



Elizabeth Fielding (Glenda Jackson) is a dissatisfied but dedicated mother.

The arts

Of thorny affections

The Romantic Englishwoman is a piece of intricacy of the kind rarely seen in film. Wildly diverse elements of comedy and drama are involved. The movie succeeds in lacing them together, although some disharmony inevitably arises.

The scenario begins harmlessly enough. Lewis Fielding (Michael Caine) is a successful English novelist, with matching country estate. His wife (Glenda Jackson) goes to a German resort town to dabble in the mineral springs and casinos. She meets a brash yet enigmatic gigolo named Thomas Herser (Helmut Berger). Besides his obvious craft, he smuggles heroin. Fortune eludes him, however, when his cache is washed away in the rain. Bathed and bemused, Elizabeth returns to England.

Lewis Fielding is a man who likes to push a situation, to see if there's anything substantial to it, to see if it pushes back. A question plagues him: what if the person you love is a liar? He gets a letter from Herser, who is in need of shelter from his smuggling partners. Herser pretends a professional interest

in Fielding's work, so Fielding to push it, invites him across the Channel to tea some day. And the dialogue begins to cut. "What is he like?" asks Lewis. "Young," Elizabeth replies coolly, "and a poet." Lewis is not young, and he's not a poet - he's a junk writer, and therefore rich though lamentably not poetic. But the Poet isn't a poet either; the title merely intrigues romantic Englishwomen who visit the baths at Baden-Baden. He's somewhat of a jet-set Artful Dodger, calmly devoted to keeping Number One fed and bedded. He comes to tea.

Michael Caine and Glenda Jackson are two of the few contemporary players worthy of the demands that follow. Their dialogue is mercilessly double-edged, not only through puns and sarcasm, but also in the tragicomic balance that evolves. Some scenes are nothing short of hilarious; others are poignantly sad. More often, they are both at once.

The Poet is induced to stay at the estate. His presence in the film ebbs and flows, yet he always the axis around which turns. Elizabeth and Lewis play him off on each other - he has his freedom, his youth and his wits. They have wit in abundance but it's almost sad, because they need all of it. They're two people who refuse to back away; they constantly test the bonds that hold them together. But with running flippancy they survive even the most dangerous moment in the story - Lewis interrupts Elizabeth and the Poet having it on in the greenhouse. "I know you never pay for anything," he tells the Poet. "This time you will." But Elizabeth mutters: "I'll pay," and the scene ends on a wry note.

At times the humor comes close to defusing the drama when the story is precise about how the two mix and swirl. We laugh a great deal, but Caine and Jackson fuse wit and tension so well that, although comedy too often prevails, the drama is not lost. The humor cuts, heals the suffering it didn't cause, then cuts again.

The film has many dimensions. It could easily survive on the dialogue alone. Tom Stoppard (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*) and Thomas Wiseman co-wrote the screenplay, which was adapted from Wiseman's novel of the same name. Joseph Losey directs; his record includes films of Harold Pinter's work. Along with Richard Hartley's music, Losey creates an underlying dramatic level in his own right. It's pleasing to see a film that makes such intelligent use of suggestive music and direction.

So, although the film subtly constantly runs the risk of becoming confusion, its enduring effect is one of deliberate intricacy. In the unlikely circumstances of heroin smuggling and model opulence, we get a complex and sensitive view of a poorly-kept woman, an often petulant author, and their marriage thorns and affection.

The Romantic Englishwoman is at the Capitol Square Cinemas.

by Don Truck

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bissett is true Canadian wildman

Most people think poets are a little strange, and Canadian poet bill bissett doesn't do much to contradict such a statement. You'll be able to decide for yourself at noon, Friday, when "one of the true wildmen of Canadian poetry" reads from his work.

bissett's readings are always multifaceted entertainments, ranging from chants and mantras to more traditional verse. He is equally at home in visual, sound or more-or-less (often less) traditional poetic forms. With his *blew ointment press* in Vancouver, he's been publishing a large variety of experimental writing by himself and others since the mid-

sixties. Books he is best known for include *Awake in the Red Desert*, (book and record from Talonbooks); *Nobody Owns the Earth*, (Anansi); and *Medicine My Mouths on Fire*, (book and record from Oberon).

The reading is the third in a series of nine sponsored by the Canada Council and U of A English Department, all held Friday noons in Lecture Room Three of the AV Centre of the Humanities Complex on campus. The readings are given by authors all known for their experimentation with the forms of poetry and prose and are chosen from the course list of English 371 (Experimental Writing In Canada).

Cinematheque 16

(formerly Gallery Cinema)

Thurs. Feb. 5 at 7:30 p.m.

"A Day In The Life
of Ivan Denasovitch" Family

Fri. Feb. 6 at 7:30 p.m.

"The Producers" Adult

Sun. Feb. 8 at 2 p.m.

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