

tionalist and, for him, the camera is nothing more than a scientific tool, a way to study and categorise things. But the passionate Rosina finds the images beautiful and sees in photography the development of a new art form, as well as a way to keep memory intact forever.

Much like the images Charles takes, his family is also decaying, pale and ghostly. Jonathan Rhys-Myers is extremely amusing as the gaunt son Henry who also falls in love with Rosina. Rhys-Myers provides the movie with some funny moments, and *The Governess* touches upon some interesting themes (Jewish vs. Protestant, religion vs. science), but it never really explores them fully. Instead, it focuses on the all-too-predictable, by-the-numbers doomed romance that develops between Rosina and Charles.

-Poonam Khanna

**REGENERATION**  
(DIR. GILLIES MACKINNON)

Ignore the facile comparisons to *Saving Private Ryan*: go and see *Regeneration* while you can, since it has finally been released, after premiering in Toronto at the 1997

## The Governess



Film Festival and then languishing in distribution limbo for the intervening year. In the *tour de force* opening shot, an overhead pan of a battle's aftermath based on Rodin's monumental "Gates of Hell" relief mural in Paris, Scottish director Gillies MacKinnon (*Small Faces*) stakes out the ground to be tra-

versed in this deceptively straightforward adaptation of the 1991 Pat Barker novel of the First World War. This is territory of a subtlety and complexity that Spielberg could only dream of — rather than recreate the inferno of war (which it also does convincingly), *Regeneration*, far more viscerally than the novel, plots the multivalent relations between individuals whose intact bodies harbour shattered psyches.

*Regeneration* very successfully translates the book's blend of history and invention. Screenwriter Allan Scott sublimates Barker's feminist concerns in the character of Dr. William Rivers (Oscar material Jonathan Pryce). Rivers, a pioneering psychiatrist of the Freudian persuasion at Craiglockart, a military hospital for shell-shocked officers, provides a focal point for a group of men who, as representatives of their generation, respond very differently to the experience of trench warfare. Siegfried Sassoon (James Wilby) is the heroic and utterly sane protester, sent to the asylum for his outspoken moral opposition to the war. With necessarily understated homoeroti-

cism, Sassoon befriends the young Wilfred Owen (Stuart Bunce), who goes on to write what became the finest poetry of WWI. In contrast, Billy Prior (*Trainspotting*'s Jonny Lee Miller), risen through the ranks from a lower-class background, is helped as much by his relationship with 'munitionette' Sarah (Toronto's Tanya Allen) as he is by the contest of wills with Dr. Rivers, whose own mental stability is shaken by the task of helping these men overcome the madness that is the only thing saving them from death.

-Russ Kilbourn

**WHATEVER**  
(DIR. SUSAN SKOOG)

Susan Skoog was lucky to find Liza Weil to play the main character Anna in her film *Whatever*. Weil is the proverbial natural, as relaxed and confident as Jason London in *Dazed and Confused*. Unlike London, she is not typically gorgeous; her high school senior is more convincing than his. Anna dreams of life classes at NY art school Cooper Union, egged on by her art teacher Chaminski (Frederic Forrest). She discusses the need for passion with a poodle-haired drifter,



Thomas Chatterton in the painting by the pre-Raphaelite, Wallis. Having thus found beauty in the most unexpected of places, to paraphrase Giles, he develops a devotion to Bostock with all the chaste fervour of a schoolgirl crush, leading him to venture further into the dark forest of pop culture he has shunned his entire life. Riffing on the familiar terrain of culture shock that has been a comic staple since *Gulliver's Travels*, Kwietnowski milks a lot of good-natured, gentle laughs out of Giles's first brushes with the technology everyone takes for granted. Hurt marvellously and convincingly plays a man richly nourished in the bosom of culture who becomes a charming naïf, as uncritically enthusiastic about pop culture as the pre-teens who buy the pin-up mags featuring Bostock. More remarkable still are the subtle shifts in his character when he vacations in the small Long Island town where Bostock lives with his model girlfriend (Fiona Loewi). As he contrives ways of meeting Bostock and insinuating himself into his life, Giles graciously accepts the veneration accorded him with dignity — no one has heard of him, but they know enough to be impressed by a British author — while slipping further into a hopeless love for Bostock. Kwietnowski, too, has enough respect for Giles not to laugh at his doomed quest, revelling instead in the poignant humour of a person venturing into a new world with only the sketchiest of maps. Unfortunately, he doesn't give the same depth to Bostock, leaving Priestley with little to do except parodically deconstruct his 90210 persona, but to his credit, Priestley is in on the joke from the beginning, as he seems to look for an exit from the culture Giles has just wandered into.

-Chris Wodskou

**MR. NICE GUY**  
(DIR. SAMO HUNG)

I never expect the stories in Jackie Chan movies to be subtle, intellectual, or deep. But *Mr. Nice Guy* is a even steeper than most of Jackie's movies — it'll have 12 year olds rolling their eyes. In many ways it's like a cut-rate sequel to *Rumble In The Bronx* with Melbourne playing New York instead of Hong-couver. In fact, I'm sure admitting it was Melbourne was a guilty afterthought, which may explain why so much of the dialogue is poorly over-dubbed (from English to English!). The money that was blown on the discount James Bond finale could have been better spent on passable lip synching. The pathetic acting and ridiculous plot do nothing to cloak one of Samo Hung's laziest directing jobs — this is paint by numbers, Ikea-assemble out of the box, Hong Kong filmmaking. *Mr. Nice Guy* has many of the formula elements of Jackie Chan movies — a multi-ethnic gaggle of helpless babes that tag after him, and lame villains like the over-the-top Mafia gangsters, and absurdly flashy "punk" motorcycle gang the Demons. There are as many unintentional laughs as there are deliberate ones. But at least I was laughing, and I can never stay mad at Jackie, he's just too cute! His charisma carries the otherwise brain damaged production, and how many times can I say that he's a master of slapstick and an improvisational genius with found weapons? As usual there are two outstanding fight sequences: one, a comedic battle on a construction sight and the other, a brawl that travels through a shopping mall, and ends up on a runaway horse drawn buggy. When Jackie's on, he's on. The truth is, there's only one Jackie Chan and even if *Mr. Nice Guy* isn't his best, it's more fun and smarter than *U.S. Marshals*.

-Matt McMillan

**NIL BY MOUTH**  
(DIR. GARY OLDMAN)

The very British title of *Nil by Mouth*, Gary Oldman's writing and directorial debut, is a hospital-ism prohibiting a patient's oral feeding. To paraphrase the Gospel

of Matthew: what comes out of the mouth defiles a man even more than what goes in, although, in *Nil by Mouth*, the characters drink, smoke and, in one case in particular, shoot heroin with the desperate eagerness that makes enjoying a cup of tea seem like substance abuse. And if the male characters, especially, are a bunch of loud-mouthed, long-winded storytellers, the gospel according to Gary ironically inverts the title's proper sense: it is what a man does not say, what he will not or cannot articulate, that has the greatest consequences for himself and others. Real communication is replaced by a self-propagating cycle of violence. Basing the slice of working-class life story on his own experiences growing up in South London, Oldman emphasises that the family in the film is not his; his own father was not violent, like Ray (Ray Winstone), the belligerent alcoholic, who initiates the two ambling plot lines by viciously beating first his wife's brother, Billy (Charlie Creed-Miles), then his wife, Val (Cannes best actress Kathy Burke). The latter scene (which, in the saddest irony, precipitates Val's "liberation") is particularly difficult to watch; even though the worst of the violence occurs just outside the frame, the unnervingly natural acting and verité camera work render objectivity a guilty pleasure. But this is *Nil by Mouth's* most distinctive and successful aspect: Oldman steadfastly refuses to either judge or romanticise his characters' generally reprehensible behaviour. Any mundane act of kindness or happiness (as when Val, finally free of Ray, dances with her grandmother in the kitchen) is thus correspondingly qualified, while being at the same time invested with a value beyond the otherwise relentlessly gritty and profane surface of the film.

-Russ Kilbourn

**WELCOME TO SARAJEVO**  
(DIR. MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM)

*Welcome to Sarajevo*, the first film to be shot in the city after the cease-fire brokered in early '96, weaves together stories based on true events from the former exemplar of European cultural cosmopolitanism. At first it seems the film's central concern is the journalists (including ones well played by Kerry Fox of *Shallow Grave* and a brazen Woody Harrelson) who risk their lives almost daily to get their stories, and who are inexorably drawn into the ravaged life of the city. Stephen Dillane (*Two If By Sea*) plays the hardened war correspondent Michael Henderson, based on real-life journalist Michael Nicholson, who smuggled an orphan girl out of Bosnia and later adopted her. In the film, after months of reporting on the Sarajevo siege, Henderson makes a passing promise to take an orphaned girl with him when he leaves. He later recognises the centrality his promise has come to occupy in a child's life that is otherwise without love or hope and it becomes a catalyst of ethical transformation in a man who moves from being a professional observer to a responsible and dangerously involved individual. Henderson's predicament is the main connecting thread in this montage-like film that tells many stories, but Dillane claims that his initial response to many journalists he had met was how unreflective they were. "In this situation they were forced to become reflective, because they were risking their lives to send these stories out while under fire, and yet nothing inter-

