

I just posted this review on the New York Times website in response to [A. O. Scott's review](#)



I saw this film at the recently concluded Milwaukee Film Festival, and found it one of the best movies of the festival. It is quite violent, but as A. O. Scott notes, that violence is most operatic in presentation.

While it is easy to leap to comparisons to "Clockwork Orange," "Bronson" aspires both to much less and in some ways more. I found myself comparing it as much to "Chicago" and some of David Lynch's oeuvre.

While director Refn romanticizes, to some degree, the violence of his subject, "The Most Famous Criminal in England," he does not apologize for him or ever ask us to forgive him. He lets us, to the extent we wish, view the world as Michael Peterson (later renaming himself as Charles Bronson, after the American cinema star) sees it. Through the spectacle of the music-hall scenes we are able to experience the bizarre vision Peterson has of his own place in the world. We witness as he progresses from the "most violent" criminal in his prison, to the most violent in England, to the "most famous" criminal in "Her Majesty's Pleasure," and it is with relish that Peterson climbs these imagined rungs on his career ladder.

Ultimately Peterson, played by Tom Hardy, envisions himself as a performer, with a perceived audience comprised of the nation, even though it is really just him, and his jailers, who really see what he has become.

The asterisk? Do not see this film if you cannot stomach the highly stylized violence. If "Kill Bill" and its cartoonish violence shocked you, then this will do worse. If you can get past the shocking violence, you will find a gem of a performance by Hardy and a beautifully crafted film from Refn.