

In nasty film everyone gets off easily

W. Hurst

Brimstone and Treacle is, among other things, a tight, amusingly nasty little film. It is also a vehicle for Gordon Matthew Sumner, a.k.a. Sting of The Police.

Sting plays Martin Taylor, an attractive, if scruffy loner whose goal in life is to use people, for the sake of using them. Martin hasn't any greater ambition, such as power over his targets.

Martin worms his way into the home of the apparently normal Thomas and Norma Blake, who have an invalid daughter. Citing a desire to help out, oily Martin offers to be houseboy and nurse. Norma eagerly accepts, but Tom is suspicious.

Tom expects secrets because he has his own. To break the monotony of his work, Tom and his horn-rimmed

secretary indulge in mutual degradation.

Denholm Elliott plays Tom very neatly. The camera focuses on his tight mouth, which seems too dry to salivate. Tom doesn't chew food, he masticates with his lips pulled down to hide his teeth.

Joan Plowright turns the cliched English Housewife, Norma, into a woman of sensible virtue. Martin's singular sexual advance is easily rebuffed by Norma. She doesn't have a prurient side.

Whether using boyish charm or malicious humour, Sting sustains the perverse character of Martin. However, Sting's sexual appeal is held in check. Martin is smarmy, but never openly. He sniffs underwear and gropes the invalid daughter covertly but is not an all-powerful character; and he never overplays his control of the household.

As the invalid Patricia, Suzanna Hamilton is uncomfortably beautiful. The film tries to make her sexual abuse more distasteful because she is a beautiful victim not just a victim.

Nevertheless, the characters are well enough established to withstand a peculiar device script-writer Dennis Potter uses. Potter, who wrote the original *Pennies from Heaven* for the BBC, smears reality with interior fantasy.

In *Pennies from Heaven*, daydreams took on the clarity of everyday reality. In *Brimstone and Treacle*, this device is used repeatedly and effectively. Martin

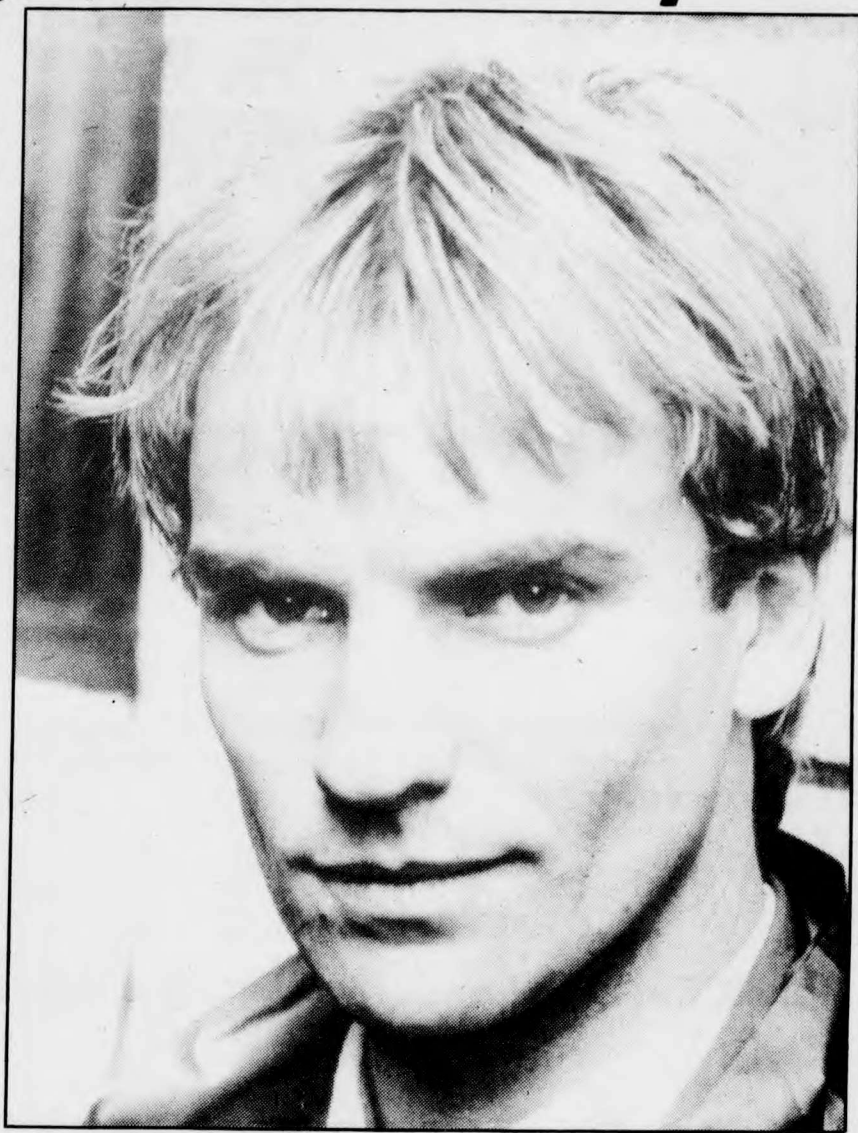
seems to summon the Furies during a prayer for Patricia. Yet sensible Norma who prayed with him, finishes the scene with "Thank you Martin. That was very nice." Martin and the audience saw the windows blow open and heard thunder, but Norma got only a tingling of the scalp.

The audience is privilege to different fantasies and realities, especially the sexual ones, in *Brimstone and Treacle*. The film encourages the audience to salaciously enjoy the secretary's black gartered rump or Sting's naked torso. Moreover, this enjoyment is accentuated by the lack of open display, successfully proving the theory that less is more.

The facile plot resolution exploits another adage. Having defiled the helpless young maiden, Martin at the film's end, seems set for his comeuppance at the hands of a stranger. The audience can feel assured that, as your mother told you, the evil get their own reward. However, practical reality constantly proves this is just not the case. In life, rotters often get what they want, not what they deserve.

However, black comedies depend upon a set of moral values against which the comedy can be played. Some films, such as this one, even reinforce these values.

Brimstone and Treacle heats up with nasty, lascivious ideas but cools off with a sweetly convenient resolution. The audience can have its morality and cheat it too.



Sting of the Police plays 'attractive, if scruffy loner' in film.

Innocent love from Moreau

Pierre Careau

L'Adolescente is touching memorabilia, reminiscent of a charming but forgotten way of life. The film's "douceur de vivre" harmonises with the beautiful countryside of Aveyron. Resting on the rocky cliff of a dormant volcano, this locale is a naturally tense background against which a girl becomes a woman in the summer of 1939.

After a successful directorial debut with *Lumiere*, in 1976, Jeanne Moreau returns as director of *L'Adolescente*, a sensuous delight completed in 1979.

Moreau's matriarchal world revolves around 12 year-old Marie. Beneath a benevolent moon, this girl and her mother clash over their love for a young and attractive Jewish doctor.

Marie comes to understand her bewildering psychological changes with the help of her mystical grandmother, poignantly played by Simone Signoret. Eventually, on the advice of the village witch, Marie reconciles her separated parents with a love potion.

The theme and conflict may not be original, but Moreau's mastery is based on the rich characterisations. These are related to the human dimension of the rural environment. In the director's feminine cosmos, men are afraid of women they don't understand, and puberty is detailed sensitively, without false puritanism. Love becomes passion and all else is futility. Moreau's world is one of magic and ritual. Prevailing emotion leaves no room for rationalism.

Although not a grand fresco, *L'Adolescente* has the attractive qualities of delicate aquarelles by Dufy. Jeanne Moreau's voiceover, a la Truffaut, colours her "remembrance of things past" with a wash of melancholy.

Actresses capture despair of working women

Michael Monastyrskij

Someone who caught a glimpse of *Les Belles Soeurs* in the Bear Pit last week, may have gotten a false impression of the production presented this weekend at the Atkinson Studio Theatre. Removed from the context the plot and scenery provide, the Central Square excerpts showed the play's loud humour, but gave no suggestion of the bitterness that pervades the story.

Perhaps Quebec playwright Michel Tremblay's best known work, the play is a reflection of the writer's sympathy for the plight of working-class women in Quebec. The York Theatre Department captured

this sentiment on Friday, relaying all of the details intact to a full house, and the audience seemed to recognize that more than a little time and sweat had gone into the production.

The entire story takes place one evening at a stamp-licking party organized by Germaine Lauzon (Marion Younan), who has won enough boxes of trading stamps to allow her to escape her poverty. Through Germaine and the other women who come to the party, the audience gradually becomes aware of frustration experienced in working-class Montreal, frustrations that are often revealed through the resentment the women feel

towards their lucky neighbour.

The scenery captured the despair. Clotheslines, strung out like so much barbed wire, provided a fitting backdrop to the proletarian kitchen. Equally appropriate, were the cross and the painting of the Virgin Mary, which acted as vigilant guards against the secular influences that have begun to seep into the Catholic Montreal neighbourhood.

The play's characters are well defined, but in two instances they

must be indistinguishable from each other. When they chant a description of their daily routines, they are stoney-faced and their voices monotone. In *Ode to Bingo* their repressed longings are exposed in a simultaneous gringing of hips that culminates in a collective orgasm.

The actresses succeeded in portraying the similarity of the women's situation, without sacrificing the individuality of the characters.


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