

MOVIES

# 'Goodbye Lover' is entertaining and engaging

BY VICTORIA DIAZ  
SPECIAL WRITER

"Goodbye Lover" is the cinematic equivalent of a stylish fun house, filled with shadows, distortion, echoes, knotted turns and expensively dressed beings vaguely reminiscent of human replicants in Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner." He advised that, as you enter the fun house, you would be wise to take very little at face value.

The movie stars Patricia Arquette as Sandra Dunmore, an empty soul who is like a life-size performing doll acting out her role for an apple by acquiring money, money and more money. As the

story opens, she's selling toney real estate around town, but this gal is hungry when it comes to money, honey. She's like a shark in the midst of a feeding frenzy, and so we see more real estate commissions going to do it for her. Soon, we'll see what she has in mind (sort of) as a step up.

Enter her razor-edged husband, Jake, played by the sweet-faced Dermot Mulroney, who absolutely nails his slippery role. Jake is us steeped in alcohol as a fruitcake, but he fully shares his wife's appetite for moving up in the world and, together, they make a particularly deadly duo, even as he plays with the bright, life-colored toy of desire, even as she sings in the church choir.

And even as she "acts out" her sexual fantasies, indulging in a sizzling affair with her beautiful older brother, Ben, played by Don Johnson looking as if he's just stepped from the glossy pages of GQ, Ben is an executive at a prestigious public relations firm called Iconage, who likes to remind his staff that "People worry that it's a dangerous...world; we've got to convince them that it's safe." Whether he actually believes the world is safe, or believes that's an empty lie, or doesn't know what he believes is beside the point. Preserving Image in his life and his livelihood.

One of the most refreshing performances in the film comes

from Ellen DeGeneres, who plays a mid-aged detective named Rita Pompano, practically deadpan. If Pompano ever believed that such things as absolute truths existed, that was a long time ago. "Either the world's right side up or upside down, it depends on how you look at it," she observes to another character. From the point of view of a veteran detective, the world is not a pretty sight.

In supporting roles, Mary-Louise Parker as a chambermaid assistant at Iconage (watch her change her image as the film progresses), and Ray McKinnon as a true-blue detective add to the labyrinthine action.

Director Roland Joffe underscores his serio-comic study of the influence of image, presenting his story against a highly detailed backdrop. Television is everywhere (including the examining room at the morgue).

Movies and photos figure prominently, as do tape recordings of saccharin show tunes and self-help advice. One of the most significant scenes in the film features a reflecting pool as its centerpiece. In numerous scenes, the director takes special pains, by the way, to bring us in and make us a part of the images we have been watching.

"Goodbye Lover" started out as a stage drama created by Ron Peer, and evolved into a screenplay written by Peer and Joel Cohen and Alec Sokolow. Though it has a few implausible spots, its tight, taut tones and fast pace should keep most movie-goers entertained and engaged throughout. It's commentary on the thin, blurry edges that appear to separate image from the real thing nowadays may even provide food for thought after these flickering bits of light have faded from the screen.

Joffe's steeply angled shots, overripe colors and imaginative lighting stylishly enhance this '90s story about a world gone awry. (At the film's conclusion, the director takes special pains, by the way, to bring us in and make us a part of the images we have been watching.)

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## Altman's 'Cookie's Fortune' is leisurely, well-observed story

BY HUGH GALLAGHER  
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As a leisurely paced as a Southern Sunday afternoon and as precisely observed as a Faulkner story, Robert Altman's "Cookie's Fortune" is the latest triumph for America's most idiosyncratic director.

Altman gave us a rainy, claustrophobic Savannah in last year's overlooked but intriguing "Gingerbread Man," from a story by John Grisham. "Cookie's Fortune" is also a gothic mystery of sorts, but it's more a study of small town relationships, idle moments, conversations. It's eccentric in the best sense.

Jewell Mae "Cookie" Orcutt is a family matriarch in Holly Springs, Miss., living in a somewhat ramshackle old Victorian home with her black handyman Willis. They have a warm relationship, kidding each other, keeping score on who one-ups the other. Then one day Cookie decides it's time to be reunited with her husband Buck. She covers her head with a pillow and shoots herself.

Willis is charged with murder, though the deputy sheriff, Lester, keeps telling everyone that he couldn't have done it because "I go fishin' with him."

Around this story screenwriter Anne Rapp and Altman populate the town with a fascinating cast of characters, played by a perfect group of actors.

The indefatigable Patricia Neal at 79 is still a luminous performer. She makes Cookie a woman of raw wit and good sense, with that touch of madness that descends upon us all with age.

When Cookie's suicide is discovered by her niece Camille, a simple gesture of resignation turns into a grave mistake. Glenn Close lets out all stops as Camille, one of those controlling, self-centered, crazed Southern



JAMES RUDOLPH, OCTOBER 1988

women, who once reigned supreme as belle of the ball. Camille won't accept suicide in her family. "How could you do this to me?" she says. Watching Close recreate the crime that never happened is a lesson in fine acting. While trying to hide a suicide, Camille is also directing the church play, a version of Wilde's "Salome," improved by Camille.

There are so many fine performances here. Evil Camille's opposite is Charles S. Dutton, the soul of kindness. He's a quiet, intellectual man who offers help, sympathy and warmth to everyone. Dutton is a master at this sort of character and here he has a role that commands attention.

Jullianne Moore is Camille's sister Cora, or so she seems. Moore plays Cora as a burnt-out case, a walking zombie of Southern clichés, a holder of deep secrets. Moore has proven that

she can play anything and here she catches us with quick smiles and darting glances. Watch closely.

Lyle Lovett is Cora's wayward daughter, Emma, at war with her Aunt Camille who stays with Willis in jail as a sign of solidarity with her old friend.

But jail is a loose place where the cell door is left open and Emma carries on with the young deputy played by Chris O'Donnell. Easy-going Lester is played by Ned Beatty with his usual warm befuddlement.

Add in Lyle Lovett as a voyeuristic cattish farmer, bluesman Rufus Thomas as saloonkeeper, Donald Moffat as a wise lawyer and Detroit's Courtney Vance as an exasperated investigator and you have a fine bouillabaisse.

This is a low-key, enjoyable, human comedy in the best sense. Altman shows again why he is a rare treasure in American film

## 'Metroland' tells of growing up

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In 1963, Chris and Toni were Mods with an attitude, rebellious suburban boys with dreams of cool-in-las in Paris and ditching their parents supposedly emotionally cramped lives at the end of the metro line.

"Metroland" is about the passage to adulthood, from snarling boyhood to accepting responsibility for yourself and others.

In a tradition of British films dating from the early 1950s, it offers a nicely detailed, intimate portrait of individuals in conflict with their own emotions set against the specifics of English social life.

By 1977, Chris is wearing ties and bell-bottomed suits and commuting on that same metro line to a job in the city. He's married to an attractive, love-headed wife and has a toddler, the worst possible time. Toni is still out in an "open" relationship, jot setting about. He's returned to London to challenge Chris and agitate all his doubts and fan-

tasies.

Philip Saville's film, screenplay by Adrian Hodges, from a book by Julian Barnes, is told in three time periods — when the boys were 16, when Chris is 21 and playing at being an art photographer in Paris and in 1977.

Christian Bale gives an outstanding performance as the conflicted Chris. He's a wide-eyed, innocent, romantic and a deeper love, dangerous and beautiful Paris 30-year-old father, yearning for what he had but not yet aware of all he has.

The Paris scenes are a love story within a love story. It's a story of a callow young man who takes up with a free-spirited, sexy, beautiful French girl, the great English fantasy. What he doesn't realize is that she is so innocent and as vulnerable as he is. Elsa Zylberstein is every young man's dream as Annick in her micro-mini skirts, her cigarettes, her peek-a-boo hairstyle, her sexual abandon.

Ah! And this was the Paris of the student rebellion, the New Wave movies — the cafes at night, revolution in the air.

In a departure from her usual roles as a somewhat disturbed and other-worldly woman, Emily Watson plays the down-to-earth Marion, the British girl that ship that is the heart of the movie. For Marion carefully steals Chris from his French lover and his Paris idyll. She knows the real ways of the world, the ways of home, family, responsibility and a deeper love.

The story would be a bit more compelling if Toni and his lifestyle were more appealing in contrast. Lou Ross makes Toni a slick but rather nasty character, who talks a big show but is obviously not happy. At least that's obvious to everyone but Chris. But the London club scene of the late '70s with lead, obnoxious punk bands, phony rich radical chic partygoers and trivialized sex is so unappealing it only offers a minute's worth of temptation to Chris.

There are interesting questions raised here about the trade-offs of dedication for passion, responsibility for freedom, family for free-love. This is a thoughtful if not always compelling film.