



Dudley Moore slows down his frantic onscreen pace in the role of a psychiatrist who falls in love with his patient in the satiric comedy "Lovesick."

the movies
Louise Snider

'Lovesick' laughs at mixed-up world 'shrinks' inhabit

For a professional physician who died in 1939, Sigmund Freud does seem to pop up in movies looking exceptionally dapper and at ease. In "The Seven Per Cent Solution," he treated Sherlock Holmes and helped him solve a mysterious disappearance. In "Lovesick" (PG), Freud's spirit materializes as the conscience and mentor of Dr. Saul Benjamin (Dudley Moore), a psychoanalyst who falls in love with his patient.

Benjamin is suffering from a case of the blacks. His wife, his patients, his life generally — everything is blah. When a beautiful new patient (Elizabeth McGovern) enters his office and reveals her anxieties and fantasies, he does some fantasizing of his own.

Freud steps in to chide him and guide him, but does Benjamin listen? No. He dumps his wife and shocks his colleagues by moving in with his patient.

WE NOTE THAT there is more fantasy in this set than in the amorous doctor's head. His patient, a young playwright newly arrived in New York, is living in a split-level apartment worthy of an Arab potentate.

"Lovesick" was written by Marshall Brickman, who used to co-author scripts with Woody Allen ("Manhattan," "Annie Hall," "Sleeper").

Brickman, however, has not been impressive as a solo writer. "Simon" was his previous film, and "Lovesick" limps along without any driving energy. This might be the fault of Brickman, the director, as much as Brickman, the writer.

Audiences looking for the charged-up Dudley Moore of "Arthur" or "10" won't find him here. "Lovesick" doesn't have the physical comedy and slight gaps of these earlier films. Also, Moore is subdued to the point of being comatose.

The best lines in the movie go to Freud, played by Alec Guinness in a charming and witty manner. McGovern is lovely, bright and vulnerable-looking as the patient. It is not a very demanding role, but she does have one good, spunky scene in which she and Benjamin argue. All his male chauvinist attitudes emerge as he carries on about his shirts not being ironed.

More than anything else, one gets the impression that "Lovesick" is Brickman's vehicle for sticking it to the psychiatric profession. The story goes off in various directions. What remains constant is the satire directed against psychoanalysis.

BENJAMIN'S COLLEAGUES are upset about more than a violation of professional ethics. When he opens a free walk-in clinic in a poor neighborhood and returns \$5,000 to a patient because he couldn't help her, they are really scandalized. None of these acts endears him to his peers. In fact, the presence of so many peers prompts Freud to remark that whenever intended psychoanalysis to be a profession.

Among the other psychiatrists, there are vivid individual characterizations created by Wallace Shawn, Alan King, John Huston and Selma Diamond. Each adds a different and interesting inflection to the humor.

However, it is all rather sly, as if Brickman is writing for an "in" group. The result is discrete satire, with special but limited appeal.

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