

FILM

Triangle of lost souls

Another Michael Cunningham novel finds a satisfying onscreen home

BY GARY MORRIS

Michael Mayer's screen adaptation of Michael Cunningham's (*Flesh and Blood, The Hours*) bittersweet novel is already infamous for showing Colin Farrell's allegedly huge prick and then cutting it from the release print for being "too distracting."

But *A Home at the End of the World* is so good it doesn't need that kind of PR trickery. This wrenchingly emotional tale of love and loss centered on a beautiful naif can stand on its own considerable merits.

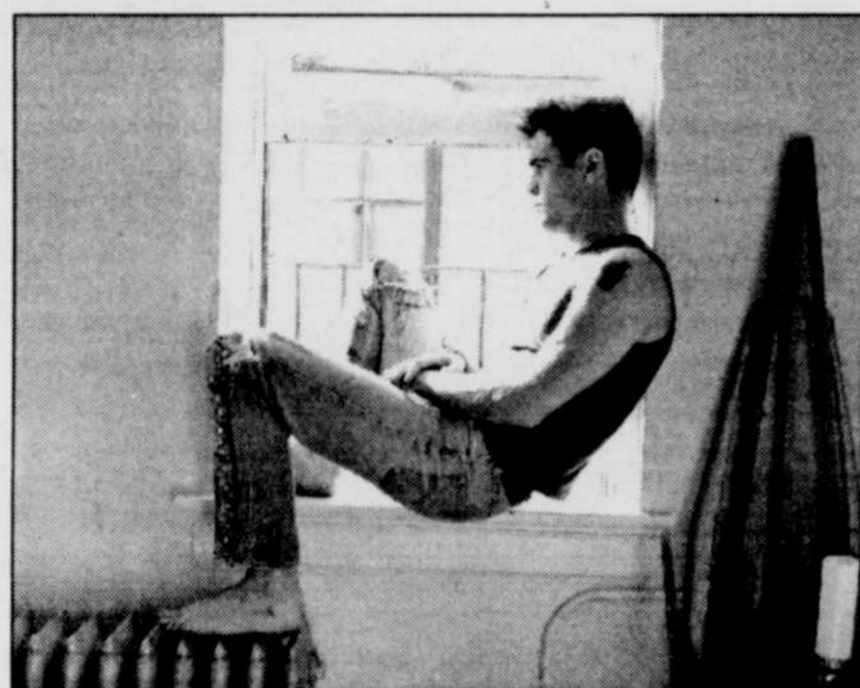
Cunningham wrote the highly condensed screenplay, which opens in the trippy late '60s, when 9-year-old Bobby Morrow hero-worships his hippie older brother, who dies in a sudden, horrific accident—the first of many tragedies that tear the people Bobby loves from his life.

Next comes 1974. Bobby is 15 and a loner. When his parents die, too, he drifts into the lives of a neighbor family, the Glovers, and particularly his classmate Jonathan. They share joints, musical taste and considerable secret late-night sex play.

But, like all parties, this one ends when Jonathan (Dallas Roberts), now 18, moves to New York. Bobby (Farrell) eventually join his pal, who lives with eccentric hat designer Clare (Robin Wright Penn). Despite being gay, Jonathan is deeply involved with Clare, even considering having a kid with her (when he isn't busy tricking).

An ever-more-complex and confusing triangle ensues as the three misfits form a makeshift family. Negative emotions erupt as the delicate balance threatens to collapse and alliances shift.

What drives *Home* are its unexpected relationships. Depressive middle-aged mom Alice Glover (Sissy Spacek) bonds with 15-year-old Bobby in a brilliant scene where the two share a joint, and he instantly divines the loneliness behind her cheery, frozen smile. (One of the film's charms is that Bobby is, throughout, naive enough not to be hampered by social constraints against questionable relationships.)



Despite cutting Colin Farrell's penis from *A Home at the End of the World*, it's still a darn fine movie

Unexpected, too, is the Bobby-Jonathan bond, which become the film's core and heart—gay and straight boy longing for an emotional intimacy that doesn't necessarily preclude sex even after they're supposedly set in their adult hetero and homo roles.

As a Broadway director, Mayer's skill with actors pays off handsomely. Erik Smith superbly incarnates 15-year-old Bobby, bristling with emotion even in such dicey scenes as the boys' mutual masturbation. And Farrell is simply a revelation as the confused, loving, wounded man-child. His nuanced performance shows a range hitherto undeveloped.

Roberts hits the mark as the adult Jonathan, and Spacek has never been better (which is saying a lot), suggesting vistas of emotion at a glance. Wright Penn registers strongly as Clare, as tragic in her own way as her two "boys" whose depth of feeling for each other trumps all else.

Mayer, in his film directorial debut, misjudges a few of the scenes—a Grand Canyon sequence is surely unnecessary, and viewers may feel that the AIDS subplot is a bit worn. But these are minor complaints about a major cinematic success. The film's themes of the centrality of embracing love wherever you can find it and coming to terms with its tragic fragility are brilliantly brought home. **F**

Growing pains *The Mudge Boy* transcends typical coming-of-age fare

BY JIM RADOSTA

A small-town teen (Emile Hirsch) struggles with his sexuality and his mother's recent death in the quirky yet disturbing *The Mudge Boy* from writer/director Michael Burke, playing Aug. 6 to 12 at Hollywood Theatre.

Duncan Mudge is a strange fruit who wears his mom's fur coat to bed and forms closer bonds with his pet chicken than with his friends or family. The object of his affection is Perry (Tom Guiry), a neighbor bully who brags about his sexual conquests with girls while slowly catching on that Duncan would like to be more than friends.

Meanwhile, Duncan's distant father (Richard Jenkins, a reliable



character actor who's appeared in several Farrelly and Coen Bros. films) tries in vain to butch up the boy by giving him chores and burning the mother's clothes. This all might sound like standard coming-of-age fare, but Burke adds a few unpredictable touches to the story: I don't wanna give anything away, so let's just say cross-dressing and fowl play are involved.

Hirsch (*The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys*) shows tremendous promise with a performance that accurately captures the gangly awkwardness of a boy who doesn't fit in with his male counterparts. The abrupt ending is somewhat unsatisfying, but only because I wanted to spend more time observing these captivating characters. **F**

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