

Malle, Irons do 'Damage' in latest film

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

Louis Malle's best movies focus on the incongruity of relationships. Remember the May-December romance between Susan Sarandon and Ewan Lancaster in "Atlantic City," Wallace Shawn's awkward and hilarious performance in "My Dinner with Andre" and the mother-son coupling that climaxes "Murmur of the Heart"?

So it comes as little surprise that "Damage," Malle's latest, pairs a distinguished member of Parliament (Jeremy Irons) with his son's attractive young girlfriend (Juliette Binoche). It's almost predictable in its provocativeness.

Despite its shop-worn view of obsessive love, "Damage" has a surprising, almost inexplicable resonance. Malle, who has been

MOVIES

Making movies here and in his native France since the 1950s, Malle's story for all it's worth.

Irons' brilliantly played politico is introduced as a stuffy, passionless man as stiff and methodical at home as he is at work. His wife, the daughter of a veteran cabinet minister, pushes him into higher positions of power. When Michael finds out about his son's new flame, Anna, he's openly cynical about how long it will last.

Michael meets Anna and is stricken by her subtle mysteriousness. She calls him for a rendezvous, he calls her for another, and soon he's tailing Anna and son Martin on a trip to Paris, spying on them through a hotel window across a courtyard.

"Damage" can be viewed as either a sophisticated study of reckless love or an excuse for myriad sex scenes. Anna and Michael engage in ecstasy on the kitchen counter, on the floor, in a Paris alleyway, and once even in bed.

"I can't see past you," Michael confesses during one of their trysts, obviously thrown for a loop. She is cool, however, and uncomfited by a husband's plan to leave his wife. "Why do you want something that you already have?"

Juliette Binoche, best known as the heroine in the pretentious "The Unbearable Lightness of Being," makes an intense and quietly powerful femme fatale. On the rare occasions when she does talk, she dredges up a troubled past. Damaged people, she says,

survive even when the rest of the world crumbles around them.

Miranda Richardson, a busy actress in recent months with "The Crying Game" and "Enchanted April," has the thankless job of playing the cuckolded wife. Try as she might with emotional fireworks at the end, she brings little new to this familiar role.

Irons has also traveled this road before in "Swann in Love" and especially "Betrayer," Harold Pinter's experimental tale of mar-drawn characters swimming beneath a murky surface of routine British sex and scandal.

It is so bleak that it makes Pinter look like Monty Python.

"Damage" retains its literary qualities and keeps the action appropriately claustrophobic. It heaps on the irony and foreshadowing while rarely allowing any joy into the characters' doomed lives.

Darkness makes "Damage" but it doesn't make it especially enjoyable to watch. Dramatic, screechy violins back a movie that expects its audience to be patient enough to recognize the well-drawn characters swimming beneath a murky surface of routine British sex and scandal.



Jeremy Irons: In Louis Malle's "Damage."

SCREEN SCENE

■ ABBEY THEATER

14 Mile at I-75, Madison Heights. Call 688-0881 for show times. (\$6)

"Johnny Suede" (USA — 1992). This offbeat cult film finally makes it to Detroit, perhaps to capitalize on the success of "A River Runs Through It" starring Brad Pitt. He's featured as a mildly talented musician whose life takes a turn for the better when he acquires a pair of suede shoes and a new girlfriend. Tina Louise (Ginger from "Gilligan's Island") also appears, along with alternative music performer Allison Moir and Nick Cave. See it while you have the chance.

"Enchanted April" (Britain — 1992). Four very different English women rent a castle on the Italian Riviera with magical results. Though the film is a bit sappy, it's still a warm way to spend a frigid February night. Miranda Richardson and Joan Plowright star.

■ DETROIT FILM THEATRE
5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-2232 for information. (\$5)

"My New Gun" (USA — 1992). 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 5-6 and 4 and 7 p.m. Feb. 7. Stacy Cochran, a 33-year-old independent filmmaker, conceived this way new comedy starring Diane Lane.

■ MAPLE THEATRE

4135 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield Hills. Call 855-8990 for show times. (\$5.75 evenings; \$2.95 twilight)

"The Crying Game" (Ireland — 1992). Love, loyalty, murder, and seduction are the themes of this stylized new thriller from Neil Jordan. Giving away the plot would be doing an injustice, so suffice it to say that the Irish director of "Mona Lisa" and "The Miracle" provides more twists and turns than a ride on the Tilt-A-Whirl. Stephen Rea, Miranda Richardson, Forest Whitaker and Adrian Dunbar star.

■ MICHIGAN THEATRE

683 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8397 for information. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"Wild Strawberries" (Sweden — 1957). 4:15 p.m. Feb. 1 and 7 p.m. Feb. 2. Ingmar Bergman's classic study of an elderly professor en route to receive an award who recalls his bitterest past. "The Crying Game" (Ireland — 1992), through Feb. 28. Love, loyalty, murder, and seduction are the themes of this stylized new thriller from Neil Jordan. Giving away the plot would be doing an injustice, so suffice it to say that the Irish director of "Mona Lisa"

and "The Miracle" provides more twists and turns than a ride on the Tilt-A-Whirl. Stephen Rea, Miranda Richardson, Forest Whitaker and Adrian Dunbar star.

"A Small Giant of Love" (Russia — 1992), 7 p.m. Feb. 5. Marat is a photographer and Casanova who prowls the beach at a seaside resort. His mysterious disappearance leads to wild rumors. Directed by Nikolai Dostal.

"Paradise Cloud" (Russia — 1991), 3:10 p.m. Feb. 7. A and ironic parable about Andrei, a professional clown who tries to draw attention to himself by saying that he's leaving. His plan unfortunately backfires in this European award winner.

■ STATE THEATRE

2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 961-5450 for information. (\$1.89)

"The Terminator" (USA — 1982), 9 p.m. Feb. 1. James Cameron's groundbreaking action film was the first to realize that Arnold Schwarzenegger is best seen and only rarely heard. He plays a cyborg from the future sent to destroy a woman who will eventually give birth to a post-apocalyptic resistance fighter. Linda Hamilton co-stars.

— John Monaghan

Statistics aren't always right

STREET SENSE



BARBARA SCHIFF

Dear Barbara: I would like to know what you think about the current controversy in the Birmingham school district. Just in case you haven't been following it, I want to describe it for you and your readers.

The district teaches a health curriculum 80 hours in length; three forty-five minute classes are on homosexuality. In these classes, it was to be taught that 10 percent of the population is homosexual and that homosexuality is an inborn trait that cannot be "caught" or learned.

Further, it was also to be taught that pedophilia, or sex with young children, is primarily a problem of heterosexual men, not of homosexual men.

Conservative groups argued with these claims. They contended that the 10-percent figure is much too high and that only 1 to 5 percent of the population is homosexual. The district has agreed to change its instruction to be more in alignment with this contention.

Also, as I understand the changes, they will contain a more balanced view of homosexuality. The conservative groups are concerned that the instruction advocated, not just described, a homosexual lifestyle, and because the groups applied pressure, it will be now be taught that pedophilia is as prevalent in homosexuals as in heterosexuals.

Since this controversy began I have heard many things about it. Recently, a friend told me that she has known many men who were accosted by other men during childhood and adolescence. To her, this means that pedophilia is more common among homosexuals. She said that she thinks that young boys are ushered into a gay lifestyle through these experiences. Is this true?

Another friend said that her child said that after learning about being homosexual she would never want to be because the lifestyle is too hard. I had always thought that if you were born gay you had little choice; do

you know the answers to these questions? Do we need to worry that our children will be taught to react in a certain way, or to relax with the understanding that they are getting a well-rounded education that includes a humanitarian acceptance of many different kinds of people?

I thank you for your attention to this subject.

Chris

Dear Chris: These are excellent questions; but let the reader beware, there is no final word. No one knows all of the answers. These issues are new and the changes in our curriculum are young; we do not yet have good, unbiased statistical studies that could help us to a clear view.

Homosexuality, since it came out of the closet, has been a holy politicized issue. Whether or not it is politicized, statistics are used for persuasion and not for discovery of the truth. When an issue is politicized, the numbers that are quoted will depend on one's bias, not on any consideration of balance and fairness. As theoretically voiced at earlier times were thought to be a sophisticated argument until people caught on to the force. We have learned that they often lie.

Throughout the nation, this issue is being debated. Even the most thoughtful educators and parents can't agree about what is best for the young people they sincerely want to educate.

Whenever we educate, we find that there is a percentage of our audience that will ignore our instruction no matter what we do. For example, if the instruction is on safe sex, some, let's say 25 percent, will not use condoms regardless of what they are taught. Another, let's say 25 percent, wouldn't have sex with or without any instruction on the issue. So that is a ballpark figure of 50 percent for whom instruction made no difference. We are left with 50 percent who could change the way they think or act as a result of what they are taught.

We hope that with this group the education we provide will lead in a positive direction. In my example of safe sex, that would mean less promiscuity and greater vigilance about using condoms. In the case of homosexuality that would mean greater tolerance without idealization of a homo-

sexual lifestyle and no experimentation with it. But even with the very best of intentions, there will probably be a small number of students who are highly impressionable and already in a state of chaos, and who will not use the education in the positive way we had hoped for.

Homosexuals will say there is zero percent chance of this happening. Homophobes will exaggerate the percentage upward. Unfortunately, we do not know the accurate statistics either way.

With this choice and with any choice there is a price to pay. Each person has a right to be respected for his or her choice. As well, we are all responsible to be aware of the danger of our choices, however small.

Barbara

If you have a question or comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, send it to Street Sense, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. You can also leave a message by calling 953-2047, mailbox 1877, on a touch-tone phone.

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