

The year's five best new films, in alphabetical order:

*Aurora* (Cristi Puiu)

This follow-up to *The Death of Mr Lazarescu* is one of the most uncompromisingly rigorous films of the year, an often defiantly taciturn, even uneventful study of a day and a half in the life of a man who also happens to take the lives of others...

*Certified Copy* (*Copie conforme*, Abbas Kiarostami)

The Iranian master's most 'commercial' movie (it stars Juliette Binoche and might be seen as a Tuscany-set love story) refuses easy readings even after repeat viewings; full of ambiguities, absences, ironies and intentional inconsistencies, it's in a teasing (if finally affecting) conditional mood: what if... ?

*Nostalgia for the Light* (*Nostalgia de la luz*, Patricio Guzman)

Astronomy, archaeology, Argentine history and politics... Guzman's sly, measured essay excavates all manner of things on its deeply humane mission to place the pain of personal loss within a far wider philosophical context. Amazingly, he succeeds.

*Of Gods and Men* (*Des hommes et des dieux*, Xavier Beauvois)

You want straightforward narrative? This is it - though Beauvois' taken-from-life account of a North African monastery threatened by Muslim fundamentalists avoids thriller cliché to provide a subtly insightful, ultimately moving study of fear, faith and fatal intolerance,

*Poetry* (*Po*, Lee Changdong)

The title tells all, evoking both the story (a woman takes to writing verse as her grandson is implicated in a girl's suicide) and tone of Lee's exquisite film. Seamlessly conjoining many themes, it benefits from one of the year's best performances, from Yun Junghee.

In a year with an unusually experimental Palme d'or-winner, I also found three other admirably audacious but accessible films particularly rewarding: José Maria de Orbe's *Father* (*Aita*), Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte*, and Lodge Kerrigan's *Rebecca H* (*Return to the Dogs*) – all engagingly mysterious, cinematically witty and emotionally affecting as well as being philosophically and formally fascinating.

Otherwise, De Oliveira's *Rite of Spring* (*Acto da primavera*) was for me the restoration of the year, while Bernardo Bertolucci's intelligent, often very funny on-stage interview at BFI Southbank in October was a joyous celebration of cinephilia and filmmaking.