

'Vanities' lacks substance; comedy triumphs

NEW YORK (CNS) — An exaggerated look at political opportunists, "The Bonfire of the Vanities" (Warner Bros.) deals with racial tensions and lust in New York City during the high-flying Reagan years.

Tom Hanks stars as supremely confident millionaire Sherman McCoy, a self-appointed "Master of the Universe," who — after picking up his sexy mistress Maria (Melanie Griffith) — makes a wrong turn that leads directly to the Bronx and his precipitous downfall.

The couple accidentally runs over a black youth and Sherman is later cajoled by the sexually voracious Maria into not telling the cops. But a black preacher (John Hancock) seeking the media spotlight and Peter Fallow (Bruce Willis), an obliging reporter desperate for a story, turn the routine hit-and-run case into a cause celebre. When Sherman becomes a suspect, the callous Maria runs for cover while the district attorney (F. Murray Abraham) sees his chance to win the minority vote by nailing the wealthy white Wall Street scion.

Meanwhile, the sleazy Fallow smells an even bigger story when he discovers it was Sherman's mistress who ran over the youth.

Indicted, deserted by his wife and jobless, Sherman eventually perjures himself in a last-ditch effort to save his own skin.

Novelist Tom Wolfe used a scalpel in his social commentary on New York City's excesses but producer/director Brian De Palma opts for a sledgehammer.

Gone are the nuances of character and subtlety of detail — the heavy-handed camera work features exaggerated close-ups often with a fisheye lens that is obvious and distracting.

As the haughty, snobbish McCoy, Hanks is miscast and frequently overacts with frozen, shocked looks as his fortunes nose dive. Griffith as the salacious paramour, on the other hand, fills her role with all the vapid emptiness and cunning that is called for.

The film is populated by shrill and cardboard characters with little human dimension. The sexual innuendo and references are unusually nasty and love has no place in this picture. It's a truly cynical look at human nature — even as the injured boy's mother weeps at his hospital bedside, she's negotiating with advisers for a new wardrobe for TV appearances.

So, when the judge makes a plea for decency at the end and the reporter concludes that he sold his soul for fame, their words have a hollow ring.

Due to many base sexual references and innuendo, racial epithets and much rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Green Card'

A Frenchman looking for a "green card" to stay stateside and a lady with a green thumb agree to marry in name only in "Green Card" (Touchstone).

As the film opens, total strangers Bronte (Andie MacDowell) and George (Gerard Depardieu) meet, marry and part ways in a matter of minutes.

She's a horticulturist who needs a marriage certificate to qualify for an apartment — which has a marrieds-only stipulation — with the greenhouse of her dreams.

He can be deported unless he can show he's married to an American. A mutual friend brings them together and — voila —



In order to convince the government that their marriage is valid, Bronte (Andie MacDowell) and George (Gerard Depardieu) concoct photographic highlights of their brief life together.

they are instant newlyweds and their problems are solved.

That is, until the Immigration Department arranges to interview them in "their" apartment. Andie goes into a panic and has George come over, but the interview raises suspicions and so they must endure a second grilling in separate rooms three days later.

The two reluctantly decide to live together platonically for the weekend so they can study each other's personal histories and pass muster. Naturally they are utter opposites, and naturally they start falling in love.

Not a whole lot happens in the film and the outcome is never in question, but the trip there has several fine funny moments. Diminutive Jessie Keosian as the unflag-

ingly nosy neighbor is hilarious at regular intervals. Bebe Neuwirth plays Bronte's man-hungry friend for all she's worth. Watch out anyone who gets in her way.

But the centerpieces are Depardieu as the lovable slob and MacDowell as the refined beauty. He brings an endearing tenderness to his characterization, and she aptly conveys the ethereal quality that has him catching his breath as he secretly studies her.

Peter Weir has written, produced and directed a pleasant romantic comedy rare in its sweetness and unhurried pace.

Due to mild sexual innuendo and minimal rough language, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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