

# The Housemaid

## WENCH IN THE WORKS

Jeon, front right, attends to her duties.



**Dir. Im Sang-soo.** 2010. N/R.  
106mins. In Korean, with subtitles.  
Jeon Do-yeon, Lee Jung-jae, Youn Yuh-jung.

America had *Psycho*. Britain had *Peeping Tom*. Korea's cause célèbre—released, like those two other taboo-breaking titles, in 1960—was Kim Ki-young's *The Housemaid*, a lurid thriller about a middle-class family terrorized by their live-in servant that pushed the limits of both implied and actual violence. Its champions include many of the current guard of Korean filmmakers (Park Chan-wook, Bong Joon-ho), as well as our own Martin Scorsese, who oversaw a recent restoration. This uneven remake, adapted and helmed by Im Sang-soo (*The President's Last Bang*), follows the basic blueprint of Kim's film; some of the particulars, however, have been monkeyed with, to mostly shallow effect.

The major change is that the domestic, Eun-yi (the great Jeon, star of *Secret Sunshine*), is now more of a victim than an aggressor. Hired to work at the forbiddingly spacious mansion of the wealthy Hoon (Lee) and his family, she soon finds herself an unwitting, though semiwilling, concubine. Their hot-and-heavy affair backfires, of course: An unexpected pregnancy brings out the beast in Hoon's jealous wife and his murderous mother-in-law. Naive prole Eun-yi is mostly helpless before these affluent tyrants, though Im's points about the ingrained cruelty of the ruling class come off as timeworn rather than trenchant. (One bizarre broken-English sequence seems to be reaching for the acerbic antibourgeois satire of Buñuel—it's not fit to trim his pencil mustache.) Both versions work best in their trashier keys, but only Kim's original embraces the perversity that Im's slick redo tries, unsuccessfully, to transcend. (Opens Fri; IFC.)—Keith Uhlich