

Intimate Relations

The mid-1950's in provincial England saw a notorious *menage-a-trois* case involving a mature married woman, her adolescent daughter, and her lodger. An outwardly innocent arrangement grew kinky as the woman--with her disabled husband still in the house--fell for the lodger, who also attracted the daughter. Well-stuffed propriety cooked by lust and well seasoned by depravity proved a bloody recipe, one which has been stirred into an elegant black comedy, *Intimate Relations*, written and directed by Philip Goodhew.

The film version of the case, while fictionalized, sticks with the facts and sets them in a strikingly banal town in uptight 1954 England. Outwardly prudish Marjorie Beasley (Julie Walters) barely tolerates her one-legged, drunken husband Stanley (Matthew Walker), consigning him to a separate bedroom and sleeping with her 14-year-old daughter Joyce (Laura Sadler).

Avid for juicier male companionship, Marjorie takes in wide-eyed young merchant seaman Harold Guppy (Rupert Graves) and promptly places him under her cloying wing, insisting she call him "Mum." While dotting on him, Marjorie goes one step further, sneaking into his bed for "a little cuddle." Joyce--hearing noises from the next room--then joins the two for a sleep-in. Affective and sexual complications ensue, and the susceptible and troubled Guppy (an orphan with a sugar disorder) finds himself pulled into a vortex of both warmth and passion from which he senses no escape.

It is the systematic delineation of Harold's succumbing to the voracious "Mum" and the morbid Joyce that makes *Intimate Relations* work. This fall from grace is so depicted so naturally that the horridness of what is actually happening to them is kept at bay. The film's tone is comic rather than callous, with people more deluded than debased by their passions. The comedy comes in the distance we've all come from those super-repressed days of the post-war Fifties, when "intimate relations" was code for SEX.

The cast is exemplary, representing each side of this baffling household. Julie Walters (*Educating Rita*) is a precious Marjorie, all prissy virtue and decorum in public while a lioness in the sack. Her wardrobe, hairdos, manner--her very being cries out for acceptance while her private actions violate all local mores. Rupert Graves' (*A Room With A View*) Harold is a striking creation; he gives off about six degrees of befuddlement as the poor bloke inextricably snagged in the wiles of his womens' web. Walker is appropriately out-of-it and pathetic as the drunken Stanley, while Sadler as Joyce seems just right as the quirky kid, so naive yet so desperate to be a grown-up.

This quartet contains a triangle which just can't be foursquare.

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