

Back to sanity and art**Lacombe, Lucien offers glimpse of survival**

By JULIAN BELTRAME

Perhaps at just such a time as now, when the American film industry has wholeheartedly jumped on the hip-movie bandwagon for fun, sex, death, and profit, drowning out or perhaps merely obscuring the importance of film in today's culture, it takes someone of insight to bring us back to sanity and art.

And luckily for us film lovers there has always been a Bergman to rescue us with a Cries and Whispers, an Anderson with an O Lucky Man, a Truffaut with a Day for Night, a Lelouch with a Bonne Annee, and now finally a Louis Malle with Lacombe, Lucien.

Malle's new film starts with all the cards in the deck stacked against it. The story is an old one—a country (France) tries to deal with the unpleasant reality of its occupation by the Germans.

As if this wasn't enough, Malle casts a teenage peasant boy, Pierre Blaise, in the role of a teenage peasant boy, Lucien, which should be ideal casting but more than not,

isn't. But this time, Blaise is perfect as the stoic, humourless farmer, who is forced out of his farm and finds a job cleaning out bedpans in a nearby hospital.

Lucien is a young deserter, more by chance than by design, but a deserter none the less, who delights in his new found power especially when it helps him impress his girl or buy the kind of things that will make her Jewish father turn a blind eye to his intent.

He is an unthinking, amoral conformist who finds it just as easy to break the necks of men as it was chickens, when he was a farmer.

REMARKABLE

But the remarkable part of Lucien is that no matter how hard we may try, in the words of the Jewish father whose daughter Lucien seduces—we can't bring ourselves to hate him. And when one thinks on it, everything about him is hateful.

Louis Malle directs a flawless film, always careful to keep the style of his presentation honest and realistic.

The presentation is idealized naturalism, just what Synge sought to do with his plays about Ireland.

The film picks up Lucien in the hospital, as if a camera crew had stumbled upon him by pure coincidence and had decided to follow him about, recording his every move and gesture.

HANDFUL OF LIFE

And the film is surprisingly impressive. It holds together as a theatrical entity without plot, without those clever comic jibes which relieve us of dramatic tension, without the usual one-dimensional villains, and without a tragic hero. There are no foreshadowings to hold our interest, no symbols to make us think, no story twists to trick us, just a handful of months in a man's life.

The story begins with the announcement that what is to come is France in 1944, and that's just what we get. If we find that Lucien has no morals, no individuality, no real courage, then let us not blame Malle for this. This is the way the French

peasant conducted himself at the hour of his greatest test. Malle allows that there were heroes, but his story does not seek to glorify the few: there have been enough films on that. It only seeks to explore the psyche of the many.

Besides Lucien, Malle structures his story on two other well thought out characters, the Jewish tailor (Holger Lowenalter) and his beautiful and talented daughter France, played by fashion model Aurore Clement.

LOVE - HATE

France's love-hate relationship with Lucien is captured beautifully near the end of the film, when Lucien, relaxing in the grass outside a country cottage where the two have settled to "cultivate their garden," looks up to find France standing over him, a rock in her hands, trying to decide whether to love him or crush his head.

But essentially, theirs is the story of a struggle for survival, a struggle



Pierre Blaise

ending with the surrender of every principle they once held precious.

The film's excellence rests on the fact that this struggle is told "not with a bang but a whimper", not in shouts but in a few poignant glances, not in melodrama but in a detached objective stare of the cold camera, remaining true throughout to the documentary approach Malle adopted at the beginning.

Lacombe, Lucien succeeds brilliantly in what it sets out to do, but its serious nature may not guarantee it popular approval. The film is now running at the International.

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