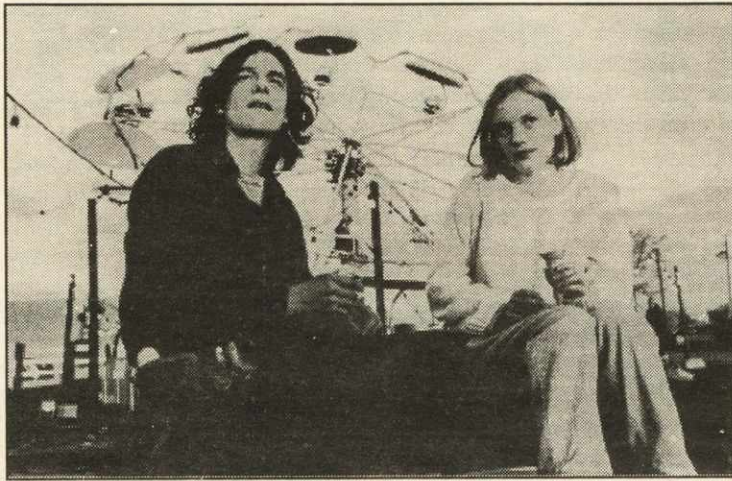


# The Sweet Hereafter

Filmmaker Atom Egoyan's interpretation of Russell Banks' novel *The Sweet Hereafter* is mystical and trippy. Everything is slightly different from what you would expect, as though the action occurs in a place that only resembles our reality. A perfect example comes in the middle of the movie, when Sarah Polley starts singing her own cover of the Tragically Hip's song "Courage". What is Sarah Polley doing outside of Avonlea anyway?



*The Sweet Hereafter* could only have been made in Canada, and specifically not Hollywood. It is too grim, too dark and there is no chance

tragedy in a small town. Fourteen children die when their bus skids off the road into a lake. Everyone involved with the accident tries to reconcile their grief with their anger. It is a failed attempt for most. Instead of mourning, the people of the town turn to lawyers to allocate out the blame. It is an ugly topic that Egoyan handles skilfully. He distances us from their guilt so we can contemplate their actions.

Quite a lot, actually. The Americans voted her "the next Uma Thurman", so it's nice to see she still has time to star in a Canadian movie.

for a happy ending or for Sarah Polley to become homecoming queen. The story revolves around a

Each character resides in a space-cushion, alienated from the viewer and each other. This movie is full of

broken people unable to deal with their own emotions or even recognize them.

*The Sweet Hereafter* isn't just about the tragedy of one small town. It is about the tragedy of a society that has lost its children.

In Russell Banks' novel, one of the characters says, "We've all lost our children. It's like all the children of America are dead to us. Just look at them, for God's sake— violent on the streets, comatose in the malls, narcotized in front of the TV. In my lifetime, something terrible has happened that took our children away from us. I don't know if it was the

Vietnam War, or the sexual colonization of our children by industry, or drugs, or TV, or divorce or what the hell it was; I don't know which are causes and which are effects; but the children are gone, that I know."

How can we exist without our children, without ourselves? What happens to us when we lose our souls, when we try to put a dollar value on our pain and suffering? Who are the victims of circumstance and who are the victims of their own rage? Egoyan asks all of these questions, but none of his characters can answer them. No one can.

CATHY INOUE

## Year of the Sheep

John Detwiler and Renee Duncan's new entry in the Atlantic Film Festival is essentially about two languid people.

Trapped in their apartment by their own free will, Tomasz, a zoologist, and Anna, an overworked doctor, cannot seem to shake off their addiction to the status quo. For these two middle-class professionals, their jobs and the struggle for a secure lifestyle preoccupy their thoughts. Take them away from work and one sees the void at the center of their existence (Yeah, I know it sounds corny).

Shot in black and white with a lot of attention given to shot selection, the style of the film is reminiscent of Bergman's *Persona* (although not as surreal).

Most of the scenes take place in an apartment in the city and most of the storyline involves the couple's futile attempts to leave the apartment and escape to the

countryside. Nothing is keeping the two trapped in the apartment except their lack of motivation which, ironically, is a symptom of their own decision to do anything they want with their leisure time.

Although a thematic synopsis of the movie makes it sound like pretentious, self-indulgent tripe, it is not. It does, however, require the viewer to be patient. A movie that focuses on boredom isn't likely to keep people on the edge of their seats. There are moments of humour which are mostly derived from the circular conversations between the two characters.

Artistically speaking, the directors successfully manage to capture that feeling of lethargy and let it permeate the entire film. While not a great movie, *Year of the Sheep* does have an interesting premise and a few humorous moments that prevent it from being an altogether bad film.

KARAN SHETTY

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