

## **“Changeling”: Swayings of Hope and Destruction**

by Jan-Philipp Kiedos

“My name is Christine Collins. On March 10th, my son Walter Collins disappeared. A five month investigation led to a boy being brought to Los Angeles from DeKalb, Illinois. The LAPD told me and all of you that this boy was my son. He is not my son”

The thrilling drama “Changeling” was released in 2008. It deals with the loss of humanity and the outburst of criminal energy against children that seems to accompany human race forever. As the quote above shows, the movie depicts a mother’s, namely Christine Collins’, search for her son, Walter, who has most probably been abducted. After five months, the police send her a boy who is supposed to be her child. Collins, however, is not convinced as her so-called son has severely changed. She goes public and can finally prove the police’s lie. The woman starts to fight the battle of her life – for Walter and against the corrupt LAPD and their unjust ways of dealing with innocent people who do not believe them: “Never start a fight but always finish it” (Collins to her son). Although she wins several lawsuits she cannot find Walter. However, she never gives up hope and searches on.

Clint Eastwood, the movie’s director and producer, did a great job picturizing Michael Straczynski’s script about this incident which really happened in the 1920s. It refers to the Wineville-Chicken-Murders in California, when Gordon Northcott imprisoned and killed various boys. Straczynski convinces the audience of his ability as an author by taking the facts of this horror scenario and changing just a few but decisive things to create an intimidating atmosphere. Although he is most famous for his contribution to TV- series like “Murder, She Wrote” he proves with Changeling, his first cinema movie, that he can create even more complex story lines.

Simultaneously, the film is one of the most thrilling ones of Clint Eastwood’s, who is, on the whole, responsible for approximately 30 movies including blockbusters like “Gran Torino”. Eastwood is known to regularly address current controversial topics which can be proved by the fact that in 2008, the date of the movie’s release, the crime of Josef F., who held his daughter and their conjoint

children hostage, was discovered in Austria. The public was outraged by what can happen in the secrecy of everyone's chamber. A similar crime only separated by decades.

Starring Angelina Jolie and John Malkovich, "Changeling" offers a highly known cast which does everything to fill the almost two and a half hours with great tension and goose bump-potential. The audience can feel with Jolie, who plays Christine Collins, wants to fight with her and wishes to show the arrogant police deputies, especially the very authentically acting Jeffrey Donovan, how to behave properly. For many, it will be especially interesting to see this new side of Jolie – obviously, she can do without her female appeal which she seemed to make a lot of use of in movies like "Tomb Raider" or "Wanted". In most situations she looks like a woman who is shattered but subsequently she is able to embody the hope of a mother searching for her son. Even people who do not like Jolie have to make concessions and might become a fan of hers.

The only other person who provides hope and humanity is John Malkovich as Reverend Gustav Briegleb, a supporter of and a great help for Collins. Malkovich, one of the greatest actors of our time, is almost invisible when playing along with Jolie although he does an excellent job, as usual. Furthermore, Jason Butler Harner's performance as Gordon Northcott can be summed up by just one sentence: He doesn't *play* a sick killer, he *embodies* one.

As already mentioned, the movie is based on real events, a fact that extends the consternation and disturbances for the audience. Some dialogues are real quotes and the names are authentic. This is also the reason why Jolie first declined her participation in Eastwood's project: "It was very hard. When I first read this script, I couldn't put it down. I immediately said, 'No, I can't do this project because it is too upsetting.' But then I couldn't stop talking about [it]." Jolie was right – the movie provides ups and downs, a ride on an emotional rollercoaster in which the audience is involved.

"Changeling" made me feel sympathy, and then anger, and then back around again without using special effects or other techniques. The only aspect I can accuse this movie of is the fact that its ending gave me several sleepless, haunted nights and exhausting days doing endless research.