

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Another life</b>
Author(s)	Derek Elley
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	2001 Jun 25
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	20, 26
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Another life, Goodhew, Philip, 1999

# ANOTHER LIFE

(U.K.)

A Winchester Films Distribution release of a Winchester Films presentation, in association with Lucida Investments and the Arts Council of England, of a Boxer Films production, in association with Alibi Pictures. Produced by Angela Hart. Executive producers, Danny Passi, Alexander Harakis, Fabio Quaradeghini, Gary Smith, Chris Craib. Co-producers, Peter Watson-Wood, Lora Fox Gamble.

Directed, written by Philip Goodhew. Camera (Deluxe color), Simon Archer; editor, Jamie Trevill; music, James McConnel; production designer, James Merifield; art director, Paul Ghirardini; costume designer, Stephanie Collie; hair and makeup designer, Tory Wright; sound (Dolby), Keith Tunny, Glenn Calder; digital effects, Tom Hocking; assistant directors, Kieron Phipps, Barry Wasserman; casting, Kate Plantin. Reviewed at UGC Haymarket 1, London, June 18, 2001. Running time: 101 MIN.

Edith Thompson ..... Natasha Little  
Percy Thompson ..... Nick Moran  
Freddy Bywaters ..... Ioan Gruffudd  
Ethel Graydon ..... Imelda Staunton  
Avis Graydon ..... Rachael Stirling  
Mr. Carlton ..... Tom Wilkinson  
Mrs. Lester ..... Diana Coupland  
William Graydon ..... Michael Bertenshaw  
Newnie ..... Daniel Brocklebank  
Mrs. Thompson ..... Elizabeth McKechnie

By DEREK ELLEY

**A** strong cast, led by relative newcomer Natasha Little in an arresting turn, gives considerable flavor to "Another Life," a period drama based on a

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famous British murder case from the early 1920s. Sophomore feature by actor-turned-director Philip Goodhew ("Intimate Relations") suffers from a wavering tone in script and direction but when all its gears are clicking has a distinctive appeal. Shot in late '99 and strangely ignored by the festival circuit, pic finally has received a U.K. release, though looks likely to garner only modest takings in the current marketplace.

Falling into the category of *cause celebre* criminals that have dotted British cinema over the years — from the 1956 "Yield to the Night" to the more recent "Dance With a Stranger" and "Let Him Have It" — the film shows some of the stiffness of that genre, with period production design holding back the sheer drama. There are, however, copious hints that writer-director Goodhew has ambitions beyond straight narrative: At its best, "Another Life" feels like a much bigger picture trapped in a small frame.

As in "Yield" and "Dance," the running subtext is women punished for stepping outside society's constraints. In practice — as in "Dance" — the heroine of "Another Life" is an essentially unlikable character and at least one sandwich short of a picnic lunch. The difference in Goodhew's pic is that, though the heroine clearly desired it, she was technically innocent of murder and, despite a huge public outcry, was sentenced along with her lover who actually wielded the knife. (A final caption notes the official files on the 1922 case were sealed for 100 years.)

After an atmospheric introduction showing images of murder, film flashbacks a decade, to Christmas 1913, as the lower-middle-class Graydon family gets ready to welcome Percy Thompson (Nick Moran), the latest beau of daughter Edith (Little) to lunch. Opening reels, driven by James McConnel's lively chamber score, succinctly sketch the atmosphere of Edwardian London, with girlish pillow fights between Edith and her quieter sister (Rachael Stirling), and family life with their kindly father (Michael Bertenshaw) and stern mom (Imelda Staunton). In the outside world, poised on the edge of WWI, all the talk is of the suffragette movement.

Clearly flirtatious, and with unfocused dreams of a life beyond her situation, Edith opts for marriage to Percy, despite reservations by her sister and by Percy's almost Dickensian mother (Elizabeth McKechnie, in a dryly humorous turn). Script never provides a convincing reason for Edith's attraction to the evidently boring Percy — beyond being an early sign of her willfulness — and the dialogue in these early scenes sometimes slips into awkward expository passages. But Little's perf largely carries the movie as the couple settles into conventional, suburban married life.

By spring 1921, the relationship is clearly on the rocks and when old friend Freddy (Ioan Gruffudd) pops by for tea, Edith makes a direct play for the handsome, well-traveled sailor. As the relationship heats up,

she starts to fantasize about killing Percy, pouring out her feelings to Freddy in letters that later prove her undoing.

Given the problem of making a sympathetic character of Edith, pic works best when it aims for an irreal style, emphasized by heightened dialogue (playing on slang and vocabulary of the era), slightly posturing perfs and an off-center look. The elements finally click into place just before midway, in a sequence where Edith and Percy argue and Freddy intervenes, and they really pay dividends in a subsequent scene in which Edith allows herself to be seduced by her amorous boss (Tom Wilkinson, in a small but wonderfully played role).

As a director, however, Goodhew doesn't sustain this tone for more than brief stretches. Although the film does deliver a powerful punch in

its final scenes, with Little transformed into a helpless rag doll as she's literally carried to the scaffold, it too often slips back into a more conventional drama. The bold decision to almost skip the trial — which caused headlines in its day — wouldn't have mattered if the movie had adopted a consistently offbeat approach; but here, it robs the film of a suitably strand-gathering climax.

Still, there's much to savor along the way, not least in the performances. A TV actress (notably Becky Sharp in "Vanity Fair") who's recently made a move into modest Brit pics (Fanny in "The Clandestine Marriage," the mysterious blonde in "The Criminal"), Little really does command the screen in her first toplined outing, bringing a slightly trashy curl to her lip that makes the pull between the sexual adventuress and the middle-class wife entirely believable.

She's matched by strong playing from the two male leads, with Gruffudd (good in "Solomon and Gaenor") bringing a charismatic feel to Freddy, and Moran making Percy a creepy study in buttoned-down resentment. Supporting cast is peppered with colorful perfs from vets like Staunton and Diana Coupland.

Pic makes clever use of its tight \$3.5 million budget, though the wealth of detail in the production design and props is often overdone. Stephanie Collie's costumes, complemented by Tory Wright's hair and makeup design, strike a better balance between authenticity and naturalism, and Simon Archer's lensing — all cold, saturated colors — gives the film a suitably claustrophobic feel.

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