

On Staying Clear of Straight Men, and Whether Gerard Depardieu Could Be Any Fatter

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“Let the Sunshine In” directed by Claire Denis is a superbly made film. Dialogue, cinematography by Agnes Godard, editing, Juliette Binoche and every other actor, first rate. Intelligent, classy, worth my time. That acknowledged, I found it one-note and didactic. A circumstance, no narrative thrust, a series of encounters Binoche’s character Isabelle—mid-life, divorced, ten-year-old daughter, successful artist—has with men that reiterate a point. These episodes one after the other were engaging, but after a while it got slow going for me. A few times, I stopped streaming and walked around and stretched a bit. The final scene, an exchange between Isabelle and a clairvoyant that lasted fifteen minutes, turned the didacticism up a notch to an outright lecture, which yes, yes, yes, I got, at least to the extent that I wasn’t distracted; I’ll get into that below.

After finishing “Let the Sunshine In,” I read reviews and none of them got into the strongest impression I took away from the film, so I thought I’d share it here for your consideration. It struck me as the take lesbians—at least of a certain age—have on heterosexual men and heterosexual sex. Ugh. The screenplay was billed as an adaptation of Roland Barth’s 1977 “A Lover’s Discourse.” I think Barth got lost in the translation. This is the discourse of the co-screenwriters, director Denis and, especially, Christine Angot. The Isabelle-and-the-clairvoyant finish summed up the lesson: get away from these losers (straight men; or at

least straight white men, the one palatable man in the film is black). Turn inside, find the light within you—or the sunshine, or whatever the French word for it is, I don't speak French. And the tacit message, doing that will set the stage for what is going to make you happy, connecting, including sexually, with other women. One other observation: lesbians of the getting-some-age-on-them sort I have in mind aren't big on children. Isabelle's daughter had precisely two seconds of screen time waving from behind the closed window of a car.

I mentioned being distracted in the climactic scene. Two reasons. One, the final credits rolled over the last five minutes of it and I found myself tempted to read who the producer was while the two of them were talking. And the big thing, the clairvoyant, played by legendary French actor Gerard Depardieu, was in the dark and shot very close up. There's Depardieu and Binoche sitting in a room having an exchange—she's in the light and at a distance and he's in the dark with at times just his facial features filling up the screen. I kept flashing on Marlon Brando in “Apocalypse Now”—shot the same way as Depardieu. The word is that Brando showed up grossly obese and they were covering for it. Depardieu now looks like a balloon in the Macy's parade. Anyway, I'm supposed to be taking in how men are the pits, and I'm going “Depardieu sure has let himself go.”