

who Alec eventually sets up house with, are forced into prostitution. Workers' protests result in retrenchment slips in the pay packets. There is no solution to the immediate problems each character faces; the answer the book argues, lies only in wide-scale structural changes. It is Alec's consistent and impassioned argument that the *workers* are 'the producers of wealth, the rightful owners of the earth'.

While *Jew Boy* strongly asserts the existence of a unique Jewish ethnicity, it sees the position of Jews within the wider capitalist framework. Alec meets Jo-Jo, a black American and communist agitator who has travelled widely. He voices a view Alec has arrived at long before: "We ain't jest Jews, and jest Negroes, we's workers too. We got to know all dese t'ings an' stick to our class at de same time". Alec rejects the theory of Palestine as the true homeland of the

Jews:

As a worker, I won't be any better off in Palestine, maybe worse. I don't see why I should change one set of exploiters for another because they happen to be Jewish.

Alec develops his political beliefs as a result of harsh circumstances over which he has no control: "he worked hard, earned profits for the boss, got fired, and had to stand in bread lines". He watches with dread as the world careers towards fascism and war. Much of his time is spent longing for companionship, sexual fulfilment — and, inevitably, escape.

Despite the miseries of Alec's life, *Jew Boy* maintains a surprising vitality — largely due to the underlying visionary socialism. From the perspective of the '80s, the book is interesting as a precursor to today's literature of dissent. As Ken Worpole puts it in his introduction,

"possibly the most affirmative writing today is being produced as a result of other cultural imperatives, particularly those of feminism and the struggle for identity in the more recent immigrant communities".

Affirmations of a meaningful ethnic identity abound, though, in this text which undermines the image of Jews as cold, self-seeking financiers: "these turbulent excitable people ... had life and colour". The novel ends with Alec's bold assertions of the need to fight for ethnic and class unity — and revolution. In some ways, reading *Jew Boy* reminded me of listening to a '30s blues jazz piece where hope (and commitment) lie just beyond the despair.

MATTHEW HARDING is book reviewer for Sydney radio 2SER's "Sunday Arts" program.

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Atta Girl

Who's That Girl, directed by James Foley. Written by Andrew Smith and Ken Finkleman. Village Cinemas. Reviewed by **David Burchell**.

Madonna may indeed be, in the words of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* reviewer, the "first star to have created herself entirely from her feminine predecessors — not just a few, but a whole album-full". She may well also be just about the worst actress in screen history, if *Who's That Girl* is any guide. But she's a *bona fide* cultural phenomenon, of that there's no doubt. And that, oddly, is what makes her clumsy, mis-paced presence in this good-tempered reborn 'fifties comedy such a perversely entertaining experience.



A force of nature: Madonna and Griffith Dunne.

After all, the whole "dizzy blonde" cliché from the heyday of this genre was essentially a gesture towards the Otherness of the screen Woman — it made her acted upon rather than acting, a spectacle rather

than a character. And *Who's That Girl* does try that line. At one point, the frazzled male lead, Young Lawyer Loudon Trott (Griffith Dunne) exclaims that, no, he can't do that — after all, he's only a man, not

an elemental "force of nature" like her. (Press those feminist alarm bells ...)

But the idea of this hyper-active, aerobicised role-model somehow playing "dizzy blonde" (is it *really* Marilyn Monroe she's supposed to be aping with that pout?) is clearly absurd — and Madonna makes sure that it is by never letting even one of those tell-tale "vulnerable" moments become remotely plausible. So, as bad acting goes, it's almost subversive.

Unlike the 'fifties heroines/victims, her "scattiness" is never allowed to become an object of ridicule or scorn — and this reviewer, at least, found that a relief. It may be a small tribute to the filmmaker, but is certainly a larger one to Madonna's own innate role-modelling good sense. After all, with the eyes of several million tough-nut teenage girls on your every confident move, how could you *melt* ... ?

In other respects, too, *Who's That Girl* is a sign of the times. We're by now well used to '80s Hollywood and its knack of reworking the clichés of bygone eras in ways that

should really have had the post-modernists reaching for their word-processors. From *Star Wars* and *Superman* onwards, the last decade seems to have been a veritable carnival of genres turned topsy-turvy in search of contemporariness. Who, for instance, really expects us to take the plot-line of *La Bamba* seriously? Poor boy made good, Latino boy meets nice white girl, mother and son, brother and brother — it's got every cliché known to film, almost as if the writer were ticking them off on his or her list. But here, as in most mainstream art forms down through history, it's not *evading* the clichés, but what you do with them, that counts.

And, apart from the 'fifties references (and here *Bringing Up Baby* is the model, as the *Herald* critic noted), *Who's That Girl* is a treasure trove of other genres and con, too. For a start, it's part of the sub-genre yuppie boy meets street life downtown (or downtown girl): in this case, it's the appropriately awful soon-to-be-married Loudon Trott, who's supposed to be taking our newly-released crim Madonna safely

to the bus station and out of town. Of course, from there everything goes wrong, and everything turns on its head — from graffitied Rolls Royces to the spectacle of Madonna masquerading as the very proper bride-to-be to a brace of stockbrokers.

And, as in comedy it should be, the message is appropriately popular, in the best sense of the word: the pomposity of the wealthy and notable gets a bucketting; the street kid wins out; and of course an appropriately incredible love-match wins out, too, in the end. If there's nothing new in *Who's That Girl*, there's certainly nothing which should give any halfway good-humoured left cause for heartburn. It does give a funny kind of uplift, and it has more than a few genuine comic moments. It's definitely not great filmmaking, but there are a lot worse things the kids could be doing over the holiday season.

DAVID BURCHELL co-ordinates
ALR.

The Future For The Left

by Jade Bull

PROMINENT UPCOMING POLITICAL BIRTHDAYS

CAPRICORN

Josef Stalin, 2/1
Joh Bjelke-Petersen, 14/1
J. Edgar Hoover, 15/1
Richard Nixon, 20/1
Loretta Young, 19/1

AQUARIUS

Antonio Gramsci, 22/1
Ronald Reagan, 6/2
Abraham Lincoln, 8/2
Franklin Roosevelt, 17/2

Jade has been inundated both by sincere, sharing supply-side socialists (probably with large share portfolios) and badly alienated unbelieving leftists, all claiming that I mispredicted the Wall Street crash (see ALR 102). My only response is "stay liquid — you ain't seen nothing yet".

As far as Jade is concerned the fireworks won't come from the Bicentennial, they will come from the Saturn/Uranus/Neptune conjunction. For the astrologically illiterate, this is a cosmic event bigger than the late lamented Laurie Brereton's vision.

A year of turmoil lies ahead, comrades: through the mosaic of Bicentennial bliss, perspiring politicians, bleeding blacks, stampeding stockbrokers, a new party of the left or the left-overs of a new party, one thing is clear — '88 will not be for the faint hearted.

So take a little advice from Jade — here are your prospects for '88.



ARIES
March 21-
April 20

Planetary influences on your chart