

## Time Without Pity

Starring Michael Redgrave and Peter Cushing  
Directed by Joseph Losey  
Screenplay by Ben Barzman  
Based on a play by Emlyn Williams  
Released to theaters in 1957, B&W,  
88 minutes. Released on VHS in 1995.

Review by Hans Sherrer

*Time Without Pity* is one of those low budget British films from the 1950s that are typically shown late at night on Turner Classic Movies or other cable channels. Yet one look at the cast and people behind its production indicates it is anything but a “B” flick.

The movie opens with a stark scene of a young woman being attacked in a room and killed by a fortyish man. The movie then cuts to some time in the future, as a disheveled middle-aged man who looks like he just stepped out of a gin joint is picked up at London’s airport by a well-dressed gentleman. The traveler is the father of a young



man scheduled to be executed the next morning for the murder of the young woman, and the gentleman is the young man’s lawyer.

The father is an alcoholic writer who has been in a Canadian sanitarium during the entire time of his son’s legal ordeal. This was possible in the England of the 1940s and 50s, since as little as six months could pass from the time of a person’s arrest to their execution.

The father approaches his son’s impending execution with the same level of obsessiveness that one can imagine he approached his drinking – full tilt. He had failed his son at every other turn in life, and he doesn’t want to do so when there won’t be a chance for redemption. It is almost too much for him to handle when he realizes that if his son is to be saved it is up to him, and he only has 24 hours to do so. His son’s lawyer has given up hope that solid evidence of his innocence can be found and presented to the authorities in time to stop his execution. The clock pitilessly tick-tock-ticks on, one second at a time.

The pressure on the father is compounded by him not having anything to go on except blind faith that his son is telling the truth that he didn’t have anything to do with the young woman’s murder. On the surface the case against his son appears damning, but it is purely circumstantial and based on speculation of what *might* have happened. The victim was his girlfriend, she was found dead in an apartment where he was staying, and she was holding a locket with his picture in it. However, there are no witnesses or physical evidence tying him to the woman’s murder.

Looking at what happened with a fresh pair of eyes, the father feverishly races around the city questioning people who knew his son or the dead woman, or who might know some crucial but overlooked detail about the night she was killed that will unlock the iron door sealing his son’s fate.

Although it may seem preposterous that *Time Without Pity* revolves around a father’s panicked effort to find overlooked evidence in 24 hours that will prove his condemned son is innocent — it isn’t. Many condemned people professing their innocence have been granted a reprieve only hours prior to their scheduled execution, and later exonerated. Some of those

people were actually strapped into the electric chair or the gas chamber gurney and were only *minutes* from being executed for a crime they didn’t commit. In some of those last-minute miracles it was a relative or friend that found the crucial evidence.

*Time Without Pity* is also true to real life by portraying that most of the characters lead “messy lives.” Emphasizing the wrongness of his predicament, the condemned man led the most honorable life of all the significant characters in the movie. The ending of the movie is unexpected and has a unique twist. Yet it rings true by not sugar coating that someone sitting on death row waiting to be executed is deadly serious business, and it is deadly serious for a person trying to avert it from happening.

The film’s theme of a good and decent man horribly wronged by people blind to the truth, and its accurate character portrayal of people willing to sacrifice others to satisfy their blind ambition may have been a reflection of the real-life experiences of the film’s director, Joseph Losey, and its screenwriter, Ben Barzman. Both had successful careers in the film industry derailed after being blacklisted from working in the United States under their own names during the reign of terror known as McCarthyism. The film, made in England in 1957, was the first that gave directorial credit to Losey after his blacklisting in the U.S.

Given that the viewer knows from the first scene that the condemned man is innocent, *Time Without Pity* depends on powerful performances and the tension revolving around whether his debilitated father can find a way to prove it and stop the execution. Michael Redgrave is brilliant as the alcoholic father who becomes increasingly desperate to find some way to prove his son’s innocence and save him from having his life snuffed out. Although it has been almost five decades since it was first seen by moviegoers, *Time Without Pity* stands up remarkably well as solid entertainment. Neither has it lost any of its relevance as a cautionary tale that no matter how guilty someone may appear at first glance, if you look below the surface their innocence may be plain as day.

*Time Without Pity* is a classic example that a thoughtful and engrossing movie can be made on a modest budget if the production has a first-rate director, a well-written script and heartfelt acting performances.

*Time Without Pity* was released on VHS in 1995, and is available for purchase on Justice Denied’s website at, <http://justicedenied.org/movies.htm>

## 81 Witches cont. from page 21

The Pardon granted already stands as a distinctive memorial to those who lost their lives. But it must surely act forever as a warning that no-one amongst us can confidently state that they would never participate in such a process of persecution. The Kirk was right: there were indeed demons loose in their Godly state. Sadly, these demons were not supernatural – they were man-made, and still dwell amongst us. (p. 48)

Incorporating a wealth of diverse information spanning more than 400 years, *81 Witches of Prestonpans* serves as a warning that when irrationalism controls the legal process of a city, a state or a country – whether in 1590 or today – no one is safe from being accused of a non-existent crime that can result in their mistreatment, imprisonment, or even execution.

It is no minor feat that in a book of only 58-pages written in lay language Allan meaningfully contributes to the dialogue about the weighty social and legal issues she explores.

*81 Witches of Prestonpans* can be read or printed at no-charge from the Prestoungrange University Press website, [http://www.prestoungrange.org/core-files/archive/university\\_press/21\\_witches/bodys\\_text\\_witch.pdf](http://www.prestoungrange.org/core-files/archive/university_press/21_witches/bodys_text_witch.pdf). There is a link to the book on JD’s website at, <http://justicedenied.org>.

