Directed by Ulu Grosbard
Written by John Gregory Dunne, Joan Didion and Gary S. Hall (uncredited)
Produced by Robert Chartoff and Irwin Winkler
Original Music by Georges Delerue
Cinematography by Owen Roizman
Film Editing by Lynzee Klingman

Robert De Niro...Father Des Spellacy
Robert Duvall...Det. Tom Spellacy
Charles Durning...Jack Amsterdam
Kenneth McMillan...Frank Crotty
Ed Flanders...Dan T. Campion
Cyril Cusack...Cardinal Danaher
Burgess Meredith...Msgr. Seamus Fargo
Rose Gregorio...Brenda Samuels
Dan Hedaya...Howard Terkel
Gwen Van Dam...Mrs. Fazenda
Thomas Hill...Mr. Fazenda
Jeanette Nolan...Mrs. Spellacy
Joseph G. Medalis...Deputy Coroner
James Hong...Mr. Fazenda


Ed Flanders (December 29, 1934, Minneapolis, Minnesota – February 22, 1995, Denny, California) appeared in 55 films and


Grosbard has been married to actress Rose Gregorio since 1965.


From Wikipedia: Ulu Grosbard (born 9 January 1929) is a Belgian-born, naturalized American theatre and film director and film producer.

Born in Antwerp, Grosbard emigrated to Havana with his family in 1942. In 1948, they moved to the United States, where he earned Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from the University of Chicago. He studied then at the Yale School of Drama for one year before joining the United States Army, and he became a naturalized citizen in 1954.

Grosbard gravitated towards theatre when he relocated to New York City in the early 1960s. After directing *The Days and Nights of BeeBee Fenstemaker* off-Broadway, he earned his first Broadway credit with *The Subject Was Roses*, for which he was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play in 1964. That same year he won the Obie Award for Best Direction and the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Director of a Play for an off-Broadway revival of the Arthur Miller play *A View from the Bridge*, for which Dustin Hoffman served as stage manager and assistant director.

Grosbard's additional Broadway credits include Miller's *The Price*; David Mamet's *American Buffalo*, which earned him Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations; Woody Allen's *The Floating Light Bulb*; and a revival of Paddy Chayefsky's *The Tenth Man*.

In Hollywood, Grosbard worked as an assistant director on *Splendor in the Grass*, *West Side Story*, *The Hustler*, *The Miracle Worker*, and *The Pawnbroker* before helming the screen adaptation of *The Subject Was Roses* on his own. Additional screen credits include *Who Is Harry Kellerman and Why Is He Saying Those Terrible Things About Me?* and *Straight Time*, both with Dustin Hoffman; *True Confessions* and *Falling in Love*, both with Robert De Niro; *Georgia* for which he won the Grand Prix des Amériques at the Montréal World Film Festival; and *The Deep End of the Ocean*.

No need to pussyfoot. No need to mince words. Get straight to the point, even if it's not pretty or, for that matter, even if it is. Sometimes things do go right. It does happen. You know it first in the pit of your stomach. A nice feeling but unfamiliar - it's the bile vanishing as things look up. Like watching "True Confessions."

*True Confessions...* is the tough, marvelously well-acted screen version of John Gregory Dunne's novel, adapted by him and Joan Didion and directed by Ulu Grosbard who, with this film, becomes a major American film maker. Quite simply it's one of the most entertaining, most intelligent and most thoroughly satisfying commercial American films in a very long time.

*True Confessions*, the film as well as the novel, owes a lot to a kind of 1940's, tough-guy, fringe-world Southern California fiction in which private eyes drink whisky instead of coffee for breakfast and calmly turn in their sweethearts on murder-one raps because, well, you can't trust a dame who shoots real bullets. She can kill you as easily as she burns toast.

Mr. Dunne's best-selling novel, loosely based on an actual Los Angeles murder case, uses history as the author sees fit, and though its syntax is familiar, its concerns are more far-reaching and more psychologically complex than the fiction it recalls. It's a big novel and *True Confessions* is a big film.

To begin with, it has America's two best actors in its leading roles, as brothers, one an up-and-coming monsignor of the Roman Catholic Church, Desmond Spellacy (Robert Duvall), who is on his way toward some of the higher honors the church can bestow, and Tom Spellacy (Robert De Niro), Desmond's older brother, a Los Angeles detective of shabby background. Early in his career, when he was a member of the vice squad, Tom had been on the take. Now he is so embittered he has somehow come full circle. He's back pursuing justice at all costs, at least justice as he defines it.

The place is Los Angeles and the time is the late 40's, not long after World War II, before television had become a force in the world and when Hollywood was still turning out a couple of hundred program pictures a year. One morning, in an especially ugly vacant lot, there is discovered the naked, bisected body of a pretty part-time actress, a displaced person from the Middle West who has become what the papers used to call a "party girl." It's a grisly murder, but at first, it doesn't seem to be an especially important one. Another case. That's all.

In the way of good fiction, as in life, nothing is quite as simple as it originally seems in "the case of the virgin tramp," which is how the paper come to label the murder of Lois Fazenda.

As the single-minded Tom Spellacy roots around in his investigation of the murder, he finds links between the victim and Tom's sometime mistress Brenda (Rose Gregorio), who runs what is crudely though accurately described as "a $5 cathouse."

There also are connections between Lois and Jack Amsterdam (Charles Durning), a big-time Los Angeles contractor and pillar of the Catholic Church, a fellow who is one of Msgr. Desmond Spellacy's softer touches. Jack Amsterdam, former pimp, now
receives introductions to the Pope, builds church schools at cost and gets honored as “the Catholic layman of the year.”

As the investigation continues, the connections become increasingly complicated and dangerous for just about everybody, except, perhaps, the urbane Cardinal Danaher (Cyril Cusack), who has made his archdiocese one the country's wealthiest, and Frank Crotty (Kenneth McMillan), Tom Spellacy's partner. Crotty is a cheerfully crooked cop who takes small bribes but who would never railroad an innocent man to the gas chamber, as Tom might.

*True Confessions* has plot to spare, and even if it's not always possible to follow the ins and outs of the business dealings, the film is abundant with life and character. At the film’s rich center is the relationship between the monsignor and the detective, the priest being far more worldly and self-aware than the policeman, who, somewhere down deep, still believes in the kind of hell-fire that his brother probably abandoned at age 15.

Mr. De Niro and Mr. Duvall are at the peak of their talents here. They work so beautifully together it sometimes seems like a single performance, two sides of the same complex character. But then the film is stuffed with memorable performances. They include those of Mr. Durning and Ed Flanders, as the most prominent laymen in the monsignor's parish; Burgess Meredith as Seamus Fargo, an ancient, crotchety, seriously committed monsignor who's being given the expedient sack in the course of the film; Miss Gregorio, who has never seriously committed monsignor who's being given the expedient sack in the course of the film; Miss Gregorio, who has never before had a film role to equal this one, which she brings to vivid life, and Mr. Cusack and Mr. McMillan.

The screenplay, of course, provides material that actors might die for. It sometimes reaches for its effects, but there's not a foolish line in it, nor a bland character. The movie is dense with period detail, but Mr. Grosbard makes sure that it never overwhelms a tale that is ironic and sad and very wise. *True Confessions* comes close to being a model movie of its kind.

*True Confessions* studies the crossed moralities of two Irish American brothers: Monsignor Des Spellacy (De Niro), an up-and-coming Catholic star and church fixer, and Tom (Duvall), a murder detective once on the take (the immigrant Irish mother’s dream team of a priest and a cop). Neither brother ever stops to question doing wrong for what they perceive as a greater good—selling indulgences, intimidating prostitutes, offering bribes for zoning variances, collecting payoffs for gangsters. Whatever it takes to raise a few bob for the church or just get good old-fashioned revenge does not count as sin in the eyes of God or Man.

As bagmen for their retrospective institutions, their actions have repercussions. The good Monsignor’s cloistered superiority provides him the comfort of hypocrisy; the bad cop’s worldliness offers him the discomfort of self-awareness. Monsignor Des may visit his mother’s hospital bed, but he plays whore for his boss, the Cardinal. Tom is nobody’s bitch; he just likes whores. Tom, though the elder, remains the bane of his Ma’s existence. He has sinned and repented, but won’t be forgiven. Mom sees the world through the priest’s tinted glasses. The Black Dahlia victim lives cut in two in an L.A. wasteland, physically mirroring the moral tear separating the siblings. You can use two stretchers to carry her away or one, but she will never be whole. Both brothers suffer from the Irish male malady of emotional paralysis, unable to apologize or express love until too late (or drunk). Honesty can be expressed only through the darkened panel of a confessional; truths must be kept within the walls of that confinement. Truth, in this church, serves to imprison rather than free the soul. There is no state of grace to be found in this box.

*True Confessions* studies the loneliness of two stubborn men refusing to acknowledge their connection and similarity. Having shared a fanatical Catholic mother and an uncommunicative father, they should have each other but don’t. One has God, one is divorced (another sin), and they both sleep alone at night. When leaving L.A., Rose, the aged prostitute, meets Tom to say goodbye. “It’s nice to have someone to say goodbye to,” she says. Earlier she had said to him, “I need you like I need another fuck.” In this film, such a turnabout suffices as redemption.

*True Confessions* demonstrates that great Catholics can only attain purity through mortification and crucifixion. Only through self-realization can salvation be reached and self-realization is the true confession. But this is Noir and no good deed goes unpunished. For something as big as salvation, you get to pay a big price.

P.S. It’s a good murder mystery as well.

**The Black Dahlia murder, From Wikipedia:**

“The Black Dahlia” was a nickname given to Elizabeth Short (July 29, 1924 – ca. January 15, 1947), an American woman and the victim of a gruesome and much-publicized murder. She acquired the moniker posthumously by newspapers in the habit of nicknaming crimes they found particularly colorful. Short was found mutilated, her body sliced in half at the waist, on January 15, 1947, in Leimert Park, Los Angeles, California. Short's unsolved murder has been the source of widespread speculation, leading to many suspects, along with several books and film adaptations of the story.
Elizabeth Short was born in greater Boston, Massachusetts; she grew up and lived in Medford. She was the third of five daughters of Cleo Short and Phoebe Mae Sawyer. Her father built miniature golf courses until the 1929 stock market crash, in which he lost much of the family's assets. In 1930, he parked his car on a bridge and vanished, leading some to believe he had committed suicide. Short's mother moved the family to a small apartment in Medford, and found work as a bookkeeper. It was not until later that Short would discover her father was alive and was living in California.

Troubled by asthma and bronchitis, Short was sent to live for the winter in Miami, Florida at the age of 16. She spent the next three years living there during the cold months and in Medford the remainder of the year. At age 19, Short travelled to Vallejo, California to live with her father, who was working nearby at Mare Island Naval Shipyard on San Francisco Bay. The two moved to Los Angeles in early 1943, but an altercation resulted in her leaving there and finding work in the post exchange at Camp Cooke (now Vandenberg Air Force Base), near Lompoc, California. Short next moved to Santa Barbara, where she was arrested on September 23, 1943, for underage drinking. Following her arrest, she was sent back to Medford by the juvenile authorities in Santa Barbara. Short then returned to Florida to live, with occasional visits back to Massachusetts.

In Florida, Short met Major Matthew Michael Gordon Jr., a decorated United States Army Air Forces officer who was assigned to the 2nd Air Commando Group and in training for deployment to China Burma India Theater of Operations. Short told friends that Gordon wrote her a letter from India proposing marriage while he was recovering from injuries sustained from an airplane crash. She accepted his proposal, but Gordon died in a second airplane crash on August 10, 1945 before he could return to the United States. She later exaggerated this story, saying that they were married and had a child who died. Although Gordon's friends in the air commandos confirmed that Gordon and Short were engaged, his family denied any connection after Short's murder.

Elizabeth Short returned to Los Angeles in July 1946 to visit Army Air Corps Lieutenant Joseph Gordon Fickling, an old boyfriend she had met in Florida during the war. At the time Short returned to Los Angeles, Fickling was stationed at NARB, Long Beach. For the six months prior to her death, Short remained in southern California, mainly in the Los Angeles area.

The body of Elizabeth Short was found in the Leimert Park district of Los Angeles on January 15, 1947. Her remains had been left on a vacant lot on the west side of South Norton Avenue midway between Coliseum Street and West 39th Street. The body was discovered by local resident Betty Bersinger, who was walking with her three-year-old daughter. Short's severely mutilated body had been found nude and severed at the waist, completely drained of blood. Her face was slashed from the corners of her mouth toward her ears, called the Glasgow smile. The body had been washed and cleaned and she had been "posed" with her hands over her head and elbows bent at right angles.

The autopsy stated Short was 5 feet 5 inches (1.65 m) tall, weighed 115 pounds (52 kg), and had light blue eyes, brown hair, and badly decayed teeth. There were marks on her ankles and wrists made by rope, consistent with being tied either spreadeagled or hung upside down. Although the skull was not fractured, Short had bruising on the front and right side of her scalp with a small amount of bleeding in the subarachnoid space on the right side, consistent with blows to the head. The cause of death was blood loss from the lacerations to the face combined with shock due to a concussion of the brain.

William Randolph Hearst's papers, the Los Angeles Herald-Express and the Los Angeles Examiner, sensationalized the case; the black tailored suit Short was last seen wearing became "a tight skirt and a sheer blouse" and Elizabeth Short became the "Black Dahlia", an "adventuress" who "prowled Hollywood Boulevard". As time passed, the media coverage became more outrageous with claims her lifestyle "made her victim material", when those who knew her all reported that Short did not smoke, drink or swear.

On January 23, 1947, the killer rang the editor of the Los Angeles Examiner, expressing concern that news of the murder was tainting off in the newspapers and offering to mail items belonging to Short to the editor. The following day a packet arrived at the Los Angeles newspaper containing Short's birth certificate, business cards, photographs, names written on pieces of paper and an address book with the name Mark Hansen embossed on the cover. Hansen, the last person known to have seen Short alive (on January 9), became the prime suspect. The killer would later write more letters to the newspaper, calling himself "the Black Dahlia Avenger", after the name given to Short by the newspapers. On January 25, Short's handbag and one shoe were found in a garbage bin a short distance from Norton Avenue. Due to the notoriety of the case, more than 50 men and women have confessed to the murder and police are swamped with tips every time a newspaper mentions the case or a book or movie about it is released. Sergeant John P. St. John, a detective who worked the case until his retirement, stated: "It is amazing how many people offer up a relative as the killer."

Gerry Ramlow, a Los Angeles Daily News reporter later stated, "If the murder was never solved it was because of the reporters ... They were all over, trampling evidence, withholding information." It took several days for the police to take full control of the investigation during which time reporters roamed freely throughout the department's offices, sat at officers desks, and answered their phones. Many tips from the public were not passed on to police as the reporters who received them rushed out to get "scoops".

Short was buried at the Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, California. After her other sisters had grown up and married, Short's mother moved to Oakland to be near her
daughter's grave. Phoebe Short finally returned to the East Coast in the 1970s and lived into her 90s.

According to newspaper reports shortly after the murder, Elizabeth Short received the nickname "Black Dahlia" at a Long Beach, California drugstore in mid-1946, as a word play on the then-current movie *The Blue Dahlia*. Los Angeles County district attorney investigators' reports state that the nickname was invented by newspaper reporters covering the murder. Los Angeles Herald-Express reporter Bevo Means, who interviewed Short's acquaintances at the drug store, is credited with first using the "Black Dahlia" name.

A number of people, none of whom knew Short, contacted police and the newspapers claiming to have seen her during her so-called "missing week"—a time period between the time of her January 9 disappearance and the time her body was found on January 15. Police and district attorney investigators ruled out each of these alleged sightings, wherein in some cases, those interviewed were identifying other women they had mistaken for Short.

Many true crime books claim that Short lived in or visited Los Angeles at various times in the mid 1940s; these claims have never been substantiated and are refuted by the findings of law enforcement officers who investigated the case. A document in the Los Angeles County district attorney's files titled "Movements of Elizabeth Short Prior to June 1, 1946" states that Short was in Florida and Massachusetts from September 1943 through the early months of 1946 and gives a detailed account of her living and working arrangements during this period. Although a popular portrayal amongst her acquaintances and many true crime authors was of Short as a call girl, the Los Angeles district attorney's grand jury proved there was no existing evidence that she was ever a prostitute and the district attorney's office attributes the claim to confusion with a prostitute of the same name. Another widely circulated rumor holds that Short was unable to have sexual intercourse because of a congenital defect that left her with "infantile genitalia". Los Angeles County district attorney's files state that the investigators had questioned three men with whom Short had sex, including a Chicago police officer who was a suspect in the case. The FBI files on the case also contain a statement from one of Short's alleged lovers. Found in the Los Angeles district attorney's files and in the Los Angeles Police Department's summary of the case, Short's autopsy describes her reproductive organs as anatomically normal although the report notes evidence of what it called "female trouble". The autopsy also states that Short was not and had never been pregnant, contrary to what had been claimed prior to and following her death.

The Black Dahlia murder investigation was conducted by the LAPD. The case also enlisted the help of hundreds of officers borrowed from other law enforcement agencies. Owing to the nature of the crime, sensational and sometimes inaccurate press coverage focused intense public attention on the case.

**COMING UP IN THE FALL 2011 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XXIII:**

November 8 *Chucking Express/Chung Hing sam lam*, Wong Kar-Wei (1994)


November 22 *Frida*, Julie Taymor (2002)


December 6 *My Fair Lady*, George Cukor (1964)

**CONTACTS:**

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...for the series schedule, annotations, links, handouts (in color) and updates: http://buffalofilmseminars.com

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The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the Market Arcade Film & Arts Center and State University of New York at Buffalo

With support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation and the Buffalo News
Humanities Institute honors Bruce Jackson

By TARA ELLIS
Published: October 31, 2011

Acclaimed folklorist, documentary filmmaker and photographer Bruce Jackson will be honored at the 2011 Scholar Session presented by UB’s Humanities Institute at 7 p.m. Nov. 4 in the Albright-Knox Art Gellery.

The session will be followed by a special photography exhibition of Jackson’s work “Full Color Depression: First Kodachromes from America’s Heartland,” which will run at the Albright-Knox through Jan. 22. The session and exhibit are free and open to the public.

Each year since 2006, the Scholar Session has honored one outstanding UB faculty member and showcased his or her work to the local community by bringing renowned scholars to Buffalo to discuss the honoree’s work. This year’s honoree, Jackson, is a SUNY Distinguished Professor and the James Agee Professor of American Culture. The event is titled “Being There: The Work of Bruce Jackson.”

A professor in UB’s English department, Jackson has written or edited more than 30 books in the fields of folklore, ethnography, sociology and photography. A Grammy nominee, he also is a documentary photographer and filmmaker. His most recent books are “Pictures from a Drawer: Prison and the Art of Portraiture” (2001) and “The Story Is True: The Art and Meaning of Telling Stories” (2007). Much of his work has been in collaboration with his wife, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor Diane Christen, who is also a UB professor of English. His next book, co-authored with Christian, “In This Timeless Times Living and Dying on Death Row in America,” will be published in spring 2012, to be followed by the 2013 release of “Inside the Wire: Prison Photographs 1962-2001.”

Jackson has been named chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government, has served as president of the American Folklife Society, editor of the Journal of American Folklife and chairman of the board of trustees of the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress.

This year’s guest scholars are Tom Rankin and William Ferris. Rankin, a professor at Duke University and director of the Center for Documentary Studies, is a distinguished documentary photographer, filmmaker and folklorist. He has been a long-time member of the board of trustees at the American Folklife Center and, like Jackson, has served as its president. Ferris, a professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and former chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, is a filmmaker, folklorist and author who co-founded the Center for Southern Folklore in Memphis. He also is co-editor of “The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture.”

Previous Scholar Session honorees include UB professors Rodolphe Gasché, Comparative Literature, in 2010; Carolyn Korsmeyer, Philosophy, in 2008; and Dennis Tedlock, English/Anthropology, in 2006.

For more information about the Scholar Sessions, visit the Humanities Institute’s website.