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SPECIAL GUEST:
Robert Greenwald

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Fri., Nov. 18th • 7pm (Doors open 6:30pm) • Center for Meeting & Learning (Bldg. 19)
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UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

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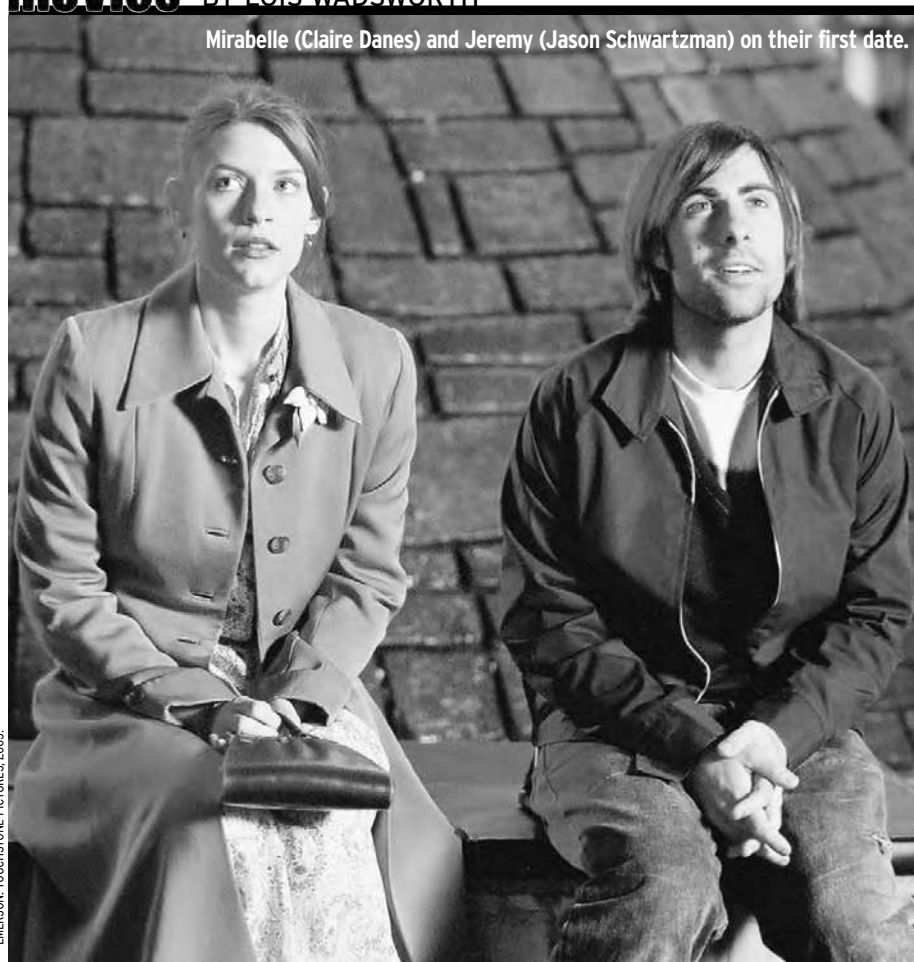
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movies BY LOIS WADSWORTH

Mirabelle (Claire Danes) and Jeremy (Jason Schwartzman) on their first date.



EMERSON TOUCHSTONE PICTURES, 2005.

Modern Love

Class, intimacy and sex

SHOPGIRL: Directed by Anand Tucker. Written by Steve Martin, based on his novella. Produced by Ashok Amritraj, Jon Jashni, Steve Martin. Executive producer, Andrew Sugeran. Cinematography, Peter Suschitzky. Production design, William Arnold. Editor, David Gamble. Costume design, Nancy Steiner. Music, Barrington Pheloung. Starring Claire Danes, Steve Martin and Jason Schwartzman, with Sam Bottoms, Frances Conroy, Rebecca Pidgeon, Brigitte Wilson-Sampras. Buena Vista Distribution. Touchstone Pictures, 2005. R. 107 minutes.

It's all about class. No matter how you parse it, the conflict at rock bottom between Armani-designed clothes-horse Ray (Steve Martin) and Saks L.A. glove department salesperson and struggling artist Mirabelle (Claire Danes) is the difference in their wealth. He's a middle-aged bachelor, retired from his own successful business, who lives in several elegant homes, alone. Mirabelle lives in a neat but modest apartment with her cat and tries to pay off her college loans a little at a time.

Class is also the undiscussed but major issue that hinders the romance between Mirabelle and a scruffy designer who works at an electronics warehouse, Jeremy (Jason Schwartzman). Mirabelle may be a shopgirl, but she's ambitious and dresses as well as she can afford. Jeremy, who obviously adores her on sight, smokes dope and looks like he needs a makeover in the worst way. His house is a mess, and he has no fashion sense. Mirabelle is lonely, but after she meets Ray, she's happy to be with him and tells Jeremy so. He takes off for three months on the road with a band he admires.

The class divides I'm talking about here contaminate the story in subtle ways, as when the film busies itself with intimacy issues. Mirabelle is honest about her needs, and Jeremy is happy to be on call. But Ray, while a smooth lover, never lets Mirabelle in. He's as walled-off emotionally as the diffidence he affects toward his wealth. Ray's very generous with gifts, especially when what he gives Mirabelle — designer label clothing — will reflect well on him publicly.

Jeremy may be a clumsy lover, but he's so ardent Mirabelle is attracted despite herself.

This is the second film this season to be pulled off-center by an accessory to the fashion-conscious. Curtis Hanson's *In Her Shoes* works hard to make the shoe-connection an important plot point, just as director Anand Tucker's *Shopgirl* hopes everyone gets the message when Mirabelle receives a pair of elegant, perfectly useless, elbow-length, black leather gloves from Ray. Give it up, guys. Stick to sex, love and broken hearts. Let the metaphors go.

Shopgirl works because Claire Danes gives her customary excellent portrayal. But she's stuck with working it out with a man unable to love for most of the movie. Toward the film's end we see her in a few scenes with a more demonstrative lover. But admirers since she starred in television's "My So-Called Life" want to see more of the sexy warmth and maturity that made *Stage Beauty* with Billy Crudup soar. Of course, the actors were in love for real, and that came through. But, like Scarlet Johansson, Danes is a gifted actress who can do anything, but frequently isn't given much of anything to do.

Martin's performance as Ray comes off somewhat better than Bill Murray's Don does in Jim Jarmusch's *Broken Flowers*. Martin knows how to break a girl's heart, and he makes the operation silky smooth, while Murray's noncommittalism just bugs me. I'm tired of movies about grown men who can't love; they make pathetic characters. There's nothing redemptive about begrudging love. Redemption comes to Jeremy from his own hard work of growing up.

Shopgirl is a fine movie and most apt as we head into this most commercial time of year — that stretch between the end of November and the end of December when consumerism reaches ridiculous highs. Love for sale? I think not. Now playing at Cinemark, *Shopgirl* gets my very highest recommendations.

EW