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## Passages

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## Passages

### Abstract

This is a film review of *Passages* (2023), directed by Ira Sachs.

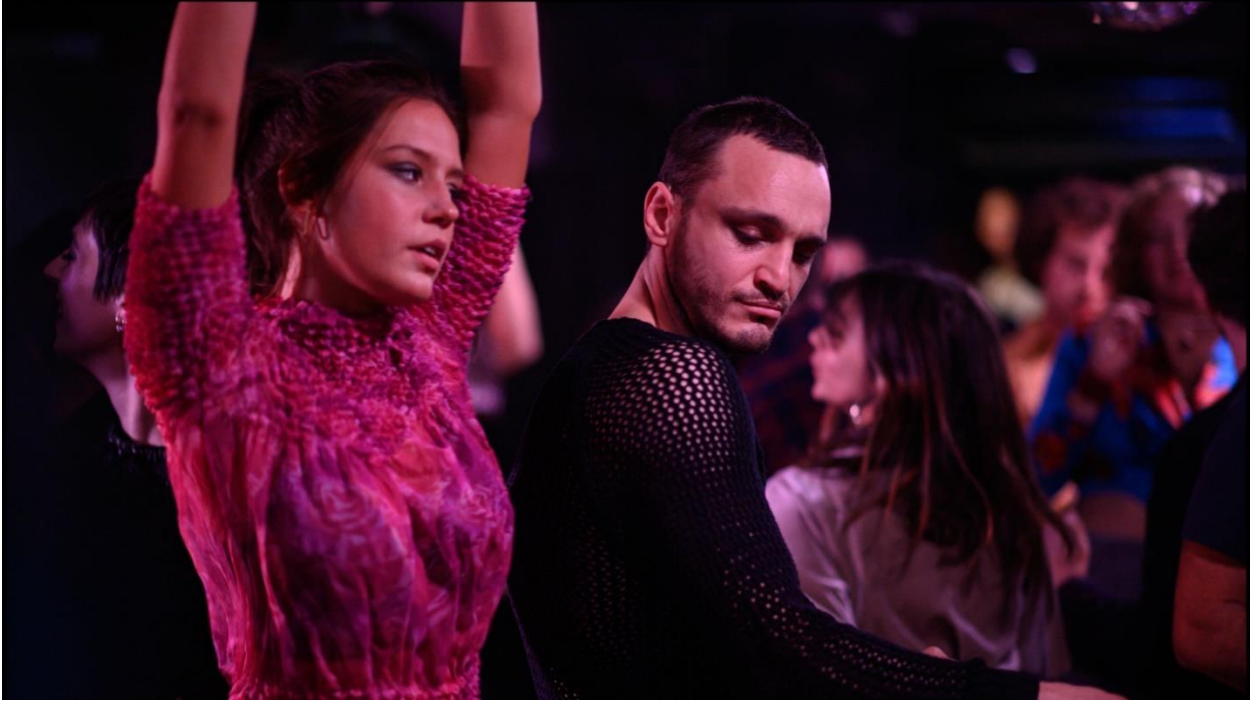
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### Author Notes

Chris Deacy is Reader in Theology and Religious Studies and former Head of Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK. His PhD (University of Wales, 1999) was in the area of redemption and film, and Chris has published monographs which include *Christmas as Religion: Rethinking Santa, the Secular, and the Sacred* (Oxford University Press, 2016); *Screening the Afterlife: Theology, Eschatology and Film* (Routledge, 2012); and *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (University of Wales Press, 2001). Chris also writes regular film reviews, is writing a book about nostalgia and religion and has been hosting a podcast since 2018 called *Nostalgia Interviews with Chris Deacy* - <https://audioboom.com/channels/4956567>



**Passages (2023), dir. Ira Sachs**

*Passages* reminds me in many respects of the John Schlesinger social critique of the mid-1960s, *Darling*, which also presented a complicated love triangle between characters who were experimenting, unable to commit, searching for some ephemeral sense of belonging or romance, but liable to undo at every turn any sense of loyalty or promise made to another. *Passages* is largely an updating of this dynamic, here focusing on a central gay couple in France whose marriage hits the rocks when one of the partners falls in love with a woman at a club, for whom he subsequently leaves his husband, moves in, and gets his new beau pregnant—only to then realize that he doesn't want to be in a heterosexual relationship after all, wreaking havoc for all parties along the way, making promises that cannot be kept and abandoning both lovers to whom he continues to return, promising the earth but then straying once more.

Tomas (Franz Rogowski) is a narcissist and a liar but he also appears to be genuinely unclear about what he wants, and is quite oblivious to the trail of destruction he leaves in his wake,

with the parent of his new girlfriend Agathe (Adèle Exarchopoulos) especially concerned about his liability to abandon one partner for another at a whim, and without seeming to have the staying power required to raise a child. Indeed, Tomas waits to have passionate sex with his ex, Martin (Ben Whishaw), before informing him that he has gotten Agathe pregnant. There is no sense of shame or remorse; Tomas is very good at following his drives and desires which seem to mutate all the time.

The film plays well into the question as to whether a one-night stand is likely to evolve into a fully committed, enduring relationship, and whether we fundamentally change if and when we meet someone who, for a period at least, appears to represent all that we might desire. The fact that Tomas is a film director also chimes with recent examples of how powerful people in the film establishment might have considered themselves to have the license and power to take advantage of others, though here the relationships that Tomas is involved with do not involve anyone on his set. What Ira Sachs' film does so well is to explore the question of whether the pursuit of one's personal, emotional and sexual pleasures can extend to an acknowledgement of the needs of others, and whether all relationships are ultimately transactional. We never get to understand Tomas' psyche and why he acts in the way he does. What we as the viewer do, instead, is witness the carnage he leaves in his wake, as someone who may well be gifted in his professional sphere but is really quite clueless, immature and like a weapon out of control when it comes to his personal life. And we are taken along for the bumpy ride.