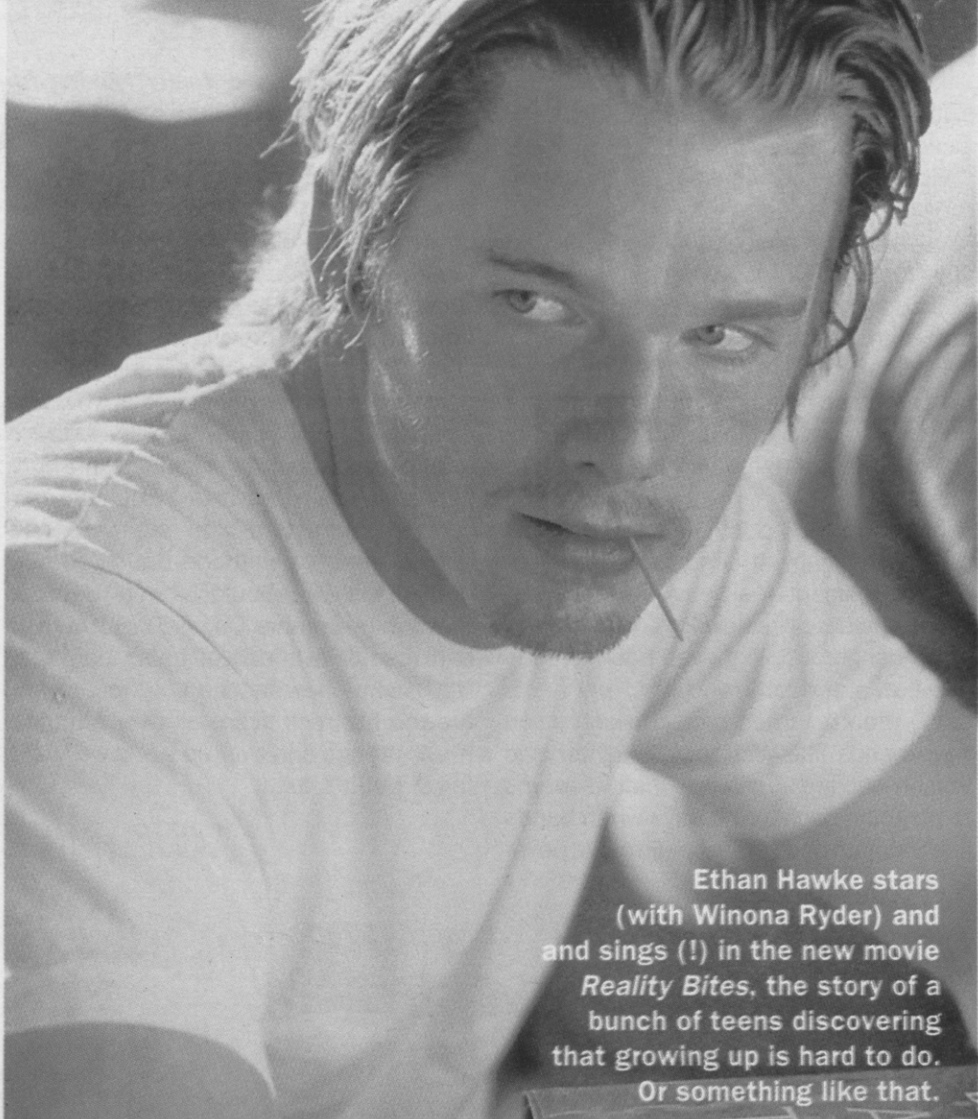


# Film



Ethan Hawke stars (with Winona Ryder) and sings (!) in the new movie *Reality Bites*, the story of a bunch of teens discovering that growing up is hard to do. Or something like that.

## MANHATTAN MURDER MYSTERY

Director: Woody Allen

After the delicious black humour of 1992's *Husbands and Wives*, Woody Allen's new film is an immense disappointment. The director has spoken of it being intended as a diversion but Woody Allen and Diane Keaton dithering around, discovering a convoluted murder plot in an apartment up the hallway provides the most contrived 90 minutes I've ever sat through. Keaton's character is drawn into it all through domestic boredom one presumes, while Allen is the sort of man who has watched *Double Indemnity* a few too many times for his own good - *Manhattan Murder Mystery* has quite a few nudgy cinéaste jokes and the final show-down is a clumsy replay of the mirror scene from Welles' *Lady from Shanghai*. Some of the gags are lamentably handled, in particular one involving a faked phone 'constructed' out of a circle of cassette players.

Allen dealt with murder in the 1990 *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, a black comedy in which questions of morality were more equivocal. Angelica Huston may not be murdered in *Manhattan Murder Mystery* as she was in *Crimes*, but she deserves better roles than that of Allen's sidekick in his latest film.

WILLIAM DART

## THE WEDDING BANQUET

Director: Ang Lee

Like Chen Kiage's *Farewell my Concubine*, Ang Lee's second feature tackles a subject that the Chinese have been slow to accept - the role and indeed, the very existence of gays and a gay lifestyle. But both films are more than just exposés of an alternative lifestyle: if *Concubine* gave us a whole panorama of Chinese politics, then *Wedding Banquet* has some shrewd observations to make on broader cultural issues and ironies in the coming together of East and West.

*The Wedding Banquet* has a gay Chinese-American man forced to go through a mock marriage with his Chinese tenant, with the total compliance of his American boyfriend - all to appease his parents, visiting from Taiwan. This sparks off some predictably hilarious scenes, from the 'cleansing' of the flat (beefcake images being torn down and re-

placed by Chinese scrolls) to the extended wedding banquet that gives the film its title. Although the pacing is snappy, the characters are beautifully observed: Winston Chao and Mitchell Lichtenstein are great as the gay couple and May Chin as Wei Wei takes to a life of duplicity with style.

Whether Ang Lee really resolves the questions of identity that he describes as the aim of his film I'm not so sure - but the film is a thousand times more off-beat and entertaining than Peter Weir's *Green Card*, which shares one of its major themes. Be prepared for some testing and almost indecipherable sub-titles.

WILLIAM DART

## THE SNAPPER

Director: Stephen Frears

Babies and the trials and tribulations involved in making and rearing them are not my cup of tea, and a snapper (Irish colloquial for 'baby') is the cog around which Stephen Frears' film revolves. Novelist Roddy Doyle, recently awarded the Booker Prize for his new novel *Paddy Clark Ha Ha Ha*, takes some characters from his script for *The Commitments*, and shows the turmoil that results when the eldest daughter of the family gets unwittingly pregnant.

Recriminations fly round the community and there's no shortage of lusty vulgarity (particularly from Tina Kellegher's mother-to-be and her two companions at the pub). Understandably Kellegher and Colm Meamy as her father dominate the film, and it's Meamy who has the most memorable character: he's a very different kind of man at the end of the film to the irascible da of the opening scenes.

WILLIAM DART

## REMAINS OF THE DAY

Director: James Ivory

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Upstairs Downstairs* novel won the author a Booker Prize in 1989, and might well have been custom-made for the Merchant-Ivory team, flushed with the success of *Howard's End*.

The film of *Remains of the Day* comes across as a nostalgic reminiscence of the turbulent 1930s, seen through the eyes of a butler, Stevens. Cocooned in a country estate, Stevens is unaware of the Nazi sympathies of his employers and is so emotionally stunted that



*Manhattan Murder Mystery*



*The Remains of the Day*

he is unable to cope with his attraction to the spunky young housekeeper, Miss Kenton (Emma Thompson).

Stevens, played by a marvellous and remarkably unmannered Anthony Hopkins, is part of that hideous pecking order otherwise known as the English class system - he's mocked by the men in the smoking room for his lack of political opinion, but in turn he humiliates the desolate Thompson in her final scene at the country house. He's so craven that he will not leave his butler's duties to visit his dying father upstairs. Yet Stevens is, in turn, humiliated by Thompson when she reveals he spends his lonely evenings reading romantic novellas. *Remains of the Day* is a little weighed down by its grandeur, Richard Robbins' music is obtrusive, and cinematic trickery such as showing the passage of time by characters fading in and out of a shot, is obtrusive. But if the satiric bite of the novel is a little blunted, there is the disturbing thought that the values Ishiguro is criticizing are by no means eradicated, even in this country.

WILLIAM DART

## PHILADELPHIA

Director: Jonathan Demme

Too late and not half as hard-hitting as it should have been, or so some AIDS activists would have us believe. *Philadelphia* certainly comes a decade later than it should have (during the 80s it was only independent films like *Parting Glances* and *Longtime Companion* that dealt with the AIDS epidemic and its implications).

But Demme's oblique approach to the crisis is a clever one: a successful young lawyer, showing the first signs of AIDS and sacked from his firm, takes on his employers in a civil rights case. But, alas, some of the often laboured courtroom scenes seem to have cast a heavy-handed spell on other moments, and there's a distinct feeling of sanitization. Tom Hanks' gayness is sketchily presented - even in flashbacks we see nothing but a chaste kiss so demure it would not have been amiss on Hayley Mills' lips in *Summer Magic*.

The two great moments in *Philadelphia* are both musical. In one, Hanks introduces Denzel Washington to opera by providing a running commentary on Maria Callas's performance of 'La Mama Morta' from *Andrea Chenier*, a scene shot in an appropriately expressionist

style and a *tour de force* for the actor. The other is less theatrical. During a party sequence there's a brief appearance from the gay acappella group the Flirtations, featuring Michael Callen, a long-time AIDS survivor and activist. Callen died shortly after the release of the film. His 1988 album *Purple Heart* is a classic that, like the disease that killed him, deserves attention beyond the gay community.

*Philadelphia* is an important film historically, and will have an undoubted impact on a wide audience. Its message is one that cannot be repeated too often, and Tom Hanks proves, as Jack Lemmon has before him, that comedians can make powerful dramatic actors.

WILLIAM DART

## Film News

Here's the movies we're hanging out to see. As yet they are but specks on the horizon but come May, we get *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* starring **Johnny Depp** and **Juliette Lewis** . . . Lewis also stars in *Kalifornia* with ex-beau **Brad Pitt**, playing a couple of young serial killers on the run. This is the kind of movie that makes a boyfriend on parole look like an essential fashion accessory. Still no date set for local release but the soundtrack has been kicking around the office for a while . . . In a similar vein, *True Romance*, from the director of cult hit *Reservoir Dogs*, starring **Patricia Arquette** and **Christian Slater**. Being a loser never looked so lovely. *True Romance* is due here in June . . . *Six Degrees of Separation* is the story of a young man (Will Smith of *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*) who cons some well-to-do couples into thinking he's **Sidney Poitier**'s son. Also starring **Donald Sutherland** and **Stockard Channing** and due here in July . . . **Gus Van Sant**'s newie *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* is also due in July, but you'll already have seen **k.d. lang**'s video with the movie's star, **Uma Thurman** . . . In *Reality Bites* (out June 3) **Winona Ryder** is a production assistant on a local morning TV show who is more interested in making a documentary about the post-college lives of her friends, including Janeane (who carries a *Charlie's Angels* lunchbox and works at the Gap) cool, unemployed **Ethan Hawke** and yuppie music exec **Ben Stiller** (who also directed) . . . and the teen movie to end all teen movies, *Dazed and Confused*, is due here July 8 at the Film Festival. Directed by **Richard Linklater**, *Dazed and Confused* is his period-detail perfect glimpse of the last day of high-school somewhere in Middle America, 1976. An ensemble cast play a bunch of high-school types you'll probably remember from your own daze. And the soundtrack is BOSS — including **Alice Cooper**, **Foghat**, **Deep Purple**, **Sweet**, **ZZ Top**, **Nazareth** and **Lynyrd Skynyrd**. Who could ask for anything more?