



MEMBER PICKS

The War of the Roses

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

US cinema had quite a run of prestigious, serious-minded relationship crisis movies in the 1970s and 80s (*Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Shoot the Moon*, much Woody Allen), but none delivered a jolt of pure malice like Danny DeVito's savage black comedy. The shock was augmented by having Kathleen Turner and Michael Douglas, hitherto known for their romping *Romancing the Stone* adventures, now stomping each other into the ground as wealthy yuppies Barbara and Oliver Rose, whose divorce turns into a full-blown war zone.

It's framed as a cautionary tale by DeVito's lawyer, and we're spared nothing as their sunny (empty?) soufflé of a marriage curdles: vicious verbal jousts, booby traps and physical abuse using their possessions, symbols of pampered, unexamined lives... it's all unfair game. The sole compromise is Turner not turning their dog into paté, but otherwise, to its final hand-off rejection, this is bare-knuckle Hollywood brawling, dealing low blows with glee.

Leigh Singer, bfi.org.uk

A contemporary review

Whereas Danny DeVito's directorial debut, *Throw Momma from the Train*, was marred by a typically Hollywood streak of sogginess (happy endings all round, and Momma dying from natural causes), one can have no such complaint about his follow-up, *The War of the Roses*. The presence of the director and his two co-stars suggests a spin-off of *Romancing the Stone*, but instead results in what is probably the bleakest portrait of a marriage since the heyday of Ingmar Bergman. Some of the exchanges, especially in the earlier part of the film, ring particularly true to life: Oliver impatiently interrupting his wife's anecdote at a dinner party, for example, or her flinching at his affected laughter.

Flying in the face of the current trend for 'feelgood' endings, the film sticks to its guns to the last, when the mortally wounded Oliver attempts to hold hands with his similarly injured wife – and she brushes him away; which is enough to make the ending of *Duel in the Sun* seem positively upbeat. The presentation is stylised; DeVito delights in setting his leading players off against each other by visual means as well as verbal – camera angles and tricks of proportion which make one loom larger than the other, for instance. The violence is largely of the Tom and Jerry bounce-back variety (the couple look in remarkably good shape for people who have been hurled on to a hard floor

from a great height), but otherwise only two concessions appear to have been made to popular sentiment.

One is the framing device by which D'Amato is seen to be telling the story; at the end he sends his prospective client packing with the un-lawyerly advice that married couples should stick together through thick and thin – which gives the audience a chance to decide whether to view the entire saga as a tale which has either been inflated in the telling or made up from scratch. The other concession is a brief insert of Oliver's dog to indicate that it hasn't been made into pâté after all (even though Oliver thinks it has): a regrettable failure of nerve, and rather unfair to the cat which has already been sacrificed to the wheels of Oliver's Morgan. On the minus side as well is Marianne Sägebrecht's housekeeper, a character so redundant that one can only assume that DeVito took advantage of the actress' presence in the vicinity when filming began.

The film fairly summarises one of the shortcomings of modern marriage: all consuming aspiration towards a dream of achievement (nice income, nice house, nice children) coupled with flagrant neglect of the spiritual side of things and an obsession with petty point-scoring. Though it's being presented as a black comedy, it isn't particularly funny, and one might also carp that Oliver and Barbara are such unlikeable characters that one cares little about their descent, locked in mutual antagonism, into self-destruction, though it might well be the aforementioned spiritual lack which makes them seem so brittle and unpleasant in the first place. Whatever, it confirms DeVito as one of the few mainstream filmmakers who are willing (and powerful enough) to take risks.

Anne Billson, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1990

THE WAR OF THE ROSES

Director: Danny DeVito
©/Production Company: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation
Production Company: Gracie Films
Executive Producers: Polly Platt, Doug Claybourne
Producers: James L. Brooks, Arnon Milchan
Co-producer: Michael Leeson
Associate Producer: J. Marina Muhlfriedel
Production Executive (Gracie Films): Richard Sakai
Senior Production Associate: Diane Brooks
Unit Production Manager: Robert Latham Brown
Production Controller: Mary Courtney
Location Manager: Taman McCall, Vicky Berglund
Production Assistants: Jane Hamsher, Charlie Eulo, Peter Jackson, David Klein, Carol Miyaka
Assistant Directors: Thomas Lofaro, Jeffrey M. Ellis, Matt Bearson, Paul F. Schlichting
Assistant Director (Washington): Lynda Gilman
Assistant Director (Philadelphia 2nd Unit): Robert Rooy
Casting: David Rubin
Casting (Washington Location Extras): White Light Casting Inc
Screenplay: Michael Leeson
Based on the novel by: Warren Adler
Director of Photography: Stephen H. Burum
2nd Unit Photography (Philadelphia): Robert Dalva
Camera Operators: Dustin Blauvelt, Joseph R. Marquette Jr
Panaglide Operator: Toby Phillips
Process Co-ordinator: Donald Hansard
Process Engineer: Donald Hansard Jr
Special Effects Supervisors: John Frazier, Rocky Gehr
Special Effects Technicians: Hal Selig, Paul Ryan, Richard Hill, Francis Pennington, David Wischnack, Lyle Carolus
Editor: Lynzee Klingman
Additional Editors: Nicholas C. Smith, Lawrence Jordan
Production Designer: Ida Random
Art Director: Mark Mansbridge
Art Department Co-ordinator: Stephanie Sandston
Set Designers: Stan Tropp, Mark Fabus, Perry Gray
Set Decorator: Ann McCulley
Selected Original Paintings: Suzanne Caplan, Mentor Huebner
Sketch Artist: Sherman Labby
Costume Designer: Gloria Gresham
Men's Key Costumers: G. Tony Scarano, Oda Groeschel
Women's Costumer: Janis Mekaelian
Make-up Supervisor: Stephen Abrums
Make-up Artist: John Elliott
Body Make-up: Gina Rylander
Douglas/Turner Body Doubles Created by: Thomas R. Burman, Bari Dreiband-Burman
Title Sequence: Elaine Bass, Saul Bass
Titles Co-ordinator: Jeffrey Okun
Opticals: Jack Hulen, Pacific Title
Music: David Newman
Musical Glass Performance: Jamey Turner
Music Editor: Tom Villano, Segue Music
Music Recording: Tim Boyle
Sound Recording: Jeff Wexler, Daniel Sharp, John W. Brilhante
Sound Re-recording: Michael J. Kohut, Leslie Shatz, Matthew Iadarola, Bill W. Benton
Supervising Sound Editor: Leslie Shatz
Dialogue Editors: Sarah Rothenberg, Michael Magill, Elliott Koretz

Sound Effects Editors: Clayton Collins, Dave Stone
ADR Group Co-ordinator: Leigh French
Foley Walkers: Hilda Hodges, Alicia Stevenson
Foley Mixer: Gary Gegan
Supervising Foley Editor: Marian Wilde
Foley Editors: Chuck Michael, John Duvall
Stunt Co-ordinator: Mike Runyard
Stunts: Trisha Peters, Janet Brady, Richard Drown, Marcia Holley, Tracy Keehn, Chris Palomino, Jim Arnett, Chuck Picerni Jr, Sammy Thurman, Scott Wilder
Stand-ins: Wendy Davies, Mark Reilly, Fred Scialla
Dolby Stereo Consultant: Douglas Greenfield
Head Animal Trainer: Karen Dew
Animal Trainers: Paul Calabria, Seana Skidmore

Cast

Michael Douglas (*Oliver Rose*)
Kathleen Turner (*Barbara Rose*)
Danny DeVito (*Gavin D'Amato*)
Marianne Sägebrect (*Susan*)
Sean Astin (*Josh, aged 17*)
Heather Fairfield (*Carolyn, aged 17*)
G.D. Spradlin (*Harry Thurmont*)
Peter Donat (*Larrabee*)
Dan Castellaneta (*man in chair*)
Gloria Cromwell (*Mrs Marshall*)
Harlan Arnold (*Mr Dell*)
Mary Fogarty (*Mrs Dell*)
Rika Hofmann (*Elke*)
Patricia Allison (*Maureen*)
Peter Brocco (*elderly mourner*)
Philip Perlman (*bidder at auction*)
Susan Isaacs (*auctioneer's assistant*)
Trenton Teigen (*Josh, aged 10*)
Bethany McKinney (*Carolyn, aged 10*)
Shirley Mitchell (*Mrs Dewitt*)
Ellen Crawford (*1st nurse*)
Michael Adler (*Dr Hillerman*)
Lisa Howard (*2nd nurse*)
Jeff Thomas (*orderly*)
Jacqueline Cassell (*Gavin's secretary*)
Vickilyn Reynolds (*Nancy, Oliver's secretary*)
Eunice Suarez (*Latin woman*)
Julia Elliott (*Latin assistant*)
Tony Crane (*teenage boy*)
Ryan Wickers, Shaun Wickers (*Josh, aged 3*)
Catherine Donohue, Mary Donohue (*Carolyn, aged 3*)
Sue Palka (*anchorwoman*)
Morris Jones (*anchorman*)
Popeye (*Bennie The Dog*)
Tyler (*Kitty Kitty The Cat*)
Roy Brocksmith (*Mr Fisk*)
Peter Hansen (*Mr Marshall*)
Robert Harper (*Heath*)
Prince A. Hughes (*bleeding man*)
Danitra Vance (*manicurist trainee*)
David Wohl (*Dr Gordon*)

USA 1989

116 mins

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