cool, but it's a look – one echoed by the equally rich characters in *Clueless* the following decade.

The Heathers and their friends exist in a bright paradise where nobody is tired or overworked. The sun-dappled croquet lawn is in the back garden of Veronica's mansion and as much as she claims to loathe her world, she is a part of it and enjoys its manifold comforts. The game of croquet, Veronica's parents' custom of taking tea in the afternoon,



the gold crest on Heather Chandler's blazer and her assertion that "I'm always red" when playing croquet, which recalls The Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*: all these things point to the characters' social ambitions. Making money is not enough, they want to embody courtly European royalism too. They have wealth, but they also want class supremacy and a veneer of sophistication, and this is as true of Veronica's own adoring parents as it is of her loathed 'best friends'.

The young characters all follow an adult ethos of yuppie survivalism regardless of whether they are Heathers, rebels, athletes, student journalists or do-gooders who campaign for good causes within the school while fantasising about being admitted to Ivy League universities. "Real life sucks losers dry," says a Heather. A less popular character concedes, "It's okay. Nice guys finish last. I should know."

Heathers gives us a classic teen-movie panorama of the school cafeteria as social microcosm, illustrated by tables of self-segregating cliques. There are the science geeks, stoners, homophobic jocks, mousy squares who would "probably miss my own birthday for a date", "the scum of the school" and their "dweebette friends". The Heathers and Veronica saunter imperiously between the tables, standing while everyone else is seated, once again evoking European royalty.

When Veronica clocks J.D. sitting alone in the corner, her gaze alights on and absorbs his beauty slowly and pleausurably. *Heathers* celebrates this attraction from Veronica's point of view and gives her desire sincere weight, without coyness or mockery. With a strutting walk, she approaches J.D., who lets her enjoy his appearance and flirts mutually with her. In a masterstroke of styling, she is dressed to match him, in dark colours and squared shoulders. Both Ryder and Slater look classic, timeless, tragically beautiful (and similar in colouring), while the other characters are merely of their time. As such, the film is an eye-burning catalogue of middle American 80s fashion looks. Madonna herself is referenced numerous times, as a sexual object for the jock characters but as an idol for the girls: one of the Heathers has a life-sized poster of her on her wall and stares at it hungrily, after an obvious but telling shot of her pet canary in its gilded cage.

While J.D. might seem different from all the other guys Veronica has met (like the college dude who tells her "save the speeches for Malcolm X, I just wanna get laid") he is a mélange of alluring, established cultural archetypes. Most obviously J.D. recalls the tightly wound sexiness and inner darkness of 1950s tragic icon James Dean. Yet with his gravelly voice, seductive self-possession, dead white skin and widow's peak, clearly silhouetted look of dark colours and overcoat, his tarnished-looking pistol and flick-knife, his single silver earring and his solitariness, he is also connected to punk, pirate, vampire, biker and

cowboy imagery. Indeed, the other characters refer to him mockingly as "Jesse James", "Billy the Kid" and a "dark horse", a Clint Eastwood style harbinger from elsewhere.

Like the classic demon lover who materialises and dematerialises as the story's heroine desires, J.D. has no friends and no demands on his time. He is always around when Veronica wants him, and always at night: in a convenience store lit up like a 1950s diner, then in the forest. *Heathers* also makes an association between J.D. and Satan. Instead of rising up from the seventh circle of hell, J.D. has come from "seven schools in seven states". Having lived in "Dallas... [and] Baton Rouge" he brings the extreme heat and swampy mysticism of the south. He is associated with flames: his mother died in a fire and his scheming property-developer father boasts about blowing up historic buildings. All J.D.'s clothes are matte and dark, as if blackened by soot, and he inveigles his way into Veronica's life with dizzying quickness.

Interestingly, other men see through J.D. immediately. To them, he is teeth-grindingly pretentious, "that guy in the coat". Although they find him ridiculous, they see that "Veronica's into his act" – she has fallen for it. Veronica is thrilled when J.D. pulls a gun on the cafeteria bullies, and his assertion that "The extreme always seems to make an impression" makes her feel she has met a soulmate who is her equal in contempt. Sexual attraction soon escalates into nihilistic abandon. Together they poison the main Heather and make her murder look like a suicide, then do the same to two homophobic jocks, and the film again associates J.D. with the devil when Veronica writes in her diary, "I've got no control over myself when I'm with J.D. Are we going to prom or to hell?"

It quickly emerges that J.D. is not some revolutionary, even though before the first murder he pledges that Heather will "spew red white and blue" – that is, she'll puke out the American dream she's been living. J.D. is in fact even wealthier than the Heathers and Veronica, and he represents the ultimate Ayn Randian credo of the 1980s: everyone is out for themselves, force is power and the ends justify the means. He crows, "We scared people into not being assholes!"

The emotional core of *Heathers* sees Veronica rejecting both the lure of J.D. and the values of the Heathers. Once the powerful archetypal appeal of J.D. has faded she sees that in reality, the 'bad boy type' is just plain bad. "And to think there was a time when I actually thought you were cool ... You're not a rebel, you're fucking psychotic," she tells him. As J.D.'s influence wears off, Veronica's clothes pale from black to blue and mid-grey.

Packed around this twist of dark anarchy, twisted romance and humour is a cast of brilliantly vivid minor characters: J.D.'s devilishly laughing Baby Boomer father; the dopehead local

Westerburg
Moments

"REMOVETE

"HETWELLEN

SUA FERULA"



cops; the jaded headmaster and fed-up teachers; the camp, quivering-jowled priest who, like the headmaster in *Footloose* (1984), denounces “MTV video games” from the pulpit in a *Beetlejuice*-esque dream sequence and says Jesus is a “righteous dude”, echoing Bill and Ted surfer speak.

Heathers builds up a perfect fictional world where rich, bored schoolkids who look like supermodels visit 1950s throwback venues like the Snappy Snack Shack that sells Turbo Dog hot dogs and listen to the Hot Probs radio helpline. The script is a marvel of coined phrases and freshly-minted insults: “C’mon, it’ll be *very*”, “What is your damage, Heather?”, “Fuck me gently with a chainsaw, do I look like Mother Theresa?” Someone who wimps out is “such a pillowcase” who needs to “get crucial” or risk being seen as a “nimrod”. My favourite is when Veronica is bequeathed Heather’s Swatch watch after murdering her: “She’d want you to have it. She always said you couldn’t accessorise for shit.”

Visually, *Heathers* is layered with sophisticated, classic film references as the bright patterns-and-pastels 1980s/1950s look of the everyday school scenes alternate with the dark 1920s/1940s leanness of the central relationship. When Veronica begins to ‘turn’, challenging her friend the ‘Red Queen’ main Heather at a party, the young actresses are lit by the flames of a fire in a bin. They face off like Hollywood grand dames, one blonde-permed and frilly in red, the other brunette and femme fatale slinky in black, with a sweep of hair that recalls Veronica Lake, her namesake. They look iconic, adult, painted in lurid vintage-movie-poster colours, not like high schoolers having a tiff. Heather’s bedroom is that of a 1940s film heroine, with its motif of pastels and sea shells, and she dies an appropriately theatrical Crawford/Fontaine Hollywood heyday melodrama death, falling through a glass table in her silky night-clothes.

There is a wonderful flippancy and nihilism offsetting the actions of J.D. and Veronica. The agonised feuds of the teenaged characters – and even their apparent suicides – contrast hilariously with the knackered, indifferent teachers who chain-smoke and bicker in the staffroom and speak about the pupils with dripping contempt. Suicide quickly becomes the norm at school and Veronica is soon feeling rich-girl blasé about being a murderer now that “teen angst bullshit has a body count”. Such is the cynicism and corruption of the wider world, the apparent suicides enjoy an even more elevated social status after their deaths. Yet when Martha Dunnstock, aka Martha Dumptruck, an obese and bullied student, genuinely tries to kill herself, she receives no attention. Veronica and J.D.’s actions have changed nothing about the values of the school’s students or staff.

Veronica’s final self-redemption involves a tricky swerve into saccharine resolution as she re-friends the dorky nice girl she used to hang out with and randomly befriends Martha,

whose only line in the entire film is a pathetically grateful “I’d like that” right at the end, when Veronica invites her to come over. Until then, the character is represented as stupid, ugly, clumsy and boring, eating alone in the cafeteria, eating alone in the sports hall in a too-tight Big Fun T-shirt and spilling a drink all over herself, falling for an absurd trick in which a popular boy has apparently written her a love note and making a suicide attempt which fails. The filmmakers treat the character with as little respect and interest as the fictional students within the narrative do.

Despite the film’s comment on the cruelty and emptiness of the American dream, the story is played out among exclusively rich and virtually all-white characters. And despite being named after and focusing on women, the film’s gender politics are hard to swallow. Veronica’s world is a womanhating one: J.D.’s father laughs about the “withered old bitches” protesting the destruction of an historic building, Veronica is slut-shamed and lied about by a jock whom she refuses to sleep with and she and the Heathers have internalised misogyny so much that they call each other “mega-bitch”. What’s troubling is that Veronica’s primary instinct is not to kill the rapist males she continually encounters but to kill Heather who is, J.D. says, “one bitch that deserves to die”, simply for being mean. The film does not implicitly challenge this. The next murders are of two homophobic, sexually coercive jocks whom J.D. and Veronica ‘humiliate’ by framing as gay.

Yet it is J.D., apparently Veronica’s accomplice, who is revealed to be her greatest danger. When she tries to break it off, he threatens to kill her, sexually assaults her, stalks her, breaks into her room and flashes through a terrifying range of moods: “I was teasing. I love you! I was coming up here to kill you.” J.D. is no different from all the other entitled, violent guys at her school, and he is worse than them in his desire to perpetrate a mass killing and “clean the slate”.

Veronica takes him on seriously and wins. In J.D.’s final moments he justifies his own violence in classic sociopathic perpetrator style, by making a self-pity play: he is a murderer “because nobody loves me”. To underline both the Western allusions and the satanic elements of the story, at the end of the film Veronica has lit a cigarette from the flames of J.D.’s explosive demise with Lauren Bacall cool, is told “you look like hell” and says of herself “there’s a new sheriff in town”. It is as though she has gone down to the underworld and triumphed, becoming a leader rather than a follower. She is the wronged and vengeful woman gone right, the mortal who resisted the devil and earned her steely, triumphant, narrow-eyed final close-up. She strolls off into the sunset of a deserted school corridor and into cult cinema history.

Bidisha is a broadcaster, filmmaker and journalist for BBC, Channel 4 and Sky News. Her latest film is An Impossible Poison.





LIFE, DEATH AND CROQUET

by Anna Bogutskaya

What is it that makes *Heathers* (1988) relevant today? Is it the endlessly quotable dialogue? Yes, but not really. Is it the young, energetic performances by two up-and-coming actors that would become a staple of the 90s? Not quite. Is it the shoulder pad outfits? I wish.

What makes *Heathers* painfully relevant to this day, and so acute at the time it was made, is its display of the brutality of teen life - its darkly comedic portrayal of the bullying that occurs every single day in every single high school in the world, and how it is systematically ignored.

In the past few years, teen bullying has become a hot topic (not that it ever wasn't), particularly with the popularity and cultural debate that arose with the Netflix teen drama *13 Reasons Why*, which premiered in March 2017. The premise of the show is to unpick the reasons behind the suicide of 17-year-old Hannah Baker, with a web of abuse, lies, and bullying being uncovered by a close friend of hers through a series of 13 cassette tapes that Hannah left behind telling her side of the story. A long way away in tone from the black comedy of *Heathers*, the series garnered media attention for its no-thrills depiction of self-harm, suicide and the cruelty that teenagers can inflict on one another. In the show, Hannah is a pretty girl who is driven to depression by a continuous stream of small pranks, slut-shaming, sexual assault and lack of support. Although more akin to *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000) in its polished look and super-serious tone, with 30-year-olds playing sombre teenagers, the message remains the same as *Heathers*: underneath all the teenage politics and drama, teen pain is a real thing, often ignored and undermined, and it should be taken seriously.

HIGH SCHOOL IS SOCIETY

Heathers is a heightened experience, much like high school. The hierarchy, power structures and cliques that make up Westerburg High School are an exaggerated version of adult society. When Veronica complains to her mother about wanting teenagers to be treated like adults, and not children, her mother retorts: "Just how do you think adults act with other adults? When teenagers complain that they want to be treated like human beings, it's usually because they are being treated like human beings." High school as a metaphor for a cruel society was a deliberate choice and is laid out clearly in the film several more times (especially by J.D.). In an interview with the website *Money Into Light*,



Heathers screenwriter Daniel Waters said: “Evil and bad behaviour can happen at a much younger age than just when you’re becoming an adult.”

And just like adults, the teens of *Heathers* are slaves to the toxic structure of high school, which is modelled much like a corporation of performative coolness and markers of success. Veronica “trades up” her childhood best friend Betty when she becomes hot enough to join the cool girl gang of the Heathers. Much like in a corporation, there is a ladder, and Veronica has been “blessed by her fairy godmother” and allowed to climb it. The general consensus is that anybody would. Even Betty confesses, “I’d miss my own birthday for a date.” This is the power structure that allows the Heathers to exist and rule their high school, simultaneously desired and hated.

The high school ladder is manifested through the lunch time poll, where girls are rated, and the poll is posted for the entire school to see and comment on. Popularity is desirability. Veronica is aware of it, and questions it from the beginning, but is powerless to fight it as she glumly follows around her clique, noticing the impact their mean words have on her fellow students. This is how she first notices her love interest, the perfectly modelled teen rebel J.D., who openly rejects participating in the high school hierarchy. Whilst drunk at a college party, she even tells him, that the Heathers are “like my co-workers, and our job is being popular and shit”. Contrary to the John Hughes film *The Breakfast Club* (1985), which *Heathers* both honours and satirises, we are not siding with the rejects, the geeks or the outsiders. Through Veronica, who is presented as an outsider on the inside by her differing name, the viewer peeks behind the curtain of teen girl Machiavellianism. She is our proxy, our gateway into the cool girl-gang mechanics.

We’re given a front row seat, right next to the bullies themselves, to see adolescent ugliness up close. Even at Heather Chandler’s funeral, the jocks beat up the geeks. This is precisely the toxic structure that enables and perpetuates the real dark side of teenage life: the shaming and abuse that can lead to self-harm and suicide.

SUICIDE IS FUN

The darkest, most subversive aspect of *Heathers* is how it both mocks the teen obsession with pain and underlines the reality of that pain. *Heathers* ridicules teenage angst, but shows it looming in the background, unnoticed, throughout the entirety of the film through the character of Martha Dunnstock, cruelly referred to throughout as “Martha Dumptruck”. We meet Martha in the very first scene, lost in the melting pot of adolescent cruelty that is the school cafeteria, and she is positioned from the start as the butt of the joke and a target.

In the first scene of *Heathers*, the initial action that gives us a glimpse of the savagery of the Heathers clique, is the forging of a “hot and heavy” note, ostensibly by school jock Kurt Kelly which is slipped to Martha to entice her into approaching Kurt and humiliating herself. Veronica protests but participates. She writes the fake note that Heather Chandler passes on to Martha and witnesses the cruel mocking Martha endures when she expectantly goes to speak to Kyle, note in hand. Veronica watches while the Heathers laugh but does nothing. Heather warns her that this is the cost of being part of the most powerful clique in school. Veronica only really breaks this cyclic system when she is threatened herself with becoming the butt of the Heathers’ jokes – with being humiliated by them and thrown down to the bottom of the social ladder. Her way of breaking the system is murder, supposedly to make her school “a better place”, but her real drive is the fear of humiliation that would come with being on the wrong side of the Heathers.

Heather Duke, who is part of the clique but also mocked by the leader, Heather Chandler, is the reverse. She is ridiculed for asking questions, for her comments and for her bulimia (“Grow up, Heather. Bulimia is so 1987”). She endures the bullying in the hope of taking Heather Chandler’s place eventually, which she does after the latter is killed. Then, with some strategic help from J.D., Heather Duke starts to cultivate her inner bitch, revelling in the media attention the death of her friend brings her. When Veronica confronts her, asking “Why are you such a mega-bitch?”, she just answers, “Because I can be.”

Meanwhile, Martha is always seen by herself, dressed out of fashion, and silent. Heather Duke is revealed to have been childhood friends with Martha, something that J.D. finds out and uses to blackmail Heather with. Being friends with Martha is used as a tool of humiliation. It’s worth noting that Martha is never mocked by the film. We see her suffer on the sidelines, and tellingly, we don’t hear her voice until the very end, when Veronica knowingly rejects the power structures she had been subject and enabler of, and invites Martha, wheelchair bound while she recovers from her injuries, to hang out: “We could rent some new releases, pop some popcorn.” This is the first time we hear Martha being addressed respectfully and speaking herself.

UNADULTERATED EMOTIONAL OUTPOURING

After Heather Chandler’s “suicide”, Westerburg High becomes obsessed with the supposed profundity of teenage feeling. The art teacher is thrilled to have “an example of the profound sensitivity a human animal is capable of” and passes Heather’s suicide note around the class, egging them on to discuss their emotions. Every line, every element surrounding a popular teen’s suicide is treated as a clue, a secret glimpse into her tragically misunderstood self. The pastor blames “a society that tells its youth that the answers can be found in the



MTV videos". The students' reaction ranges from sick fascination to seeing the death as a route to self-gain: Heather Duke sees it as her road to power, Peter Dawson uses it for his Ivy League school application, the school paper puts her suicide note at the center of a two-page spread about her. Real pain is co-opted to reinforce the high school status quo.

The adults are ill-equipped to deal with both the wave of suicides and actual teen pain. Their reactions are nothing but performative concern, a desperate attempt to seem young, hip and still able to relate to their younger selves. The art teacher aims to create "an unadulterated emotional outpouring" in the cafeteria, with television cameras present. Tellingly, during this moment, Martha hides under the table, wanting to remain unseen. She hides in plain sight.

But when Martha attempts to kill herself, nobody's looking. In the film's only straight scene, one without quips or one-liners, Martha tries to walk into traffic with a suicide note pinned to her chest, addressed to "Dear Westerburg". Her suicide attempt is the only genuine one in the whole film, and instead of being addressed, it's mocked. Heather Duke laughs it off as "another case of the geek trying to imitate the popular kids in school and failing miserably". It is treated as if she is the weak link who couldn't work within the power structures of high school.

Actual emotional pain is mocked mercilessly. Martha's suicide attempt is treated like a desperate stab at popularity, not a cry for help. When Heather McNamara calls a helpline after struggling to cope with an abusive encounter with a college guy, Heather Duke mocks her publicly, writing "Poor little Heather" on the class blackboard, edging her to attempt suicide (which Veronica stops).


Veronica, who instigated the suicide trend with her and J.D.'s murders, sees the real underlying pain that her classmates live through and is helpless as to what to do about it. There is no "It Will Get Better" campaign, the teens are left to deal with their pain themselves. J.D. revels in this, using it to masquerade his psychotic murderous streak: "Society nods its head at any horror that the American teenager can think to bring upon itself." This is a knowing aside to the era's fascination with adolescent anger and angst as a source of amusement, as seen in the "very special episodes" of popular shows like *The Facts of Life* (which ran on NBC from 1979 until 1988, the year *Heathers* was released) and *Fame* (which ran on NBC from 1982 until 1987). These were shows that centered on teenage life and high school dynamics but used suicide as fodder for moralistic episodes.

Heathers remains unique in that it uses pitch-black comedy to make its point, but never undermines the reality of the teenage emotional struggle. Its direct inspirations (*Clueless* [1995], *Jawbreaker* [1999], *Drop Dead Gorgeous* [1999], *Mean Girls* [2004]) remain somehow less brutal than *Heathers*. It was the first teen film to look at the inner workings of the high school mean girls clique – perfect hair and warts and all.

Anna Bogutskaya is a film and events programmer at the British Film Institute and festival director of the Underwire Festival.







HEATHERS: NOT JUST A PRETTY SHOW AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY FRANCIS KENNY

by David J. Heuring

This interview was originally printed in American Cinematographer v69 n11 November 1988, pp. 28-30,32-33. Reproduced with the kind permission of American Cinematographer.

The title of the film *Heathers* refers to three beautiful, trendy and popular high school girls named Heather. The setting is Sherwood High [sic], a neo-Fascist high school in Sherwood, Ohio. When the new boy in school tricks his girl into murdering one of the Heathers, however, and convinces the authorities that it was suicide, it becomes obvious that *Heathers* is not an ordinary nostalgic teen comedy flick. Murder lurks around every corner in the film, but the emphasis is on black humor, not violence. This thoroughly modern and disturbing comedy stars Winona Ryder, fresh from the success of *Beetlejuice*, and is accented by the imaginative cinematography of Francis Kenny.

Kenny has an impressive background in documentary filmmaking. His credits as director of photography include *He Makes Me Feel Like Dancin'*, which won a 1984 Academy Award for feature length documentary, and the forthcoming *The President's House*, a historical/documentary scheduled to premiere at the 1989 presidential inauguration. Kenny has made his mark in the music video field, counting Dire Straits' "Brothers in Arms", Joe Jackson's "Right and Wrong" and Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" among his credits. Kenny also gained experience as a fashion photographer for Ralph Lauren and Norma Kamali.

The President's House is a feature-length film, shot in 35mm, which focuses on the White House, past and present. Kenny recalls the shoot: "It was a great honor to be chosen to photograph the White House, including the First Family's living quarters. It's a fascinating building, so full of history. For example, the actual handwritten Gettysburg address is in the Lincoln bedroom, supposedly along with Lincoln's ghost. In contrast, the West Wing, which houses the Oval Office and the NSC, buzzes with the excitement of being the information and decision-making center of the world. You work in awe of the amount of power these people have over our lives.

"For the film, we shot some modern-day scenes, and intercut them with re-creations from the past-period scenes. At times, it was difficult to photograph such a 'white' building in the

bright and hazy days of summer in Washington. We tried to save all the exteriors for magic hour, early morning or late afternoon. In one scene, a night exterior, we recreated the storm that saved the White House after the British set it on fire during the war of 1812. We had giant wind machines, rain makers, lightning, and dozens of PA's pulling tree branches and bushes with monofilament. After it was all over we had turned the north lawn into a swamp. While shooting at the White House, I kept thinking, 'If you make a mistake on a feature film, they fire you. If you screw this up, who knows what they'll do?'" he chuckles.

Kenny recently brought his varied background to the feature film arena. *Heathers* is his third feature as director of photography, following *Salvation* and *Campus Man*. He discusses his reasons for moving into the feature field: "It seems all roads lead to features. It was amazing to me that shooting a film that won an Academy Award and an Emmy didn't amount to a hill of beans in terms of having my work recognized. But if I told them that I worked on *Desperately Seeking Susan* or *Making Mr. Right*, the response would be "Wow, you must be really good!" Unfortunately, there are very distinct divisions between the categories of work, and many people in the industry only recognize their own category, whether it be television, documentaries, music videos, or commercials. Yet, when it comes to feature filmmaking, you have to apply your experience from all of these categories, especially documentaries. There are times when too much 'set-up' will kill a performance. Sometimes you have to go hand-held, apply what you have learned from documentaries and just shoot it."

Heathers takes place in and around the fictitious Westerburg High School. The school's mascot, a rottweiler with clenched fists, gives some indication of the tongue-in-cheek approach of the film, a departure from the nostalgic and innocent tone of many high school films. To augment the modern attitudes of the 16-year-old adults who populate *Heathers*, Kenny avoids any "sepia-toned remembrance images."

"Early in *Heathers*, the lighting and camera work is very straightforward," says Kenny. "The key lights were always done in pastels, such as Lee #152 or Lee #107. With soft tones, I tried to create a setting of a very safe world. The girls are quite beautiful, so it was easy to make them look great, and my fashion background helped. Then, as the story begins to twist into the bizarre murders and suicides, the lighting becomes more expressionistic. The hues change gradually from pastel to primary. For example, a room's ambience would be done in Lee #181 (Congo Blue) but defined with edge light in an opposing color like pure white, or Lee #103 (Straw). The fill light decreases and the angle of the key becomes lower, creating longer shadows with very deep blacks. The emotional value of a scene is determined by how colors would relate to each other, not just by one color alone. As the darker side of the characters is revealed, the film becomes darker.

"Some of the characters - the adults - are done in brighter tones, because in the story they don't carry much character. From the point of view of the kids, the adults have their neurotic view of the world, and they don't understand these deep feelings and thoughts. The teachers and parents are done in 18mm close-ups. They come across almost like the Federal Express commercials, real caricature visual humor. But it's played very straight, because that's the structure of black comedy."

Kenny allowed the movement of the actors to determine the movement of the camera, a technique he refers to as "organic movement." Lenses were chosen according to the characters. The girls would always be shot with longer lenses like a 50mm or 85mm, and Kenny and his crew took great pains to ensure that all close-ups and their reverses were equally matched in terms of lens and distance.

"We shot with an Arriflex BL4, Zeiss high speed lenses, and Superfrost filters (0 and 0+). I really love the BL but I wish they could just make the mags quieter," says Kenny. "We shot tests on the Tiffen soft cons, low cons, and the Mitchell diffusions, and found that the Superfrosts were preferable for several reasons. There was very little focus loss, the blacks did not white out, and there was no stop loss. The only problem with a Superfrost filter is that if it gets scratched, that's it. Throw it away and get another. We went through about a dozen Superfrost filters. I used the new Rosco black scrim on the windows. It is a terrific product, because it cuts the light a full three stops, it doesn't rattle in the wind like acrylic gel, it doesn't reflect lights, and you can re-use it over and over again, which is something a production manager can relate to.

Kenny used more than 100,000 feet of Kodak's new 5297 film stock for *Heathers*, and he gives it rave reviews. "I think it's one of the best products they've ever come out with," he says. "It gives the HMI a full-bodied look that only the arc light used to give. It has extremely fine grain and a true ASA of 250. We had many interior daylight situations where the 5297 was perfect - offices, classrooms and hallways. For these scenes, I would key with something other than florescent overheads (chroma 50's). We carried four 12K HMI's, which would be used to key through windows. We would bounce with a corrected HMI par to fill, and usually end up shooting at around a T4. For the day exteriors, I used 5247, and for all the night work and tungsten interiors I used Fuji 8514, rating it at around 400 ASA. I really wanted to use the new Kodak 5295, but found after extensive testing that the Fuji film was of finer grain and handled the under and over exposures better. It was a little more pastel than the Kodak, but just in terms of seeing into the darkness it wins by a half stop. It also handled a three stop over exposure on windows better than Kodak. We used Deluxe for the lab and averaged around 110 total points on the printing lights."



After a rough first day, Kenny and director Michael Lehmann were able to execute a detailed storyboard. They worked on an English system, which placed Kenny, Lehmann, and camera operator Mitch Dubin on equal terms for working out the structure of the shot, leaving Kenny to light and execute. Kenny was pleased with this setup and feels that the strong director-operator relationship only made his job easier. He recalls the first day: "We only did nine set-ups. We were outside, shooting a croquet game, and we had to silk a huge area. We had two 20Xs and two 12Xs along with 12Ks for fill. It was very windy that day, and we tore a silk and bent a Matthews stand, bent it like a pretzel. So, we were behind schedule half a day already. But the second day, things started to click, and we did 18 setups. After that, it was as if Michael had done 20 films. By the last day, we were doing close to 40 setups. On most features, if you shoot a bad scene or have a bad day for the next couple of days, you're gun-shy, afraid to take any chances. The point is, working with Michael and Mitch, we were never gun-shy. They were willing to give any idea a chance, and that's very important to the success of this film."

For the murder scenes, Kenny created excitement with unusual camera movement. There were 360-degree pans and tilts, referred to on the set as "boss" shots. Occasionally Kenny used two heads to help achieve the desired effect. In one sequence, the jocks of the school are lured to a forest clearing by the promise of a romantic rendezvous, only to meet with a nasty fate. "For this shot, Veronica (Ryder) was about to pick up-a gun and shoot one of the jocks," he recalls. "We used a Sachtler fluid head on top of a mini-worrall head. We started the shot on an extreme "dutch tilt" angle. When the camera began to dolly in rapidly towards the actress, the first assistant would begin to turn the mini-worrall head to make the horizon level. It was a very dramatic effect."

"The scenes in the woods required a dawn feeling, but in real time required several days to shoot," Kenny continues. "For this look I used a Tiffen LLD filter. It's very light, with a small bit of orange in it. We shot 5247, replaced the 85 filter with an LLD filter, exposed at 125 ASA, and underexposed one stop. You still get the blue look, but the flesh tones are normal. After the gunshots, the cops come in and there's kind of a wacky chase scene. Most of this scene was shot on an ATV (all terrain vehicle) with a Steadicam. When you're in preproduction, it's fun to think up these wild shots (overheads and intervoltmeter dolly shots), but when you consider it on the set, sometimes they seem impossible. When you actually execute it, and see it in dailies, it's a great feeling."

Not everything went so smoothly on the set of *Heathers*, however. Kenny encountered a baffling problem while shooting at the Corvallis High School. In the gymnasium, the crew had constructed a bedroom for the scene, which called for a dying girl to crash through a glass coffee table. Kenny recalls the day: "In Heather Chandler's room, it was interior day. We pulled the roof off and double silked the entire ceiling. We went in with one big overhead

block light and keyed smaller HMI's through the windows. So there were no lights in the room, just one big ambient light on top with the key coming in through the window. In one of the scenes, our generator went to 59.61, or somewhere in that vicinity, and we began to get a density shift over a period of 15-30 seconds, where the film actually changed exposure a whole stop. It was impossible to see with the naked eye, and the frequency meter, which was put on random lights, didn't pick it up."

"Kodak analyzed the density of the film, frame by frame, and came up with the suggestion that I was riding aperture. We joked with the first assistant that he had accidentally connected his focus wheel to the aperture. But we got this slow wave of exposure shift - it would start getting a little brighter, and after about 15 to 30 seconds it would recede. Normally, on an HMI problem, you get a visible pulse. No one could see this until it became apparent in the high speed screening the next morning at the lab. My conclusion is that it must have been an old bulb on the large ambient HMI which couldn't handle the frequency shift as well as the other HMI's used in the same scene. So it turned into a major problem and we had to reshoot."

Of course, working with young actors can make scheduling difficult, if not impossible. The strict requirements for education, and limitations on the number of hours a minor can work on a set, often had Kenny and the crew scrambling. One such situation arose in Griffith Park, where a master scene required lighting a cow pasture through a dense forest. This involved two 100-foot condors, with two 12Ks in each, which took four hours to set up. After the crew used this huge setup for one scene, they had to lower the condors to get crew members down, set up for a reverse close-up before losing Miss Ryder to her schedule, and then relight the giant master to finish the scene. "It was absolutely insane," laughs Kenny. "If we knew we only had Winona for another 20 minutes, and we still had two shots to go, we'd go into a condition red, known on the set as 'Winonamania.' The entire set would explode into action in order to accomplish these shots before we lost her."

Heathers, a New World picture, is scheduled for release in November. The film was written by Daniel Waters and produced by Denise Di Novi. "For me, it's all about the word," concludes Kenny. "A good movie starts with a good script. You can have the most beautiful images in the world but if the script is bad, people stop watching. *Heathers* will probably be a controversial film, since it deals with teen suicide, and these high school kids literally get away with murder in the story. It's very black humor, and there are always people who will miss the point. In my opinion, though, this is a funny, interesting, and well-written film and I was very lucky to be given the opportunity to work on it."

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Heathers was exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with mono, stereo and 5.1 sound.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K resolution on a Lasergraphics Director at EFilm, Burbank. The film was graded and restored at Silver Salt Restoration, London. Picture grading was completed on a DaVinci Resolve. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches, picture instability and other instances of film wear were repaired or removed through a combination of digital restoration tools and techniques. The original mono, stereo and new 5.1 mixes were remastered from the original mag reels at Deluxe Audio Services, Los Angeles. All original materials supplied for this restoration were made available by Lakeshore Entertainment. Stills supplied by Lakeshore Entertainment and Michael Felsher.

Restoration supervised by **James White**

EFilm **David Morales**

Silver Salt Restoration **Anthony Badger, Steve Bearman, Mark Bonnici, Simon Edwards, Marie Feldman, Ray King, Tom Wiltshire**

Deluxe Audio Services **Jordan Perry**

Lakeshore Entertainment **Mike Lechner**

The Beaver Gets a Boner has been newly transferred in High Definition and is included with the kind permission of USC School of Cinematic Arts.

USC School of Cinematic Arts **Dino Everett, Amanda Smith**

USC School
of Cinematic Arts

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **James Blackford**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**

Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Blu-ray Authoring **David Mackenzie**

Design **Obviously Creative**

Artwork **Robert Sammelin**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Scott Alexander, Bidisha, Anna Bogutskaya, John Ross Bowie, Michael Brooke, Jacqueline Castel, Denise Di Novi, Elijah Drenner, Chris Edwards, Dino Everett, Lianne Falk, Roland Feliciano, Michael Felsher, Victoria Humphrys, Jon Hutman, Larry Karaszewski, Michael LaHaie, Michael Lehmann, Kara Lindstrom, Brian McNelis, David Newman, Anthony Nield, Ian O'Sullivan, Stephen Pizzello, Steve Rivo, Alex Rowley, Edwin Samuelson, Jon Sadler, Julie Selzer, Danny Scollard, Amanda Smith, Daniel Waters



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