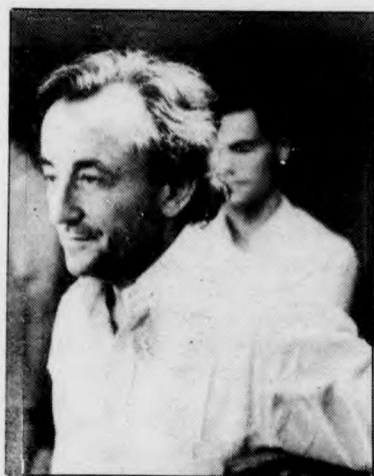


Malle's *May Fools* is hauntingly graceful



Louis Malle, director of *May Fools*, doesn't feel like sharing anything with anybody at the moment.

by Azed Majeed

May Fools directed by Louis Malle produced by Nouvelles Editions de Films

I first heard of Louis Malle in 1977 with the release of his pedophilic Brooke Shields vehicle *Pretty Baby*. I think everyone would agree that that was one strange film, except for maybe Lewis Carroll and/or Jimmy Swaggart. This is not to say that the film is bad, NO, NO, I DIDN'T MEAN THAT!!! THERE YOU GO AGAIN, JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS... HEY, MAN I LIKED LOUIS MALLE'S FILM'S WHEN YOU WERE STILL WATCHING HAPPY DAYS... but, why be defensive?

Malle followed *Pretty Baby* with the hauntingly graceful (I lifted these adjectives from a review by Gene Siskel) *Atlantic City*. This film does not have a

strange scene in it (to fully understand what I consider strange mix one part Lynch's *Blue Velvet* and add a dash of *Valley of the Dolls*).

What I am getting at is that Malle has two distinct styles of filmmaking: 1) The french new wave influenced weird type, as with *My Dinner with Andre*, and 2) The french pre-new wave influenced less wierd type, as with *Au Revoir Les Enfants*. This is the wonderful, beautiful, crazy paradoxical world of Louis Malle. Malle's latest film, *May Fools*, falls into the second, or "hauntingly graceful," category.

May Fools tells the tale of Milou (Michel Piccoli), a 60 year-old man with the lifestyle of a little boy. Milou lives on a large villa in the southwest of France, with his aged mother and the sexy "oh la la" maid, Adele. Milou's life is the very picture of pastoral decadence, that is until his Ma dies; she's gone, she's outta there, she's history... anyway I'm sure you get the idea. The sudden death of the matriarch brings the whole family back to upset the utopian dream. This whole tale is set in the context of the May 1968 student demonstrations, which was as close to the sixties youth sub-culture revolution in America (and Canada... remember Yorkville... Joni Mitchell, Neil Young... draft dodgers... Steppenwolfe... Jesus, I'm getting misty) that France ever got.

The beautiful thing about *May Fools* is the subtle way Malle and scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carriere present the parallels between the seemingly unrelated contexts. The classic french attitude towards the bourgeoisie has

almost always been one of contempt and/or ridicule. Malle and Carriere, however, present the members of this bourgeois family in a very sympathetic and glorified way.

May Fools is closer to Renoir's *Rules of the Game* than to Godard's *Tout va Bein*, although it is influenced by both; Malle, as with Renoir, is interested in showing the human side of bourgeois life. Milou's life is easy and privileged, however this allows for many positive connections, for example, the time to read books and appreciate art, as well as the time to truly commune with nature.

May Fools is full of great performances by great French actors

The parallel between this life and the May '68 strike lies in the transience of both. The May '68 uprising was a time of freedom and solidarity in Paris. It was also a time of great hope for change in the country. History, however, has pointed out how fleeting idealistic notions of life can be. There are neither any more student demonstrations nor any more bourgeoisie in France — they have both melded together into one compromised ball of goo.

May Fools is full of great performances by great French actors; Miou-Miou, Michel Duchaussoy, Dominique Blanc and one of the greatest performances by Michel Piccoli. The look and the mood of the film is impressionistic and quiet. The characters are all a little eccentric and

greedy, but hey, who among us has not sinned, huh?

In the end, *May Fools* is a nostalgic look at a time forever gone and a way of life that could not last. I think Jerry Lewis said it best at the end of his recent MS telethon upon receiving word that they had raised \$42 million,

and I'm paraphrasing here, "... we should go down to the Persian Gulf and say, 'Hey, Mr. Arab and Mr. Isreali if we can come together on this thing so can you.' Love, man. We all want it, and we all give it"

No wonder the French consider him a genius.



The Two Jakes, Jack Nicholson's sequel to Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, is a disappointment. Above, Nicholson and Harvey Keitel share a cigarette.

Two Jakes too many

by Ira Nayman

The Two Jakes directed by Jack Nicholson produced by Paramount Pictures

Going into *The Two Jakes*, the sequel to the phenomenal Roman Polanski film *Chinatown*, the average viewer might have a couple of questions. How bad can Jack Nicholson's direction be? How good can Robert Towne's script be? And, what's with those dumb radio commercials?

These are probably the wrong questions. Nicholson's direction is better than you might expect; Towne's script isn't as good. As for the commercials, well, they're more like parsley than onion rings.

The Two Jakes takes place 10 years after *Chinatown*. Jake Gittes (Nicholson) is still investigating infidelities, although World War Two has been good to him; Gittes is a successful, respected member of his community, with a big suite of offices, smart clothes and membership in the local golf club.

Gittes is hired by Jake Berman (Harvey Keitel — the other title character) to help him walk in on his wife and her lover to get evidence for a divorce. When Berman shoots the lover, Gittes must find out whether or not the killing was premeditated; but, even this becomes secondary when the case is connected with Gittes' past.

Towne's script does little things well. The parallels between the two Jakes are various and fascinating. The plot is intricate, the dialogue is largely adult. And, he takes his customary care to give his characters depth and conviction.

Unfortunately, the script does important things poorly. The story is a virtual clone of *Chinatown*, from the greater social canvas (revolving, this time, around oil) to the scene with the threatening thug (Reuben Blades, sticking an ice pick in a wall, unable to match Polanski's menace in the original). Even a slight variance in the established form would have been enough to add some suspense to the film.

But, there is none. Revelations are revealed with a dull thud instead of a bang. The pace of the movie (at two hours and 20 minutes) is far too leisurely. More to the point, there are scenes which do not hold the viewer's attention.

Nicholson must share much of the blame for this; as director, he could have tightened the film up, could have made things move faster. This slower pace may reflect his idea of a kinder, gentler Jake Gittes, but it is a disservice to filmgoers.

On the other hand, except for an occasional lapse (say, a slow motion tumble through the air), Nicholson avoids the temptation to use showy directing techniques. His camera is fluid, some of his compositions are stunning and he has gotten excellent performances out of his cast (starting with his own).

Comparisons between the parent and its offspring are inevitable. Where *Chinatown* ended with a bang, *The Two Jakes* ends with a pseudo-philosophical whimper; this is indicative of the difference between the taut drama of the first film and the looser, rambling, reflective style of the second. *Chinatown* worked well as a whole, *The Two Jakes* only works well in parts.

Taken on its own, *The Two Jakes* would be an interesting film with some things to recommend it and some problem areas. Compared to *Chinatown*, it is a disappointment.

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