

LET'S GO! MOVIES

Talented Jodie Foster creates a believable 'Nell'



JOHN MONAGHAN

I'm not exactly sure what Jodie Foster studied in college, but I bet it had something to do with psychology. Her directorial debut in "Little Man Tate" focused on a child prodigy placed in the hands of the scientific commu-

rapo, resulting in a complete withdrawal from the community and the clandestine birth and rearing of Nell.



ANDREW COOPER

Drama: *Natasha Richardson is Paula Olsen, (left to right), Jodie Foster is the title character, and Liam Neeson is Jerome in "Nell."*

REVIEW

Nell has never seen another human being and has thus picked up her mother's manner of speech, virtually unintelligible since half of the older woman's face was paralyzed by a stroke. The movie keeps an audience on

its toes trying to figure out what she's saying.

The jury is out, at least for three months, as the court decides what to do with Nell. Liam Neeson's scruffy country doctor would like her to stay put. The medical community, represented by Natasha Richardson, wants her in the hospital for observation.

He watches Nell from a nearby campsite while she, on a floating laboratory, logs her every move on video monitors. For Richardson, studying Nell will lead to juicy articles in the scientific journals, probably even a university position. His motives remain cloudier.

In a year when quality women's roles have been scarce, Foster already has Hollywood buzzing about a third Best Actress Oscar.

Where co-stars Richardson and Neeson have trouble maintaining believable Southern accents, Foster makes an entirely new language.

Director Michael Apted has a clever way of bringing compassion and dignity to mountain people. Just as he did in 1990's "Good Will Hunting," he can't, he

neers in the script, especially at the end, where a courtroom scene wrenches tears from its much-manipulated audience.

And I suppose this is fine for the Christmas season. If you want truth, however, check out "The Wild Child," Francois Truffaut's clinical yet emotional study of an actual 18th-century boy raised in

the French woods. The 1969 classic can be found at better video stores.

If you have a comment for John Monaghan, call him at 953-2047, mailbox 1866, on a Touch-Tone phone, or write to him care of Street Scene, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

Screen Scene

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Monaghan.

MAGIC BAO THEATRE
22318 Woodward, Ferndale. Call 810-544-3630 for information. (\$6) Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation. Dec. 22-30 (call for showtimes). Beavis and Butt-head made their Detroit debut during an earlier edition. So you can imagine what's in store in this new compilation, featuring such titles as "Home Honey, I'm High," "Brian's Brain," and "Lloyd's Lunchbox." Not for the weak at heart—or stomach.

MAIN ART THEATRE
118 N. Main Street at 11 Mile, Royal Oak. Films play through at least Thursday, unless noted otherwise. Call 810-542-0180 for in-

formation and showtimes. (\$6.50; \$4 students and matinee; \$3 twilight)

"The Last Seduction" (USA - 1994). The follow-up film noir from John Dahl, director of "Red Rock West." This time Linda Fiorentino stars as a ruthless femme fatale who double crosses her husband, then hides out in a Smalltown, USA.

"Bullets Over Broadway" (USA - 1994). Woody Allen's latest, set in the 1920s, finds an ambitious playwright (John Cusack) offered the chance to direct his own play. The only hitch: he has to cast a mobster's girlfriend in a key role.

"Heavenly Creatures" (New Zealand - 1994). The tale, based on a true story about two imaginative girls who find themselves involved in something they can't control. An acclaimed new movie from Peter Jackson, the director of "Dead Alive." Starts Dec. 23.

MAPLE THEATRE
4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. All titles play through at least next Thursday. Call 810-855-9090 for information. (\$6; \$2.95 twilight)

"Little Women" (USA - 1994). Yet another screen treatment of Louisa May Alcott's American classic about a woman and her four daughters. Susan Sarandon, Wynona Ryder, and Gabriel Byrne star. Directed by Gillian Armstrong ("My Brilliant Career").

"Nell" (USA - 1994). Jodie Foster tries for a third Oscar in this sometimes moving, often sappy story of a woman facing the world after growing up alone with her mother in the woods. Liam Neeson and Natasha Richardson help her along. Opens Dec. 23.

"Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle" (USA - 1994). Alan Rudolph ("The Moderns") seems well-suited to resurrect Dorothy

Parker and the other literary luminaries who held court over lunch and drinks at New York's Algonquin Hotel. Jennifer Jason Leigh stars. Opens Dec. 23.

MICHIGAN THEATRE
603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 313-668-8397 for information. (\$5; \$4 students/seniors)
"Heavenly Creatures" (New Zealand - 1994). Through Dec. 30 (call for showtimes). See Main Art Theatre listing above.

STATE THEATRE
2116 Woodward, Detroit. Call 961-5450 for information. (\$1)
"Natural Born Killers" (USA - 1994). 9 p.m. Dec. 26. Oliver Stone's hyperviolent story of homicidal lovers on the run, based on a story by Quentin Tarantino. Juliet Lewis, Woody Harrelson, and Tommy Lee Jones star.



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