

CINEMA

Mixed flicks

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allowed and even encouraged, and any attempt at a "plot" or "characters" is supposed to thinly veil the erotic or sensationalistic "good parts."

As it stands, however, *Hard* is a narrative feature film. By that standard, it's not even a *Showgirls*-style, so-bad-it's-good, campy sort of affair. It's just plain bad. —CM

The *Cider House Rules*, based on John Irving's novel, is an intense story.

A doctor, played in the film by Michael Caine, runs an orphanage in 1940s, World War II-era Maine; Tobey Maguire is Homer, an orphan whom the doctor treats as his own son.

The doctor's hopes that his protégé will follow in his footsteps, providing medical services (including then-illegal professional abortions) to the pregnant women who show up at the orphanage, are dashed when the young man decides to strike out and take a job on a far-off farm. However, Homer's worldly experiences with life and love—including a doomed affair

more honest feeling, *Cider House Rules* comes a little too close to being a bore.

—CM

Mansfield Park is a fine film for lovers of Jane Austen costume dramas, but as is customary with all things Austen, this one is heavily hetero—despite being directed by the gifted lesbian director Patricia Rozema.

She directed what I think is the most sensitive, beautiful lesbian love story ever filmed, *When Night Is Falling*. (If you've never seen it, get thee to a video store and see for yourself.)

Mansfield Park does mark a big leap forward in Rozema's skills as a director and should ensure her another feature film directing opportunity. Also the screenwriter, Rozema adapted Austen's novel and amped up the spunk factor of lead character Fanny Price with passages from Austen's letters and journals. Though very much a film set in 1806, it does include a few sly modernisms that add sparkle and wit.

Fanny Price is portrayed as a strong-willed woman, willing to defy her benefactor and return to her stark and humble origins in order to avoid marriage to a man she distrusts. Her pluck and perseverance are ultimately rewarded

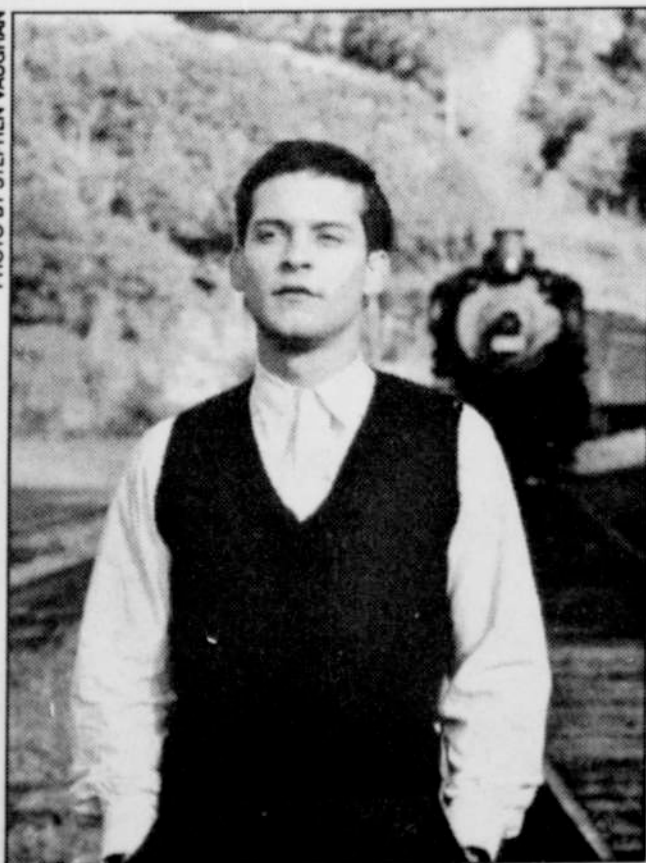


William H. Macy is a lonely guy in *Magnolia*

and a crisis situation in which he feels morally obligated to perform an abortion—only prepare him to return to the orphanage upon the doctor's death and take his rightful place, wiser and content with his vocation.

There are fine, thoughtful performances by Caine and Maguire, though Charlize Theron's persona emits too much supermodel to be truly believable as a farm girl. Still, it's clear that a lot of thought and care went into her performance. In fact, the whole film suffers from too much thoughtfulness, too much composure, which seems at odds with a story that involves children being abandoned, abortion, incest and murder.

Director Lasse Hallström (*My Life as a Dog*, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*) is too intent on achieving a sort of earnest placidity to let his characters truly feel their pain. For those willing to meet Hallström halfway, the film could be an interesting bit of storytelling. For those who expect a little



Tobey Maguire learns *The Cider House Rules*

as she makes a match true to her heart—albeit with her first cousin!

Production costs were trimmed via a competent cast that contains no big-name stars, though Frances O'Connor as Fanny delivers a suitably lively rendition of her character.

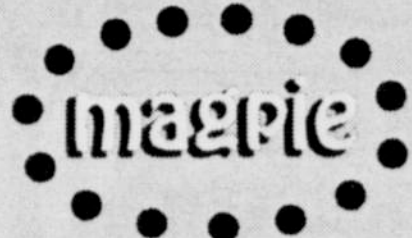
Filmed in England, the movie benefits from lush art direction, appropriate to the upper-class setting of the story, and Rozema manages to include some social commentary on the source of income that supports the lifestyle at Mansfield Park.

Some reviewers have strained to identify lesbian overtones in the film, but, alas, it would take a huge leap of the imagination to see much femme-to-femme innuendo in this movie.

—Oriana Green

■ CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN is a Portland-based writer and tireless observer of pop culture.

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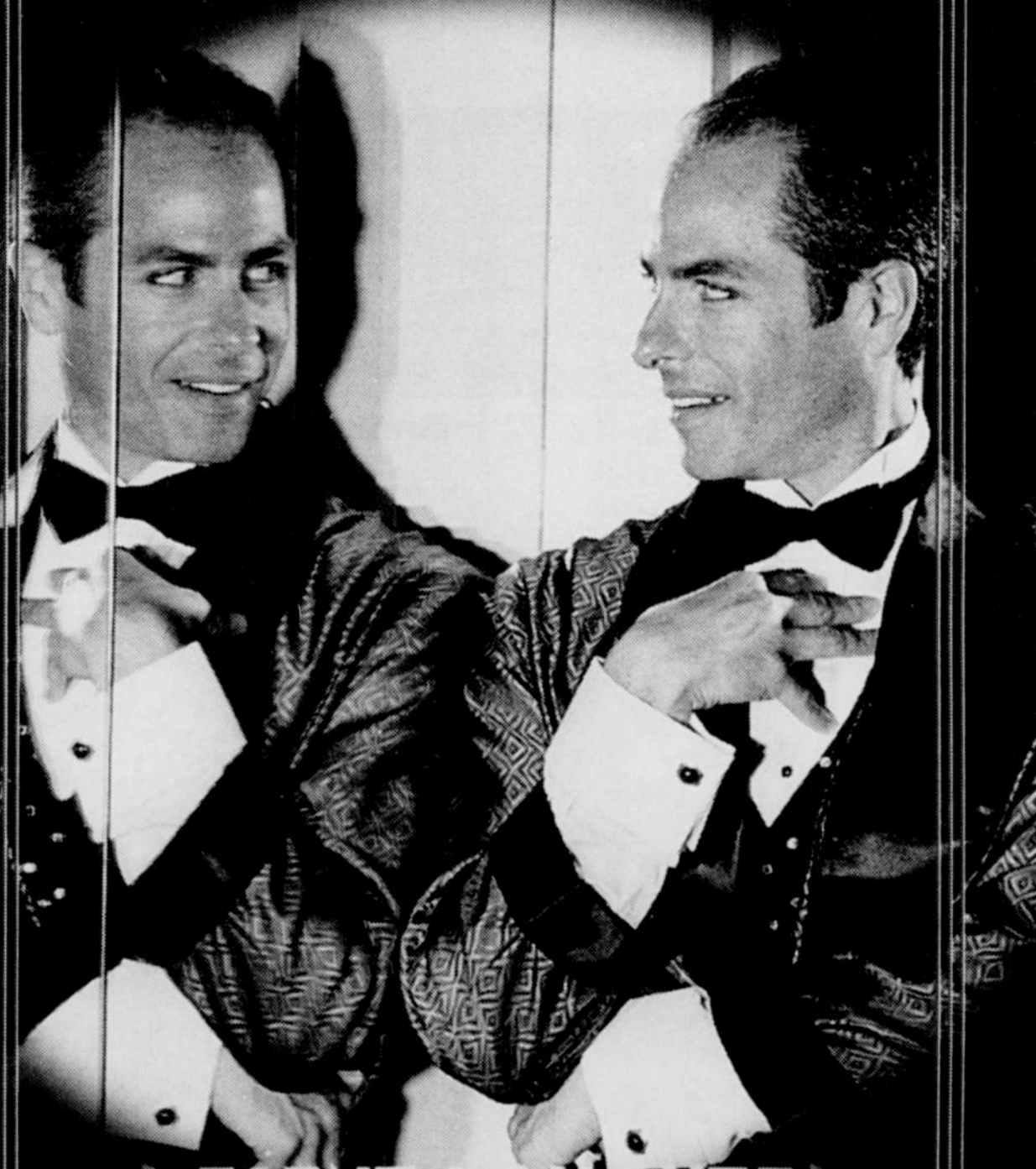


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