

# Movie's artificial plot never comes to life

By Eric Peterson

Like *Divya*, the last picture Jean-Jaques Beineix made, *The Moon in the Gutter* has an extremely elegant and

## Film Review

sophisticated visual style. The film has a dreamlike feel to it, and threatens, like a dream, to float away. *The Moon*

in the *Gutter* shows tonight and Saturday night at 7 p.m. and 9:15 p.m., with a Saturday matinee at 3 p.m. at the Sheldon Film Theater.

Beineix's film is based on a novel by David Goodis and uses the conventions of the detective thriller to get and keep the viewer's eye. The opening sequence is a tribute to Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*: the camera runs low over a gutter, looks up from immediately beneath a woman walking next to it. The camera stays level with her legs and shows only the shoes of a man walking behind her. The pace

quickens until she is running, and the camera looks away into the pale moon. Her shoe is seen in an alley, and the camera glides left to her body, the blood gleaming on it and a razor in her hand. The rape and suicide is supposed to be made so stylized and immaterial that the Pluto watch she wears and the clouding of the moon's reflection in the gutter by the blood flowing from her body attract as much notice as the horror of the crime.

For those who expect a detective movie, *The Moon in the Gutter* does not deliver. The blood dries on the pavement but does not go away, nor is the rapist discovered — this lack of resolution becomes a tormenting confusion for the passive main character, played by Gerard Depardieu.

Near the start of the film, Depardieu tells another character (in French, naturally), "I am Gerard... Gerard Dalmas." The shock of hearing a star say his own name in a picture — like Meryl Streep calling herself Meryl in a film — helps show how the film and director play with the audience. And the moon, beautiful and troubled as it looks, may still be made of paper.

Certainly the plot is — it never comes to life. Part of this artificiality is surely intentional, as when Nastassia Kinski, aka Miss Loretta Channing, makes her first entrance in a flood of romantic orchestrated music which drowns anything but a satiric response. Again, when she rolls up at her dockworker's house in a red sports car, stopping under a soft blue billboard which tells Gerard to "Try Another World," and traces the steering wheel and the car door with her hand, all this easy glamor provokes laughter rather than awe.

However, the social class basis of the plot is not so simply and clearly satiri-

cal. Gerard is something like Jay Gatsby — his yearning after a deceptively elegant rich woman is supposed to be a quest for nobility which will lift him out of the gutter he was born in. Loretta is clearly slumming in her impromptu marriage with Gerard — she wants the sexual virility she associates with men of the working class and which her washed out and washed up brother lacks. "Why do you call it dirt — it's magnificent!" she says of the docks as they drive past — and the dockyard really is magical at night and under Beineix's eye. The ship lights glow from air and water, and as the couple drive the arcs of light open and close.

However, her aggressive condescension and manipulative bent are revealed when she drives to the docks during the day, snaps pictures of her new hunk, purses her lips in delight at the fight which breaks out over her, and asks hopefully if Gerard has lost his job so she can get it back for him because she knows the ship owner.

Gerard knows that life in the jet set would fit him as badly as his suit and tie, but cannot reconcile himself to what he considers life in the gutter. Both Gerard and Loretta seem drawn to a lover from another class out of shame rather than that search for a complementary partner so dear to the hearts of novelists and directors.

Beineix has taken Gerard a little too much to heart for the good of the film. When Gerard despattingly holds Loretta and looks longingly at the world of frilly dresses shut off from him by the steel gate dropped over the storefront, both the social sensitivity of a film which partially accepts his class-based self-hate and the effectiveness of the film's glittering and distanced surface are in doubt.

## HOTSPOTS

### Television

When the movie version of *The Wiz* was first released in 1978, Michael Jackson was nothing more than the youngest member of a floundering pop-soul group. However, six years later, Jackson is an international superstar, and CBS's airing of *The Wiz* (7:30 p.m., Saturday, channels 6 and 10) is sure to garner high ratings. The film stars Jackson (complete with old nose), Diana Ross, Nipsy Russell, Lena Horne and Richard Pryor.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Frenzy* will be shown Saturday at 10:30 p.m. on Channel 7. The story, written by Anthony Shaffer of *Sleuth* fame, is about a man who is falsely accused of murdering his wife. The 1972 film stars Jon Finch, Barry Foster and Barbara Leigh-Hunt.

### Radio

*New Dimension* debuts Saturday at 10 a.m. on KZUM (89.5 and 99.3 FM). The program looks at current issues in today's society, with political, psychological and sociological perspectives. The guest on this week's program is Timothy Leary.

Beginning this Sunday KUCV (90.9 FM) is broadcasting a 10-part series which captures the rich social history of America's women immigrants from the 1840s to the present. *The Golden Cradle: Immigrant Women in the United States* weaves music, drama and narrative with vivid memories to reveal this country's unique legacy. It airs at 6 p.m. Sunday.

### On Stage

Three productions will be presented this weekend. On campus at the Howell Theatre, *Summer and Smoke*, written by Tennessee Williams, has its final two performances tonight and Saturday night, beginning at 8 p.m. At the Lincoln Community Playhouse, *Annie*, the local production of the smash Broadway musical, will be presented at 8 tonight and Saturday, as well as over the next several weekends. And, at the Nebraska Directors' Theatre, 421 S. Ninth street, Suite 112, Charles Marowitz's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* is being staged tonight and Saturday at 8 p.m. A review of the play appears on page 8.

### At the Sheldon

*Moon in the Gutter* will continue through Saturday at the Film Theater. For more details on that film, see the review

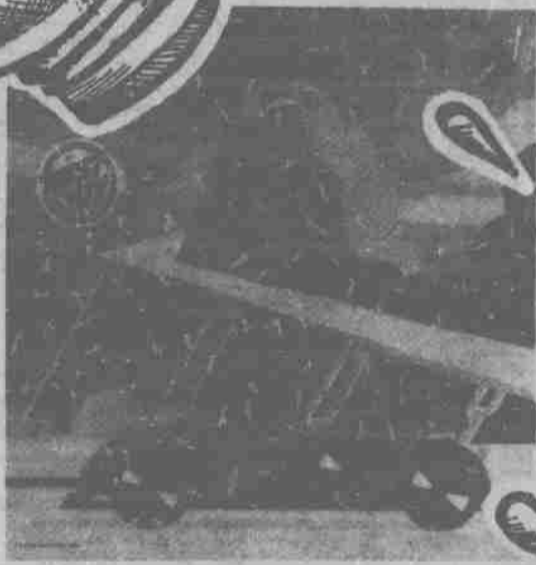
elsewhere on this page. Beginning Sunday, and running through May 22, Bruce Beresford's *Tender Mercies* will have an encore screening. Screenings are at 7 and 9 p.m., with a 3 p.m. matinee Sunday. Robert Duvall won an Academy Award for his restrained portrayal of country music singer Mack Sledge.

### Around Town

The R.V.'s, local rhythm and blues band, will play at a benefit dance at the Lincoln Indian Center, 1100 Military Road. The dance is tonight, from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Donations go toward the music therapy program there.

This is the last weekend for many to enjoy Lincoln's wide array of live music. Acts taking to the stage this weekend include Iowa City's Boys With Toys at the Drumstick, 547 N. 48th St., Rap City at the Mountains, 311 S. 11th St., Charlie Burton and the Cut Outs at the Zoo, 136 N. 14th St., Wondersea at Chesterfield, Bottomsley and Potts, 345 N. 13th St., The Fretz at Bill's Saloon, 1020 P St., The Blue Notes at the Green Frog, 1010 P St., and Karmann Goldwynn Band and Vicious Rumour at the Bo's-Judges complex, 2630 Cornhusker Highway. Enjoy while you can.

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