



THE NEW YORKER
THE INNOVATORS ISSUE

MAY 12, 2008



A detail of Ethan Levitas's photograph "Untitled/This Is Just to Say, #91," in "Eminent Domain," at the New York Public Library.

at the college and a brilliant high-school-age daughter, Vanessa (Ellen Page, from "Juno"), who shares her father's scholarly asceticism. "Smart People" is a modestly scaled return-to-life movie: Lawrence carries on an awkward affair with a former student who has become a doctor (Sarah Jessica Parker), but the affair keeps falling apart. Most of the time, the characters sit around or drive somewhere, matching wits or making critical remarks about one another, the best of which are delivered by the devastatingly self-confident Page. In his first film as a director, Noam Murro creates moments of strained or comic disconnection relieved by minuscule surges of warmth. He's very precise and has a nice touch, but he doesn't get much drama going. With Thomas Haden Church as Lawrence's adopted brother, a sweet-natured but stunningly unemployable sponger, who plops his body down in the house and stays. Written by the novelist Mark Poirier.—D.D. (4/21/08) (In wide release.)

SON OF RAMBOW

For forty minutes or so, Garth Jennings's film about childhood—to be specific, about the place of film in childhood—unfolds with tenderness, style, and wit. The place is provincial England, the time is the nineteen-eighties, and the hero is Will Proudfoot (Bill Milner), a shy and studious boy who lives with his mother among the Plymouth Brethren, a religious sect. Still, he attends a normal school, even if he has to leave the class whenever the others are

do you stop a film about amateurs from sliding into the clunky?—A.L. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

STOP-LOSS

Kimberly Peirce's second feature, which she co-wrote with Mark Richard, is the story of Brandon King (Ryan Phillippe), a decorated young soldier who returns to rural Texas with members of his unit after fighting in Iraq, watches in anguish as his friends go to pieces, and then falls into disgust and rebellion himself. When the Army invokes "stop-loss"—a loophole in his contract which can send him back to Iraq—Brandon bolts for the open road. The movie is not great, but it's forceful and alive, with the raw, mixed-up emotions produced by an endless conflict. Peirce goes as far as any male director has ever gone in examining the hair-trigger anger and pathos of the American warrior caste—the men keep getting into brawls, and they find intimacy with women impossible. Chris Menges, charging into the middle of things with a handheld camera, shot the movie, which co-stars Abbie Cornish as the tough country woman who becomes Brandon's confidante, Channing Tatum as Steve, who feels comfortable only within the ordering discipline of the Army, and Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Tommy, who has lost part of his sanity and his soul in combat. Peirce treats both men with respect but also grieves over them.—D.D. (4/7/08) (In wide release.)

ity about the many-sidedness of need—the way that genuine benevolence can be cloaked in blunt intrusiveness or that insults can be a reckless demand for love. Hunt, Alice Arlen, and Victor Levin adapted Elinor Lipman's 1990 novel.—D.D. (5/5/08) (Chelsea Cinemas and First and 62nd Cinemas.)

THE VISITOR

Still another melancholy-middle-aged-professor movie, this one about a widowed economics professor at Connecticut College, Walter Vale (Richard Jenkins), who returns to his apartment in New York and finds a Syrian drummer (Haaz Sleiman) and his Senegalese girlfriend (Danai Gurira) camping out there. (It had been rented to them under false pretenses.) Walter is by nature diffident and secretive, the drummer ebullient and friendly; the two become pals and, by degrees, Walter, taking drumming lessons, loosens up, and becomes involved in the personal difficulties of the couple—both illegals—as they struggle to avoid deportation. Jenkins is an almost incredibly honorable actor; he lets his character thaw out so slowly that you want to shake him to push the performance along. The movie is scrupulous, intelligent, and faintly tedious—a little crude drama wouldn't have hurt. With Hiam Abbass as the drummer's stunning mother. Written and directed by Tom McCarthy.—D.D. (In wide release.)

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS

If the title is a question, the answer is: not much. A trader from New York (Cameron Diaz), dumped by her mean boyfriend, goes to Las Vegas to swamp her sorrows and, after a busy night, ends up in pos-