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'Lieutenant's Woman':

A successful experiment

"The French Lieutenant's Woman" is a finely-crafted tapestry, weaving together the past and the present. Through careful use of cross-cutting, these story tenses remain distinct, yet uniquely intertwined.

In the past, Meryl Streep plays Sarah, a mysterious Victorian woman whose rumored affair with a French officer causes her to be outcast from the community. Jeremy Irons plays Charles, a man who becomes obsessed with finding the secrets behind Sarah's strange mourning. In the present, Anna

(Streep), is an actress playing the role of Sarah, and Mike (Irons), is her leading man.

The screenplay, by Howard Pinter, combines strong elements of romance and suspense as Charles unravels Sarah's story and falls in love with her. The same elements are repeated as we see Mike and Anna's relationship begin with an affair and slowly change. Director Karel Reisz manages to strike a perfect balance between romance and suspense.

Although other movies have



utilized cross-cutting between stories to enhance suspense and drama, none has worked as well as "The French Lieutenant's Woman." The honesty and humanity of the actors' lives poses a sharp contrast to the flowery images seen in the Victorian scenes. The result is that the audience is drawn into the story, experiencing every nuance and image that offers.

The two stories are brought together as Mike and Anna subtly bring elements of Charles and Sarah's relationship into their own. This twist is brought to a climax when, at the close of the film, Mike calls out to Anna, and mistakenly shouts Sarah's name instead.

The acting in "The French Lieutenant's Woman" is impressive. Streep handles her roles with grace and confidence. Irons, a newcomer to the screen, shows immense promise as he flaunts his way through his parts with a barely-restrained power, and a remarkably relaxed intensity.

Fine cinematography enhances the entire movie, and hauntingly beautiful images abound. The background shots of England are perfect: nicely lush, yet believably plain in all the right places.

Although "The French Lieutenant's Woman" isn't the epitome of romantic films, it attempts a difficult feat, and succeeds with remarkable results. In writing, acting, directing, editing and cinematography, "The French Lieutenant's Woman" is an experiment that succeeded.

by matt meyer

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