



From French romcoms to Japanese horror: your picks of the best non-English flicks

As Netflix's *All Quiet on the Western Front* proves to be a surprise awards season hit, what better time to list Guide readers' own favourite films in other languages?

Gwilym Mumford



One film reigned supreme in the nominations for the Baftas this week, and surprisingly it wasn't one of the established awards season frontrunners. Instead of [Spielberg's *The Fabelmans*](#) or [the much admired *Tár*](#), the film that hoovered up most of the nominations was [the largely unfancied *All Quiet On the Western Front*](#).

Backed by Netflix, Edward Berger's film is the first German adaptation of the classic anti-war novel, and has received glowing reviews for its depiction of the

senseless brutality of the first world war. Still, as admired as it was, few would have predicted its dominance at the Baftas, where it tied Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon's all-time record for nominations – for any film, not just those not in English.

All Quiet's success speaks to a wider sea change. Non-English language films are proving popular with awards voters. Just look at [the success of Parasite](#), which dominated at the 2020 Oscars, or the many awards handed to Drive My Car, [Ryusuke Hamaguchi's brilliant Japanese drama](#) from last year. Suddenly the "one-inch tall barrier of subtitles", as Parasite director Bong Joon-ho put it, is not looking quite as intimidating.

Last week, in a spooky coincidence before All Quiet's bumper Bafta nomination haul, I asked for you to share your favourite non-English language films. The response was massive. Some will be familiar to many, some will be unknown, but all of them speak to the enjoyment of watching great international cinema.

Guide readers on their favourite films not in the English language



"The Japanese anthology [Kwaidan](#). It is four ghost stories based on tales by Lafcadio Hearn. Exquisitely paced, designed, and composed." **Hilary McLaughlin**

"[Delicatessen](#), the wonderful black comedy from Jeunet and Caro. Forget Amelie, this is Jean-Pierre Jeunet's true masterpiece – set in a rundown apartment block in post-apocalyptic France, it centres around a butcher's shop and how it keeps selling meat, despite a shortage of food. Inventive, zany with a

bit of horror and sci-fi thrown in for good measure. A true cult classic.” **Rob Mansfield**

“My favourite is [Jesus of Montreal](#). I remember watching it on [Irish channel] RTÉ in the early nineties, and it had a big effect on me at the time. Loved the premise, and the storytelling. I imagine it might seem twee by today’s standards, but the country was still emerging from the breakdown of state-religious structures, and to see depictions of Christianity in a modern context rather than austere historical representations was remarkable at the time.” **Ronan O’Cualain**

“[Cinema Paradiso](#). Apart from the sheer beauty of Sicily there’s the nostalgia, Ennio Morricone’s music and that final scene with the cut out screen kisses. Gets me every time!” **Sally Belsham**

“I remain eternally grateful to whoever started the round of applause for Alfonso Cuarón’s [Y Tu Mama Tambien](#) at the Uni Film Society screening I went to – one of those heartening occasions that proves going to the cinema can be a great communal experience. On one level the funniest road movie you will ever see, but with the counterpoint of an unseen narrator commenting astutely on friendship, love and society. What a joy to see Gael Garcia Bernal, Diego Luna and Maribel Verdu (above) continue to thrive over the years.” **Richard Hamilton**



“Guillermo del Toro’s [El Laberinto del Fauno](#) ([Pan’s Labyrinth](#)). Wonderful even if filmed in Burbleglot, but I was learning Spanish the first time I watched it, so double points. Watched it muchas veces since.” – **Daphne Pleace**

“I have already watched [The Girl with a Bracelet](#) four times for its revelation to me of how the French justice system works and, for a man in his seventies,

how today's youth regards friendship and sexuality. A superb achievement of a film.” – **John Dinning**

“The first (and only) time I saw Wim Wenders’ [Wings of Desire](#) was at the Leicester Square Odeon back in the day. I came out in a daze and wandered aimlessly for about an hour, still caught up in the beauty of it, hoping to see Bruno Ganz walk towards me wearing that coat. I haven’t watched it since, as I couldn’t bear for it to disappoint the second time round.” – **Sharon Eckman**

“Now don’t laugh (or judge) ... I love French cinema, especially the classic Truffaut films, but the film I watch regularly is [French romcom] [La Boum 2](#). It came out in the 80s when I was doing a year abroad as part of my degree. The film brings back happy memories of those times. It has a lovely theme song [Your Eyes by British New Wave band Cook da Books], the story is a bit corny, but it’s also funny and heart warming.” – **Lindsey Ward**



Take Five



Each week we run down the five essential pieces of pop-culture we’re watching, reading and listening to

1 TV – The Last of Us

If anyone can squeeze out one last drop of life from the zombie survival genre, it might just be the dream team of Craig Mazin – who did such a great job capturing the horror of nuclear meltdown in HBO’s Chernobyl – and Neil

Druckmann, creator of the acclaimed video game upon which this TV adaptation is based. One atmospheric and occasionally thrilling episode in, and the signs are [very promising indeed](#). Available on Sky and Now TV in the UK, HBO Max in the US.

Want more? For something completely different, why not try Marie Antoinette, streaming in full [on the BBC iPlayer](#) in the UK.

2 **PODCAST** – **Real Money: The Hunt for Tether’s Millions**

Given the huge success of their series Sweet Bobby, a new podcast from Tortoise Media is always likely to grab people’s attention, particularly one tackling the thorny topic of cryptocurrency. A year in the making, [Real Money](#) investigates the murky dealings around Tether, a cryptocurrency that, by being “tethered” to the US dollar, promises stability but in reality seems anything but stable. Aleks Krotoski, [formerly of this parish](#), presents.

Want more? [NPR’s long-running Planet Money](#) podcast continues to report from the bleeding edge of business, but with a clarity and simplicity that anyone can digest.

3 **FILM** – **Holy Spider**

Ali Abassi marked himself out as a director to watch in 2018 with his politically tinged supernatural drama Border. His follow-up is a far more grounded effort, retelling the story of a sex worker-targeting serial killer in Iran and a journalist’s attempts to bring him to justice. It’s a tough watch at points, but it’s worth watching just for Iranian actor Zar Ahir Ebrahimi’s excellent performance (pictured above).

Want more? Ebrahimi [has been interviewed](#) by the Guardian’s Emma Graham-Harrison, and her story – from being forced to flee Iran after an intimate video of her was leaked, to triumphing at the Cannes film festival last year – is a pretty stunning one.

4 **MUSIC** – **boygenius: the record**

Supergroups don’t come much more super than that of boygenius, which combines the talents of singer-songwriters Phoebe Bridgers, Lucy Dacus and Julien Baker. Still, the sum part of their output was one, very good, 2018 EP ... until now. They’ve just announced a debut album, and have released a trio of tracks to trail it. My pick of the three is the driving, Baker-penned [\\$20](#), but really they’re all worth your time.

Want more? Bridgers’s album Punisher, released last summer, remains [one of the most intensely moreish indie albums](#) of the post-pandemic era.

5BOOK – M: Son of the Century by Antonio Scurati

Atonement director Joe Wright is currently working on an adaptation of this well-regarded novel, which traces the rise of Mussolini in pre-fascist Italy. Before the series hits our screens, why not get ahead by burning through it? At 839 pages it's a bit of a doorstop, but it's intensely readable in its account of the birth of a radical and terrifying ideology.

Want more? For more great historical novels, delve into [this selection](#) by former Observer books editor William Skidelsky.