

Arts/Features

'Gardens of Stone' hits close to home

"Gardens of Stone," as the title suggests, opens with a military funeral at Arlington National Cemetery in 1968. Yet, "Gardens" is not the typical Vietnam horror film. Surprisingly, its message is pro-army, but antiwar.

"Gardens," which stars James Caan in his coming-of-age role as career Sergeant Clell Hazard, is the story of the other side of the Vietnam war — the war at home. After serving two tours in Vietnam, Hazard is assigned to train a group of elite recruits at Fort Myer, Va.

Although these recruits are the cream of the crop, most of them will not perform in a life and death situation. These recruits are the Old Guard, "toy soldiers," as Hazard says, who perform ceremonially and bury the war heroes at Arlington.

Pvt. First Class Jackie Willow, played by D. B. Sweeney, is an idealistic, outspoken young recruit who feels useless at Fort Myer and wants to go to the front. Hazard conveniently served in a platoon in Korea with Willow's father, so Hazard takes an interest in the young Willow.

However, their attitudes clash.

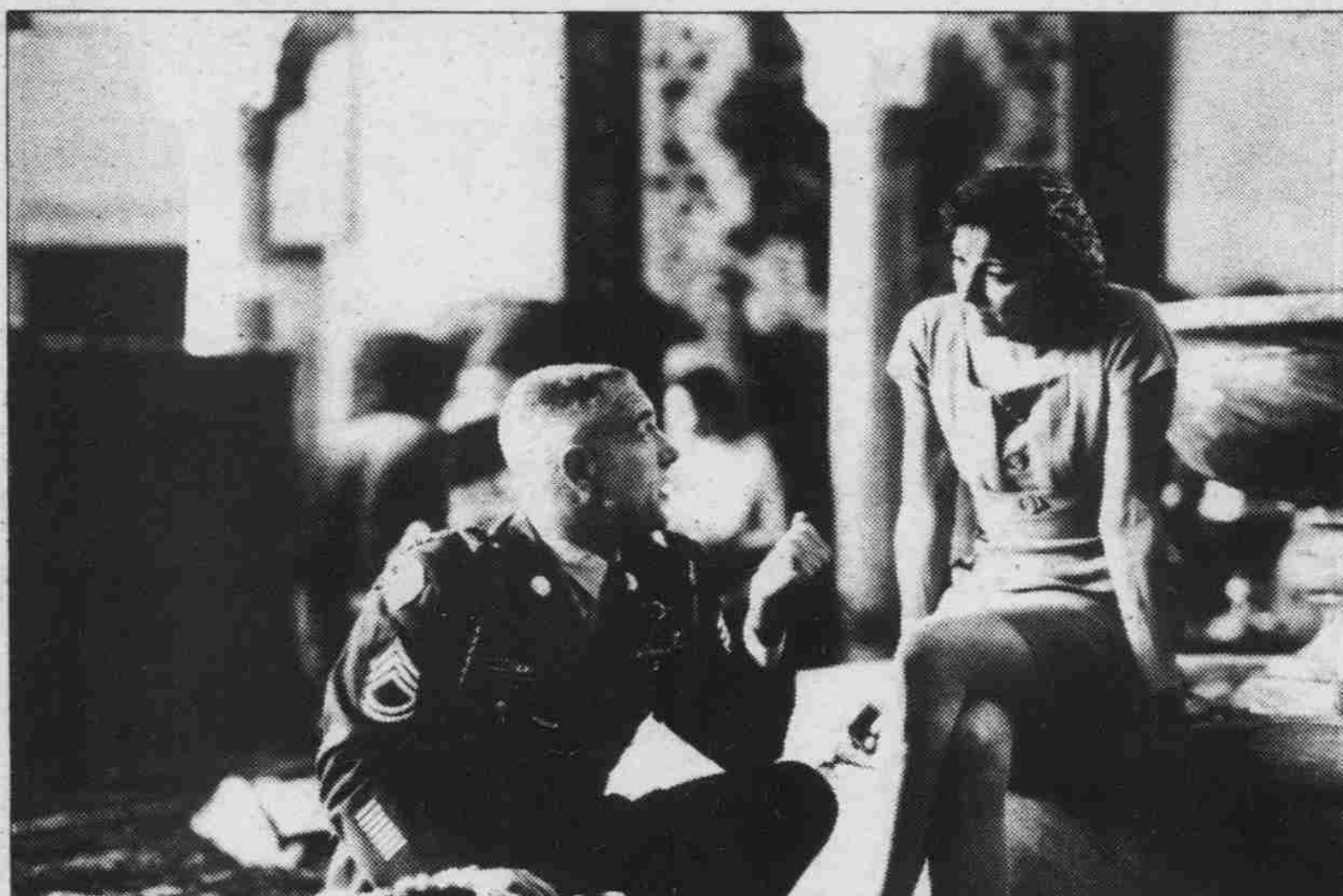
Joanne Gordon

Cinema

Willow insists on fulfilling his patriotic duty while Hazard, a tough man of experience, knows that the war "can't be won." Despite their differences, they develop a paternal relationship.

At the same time, Hazard falls in love with female reporter Samantha Davies (Anjelica Huston), who is an antiwar activist. Again, conflicts arise, but they only strengthen the element of romance in "Gardens." With these two relationships, the war on the home front becomes a personal war as Hazard battles his life-long dedication to the Army and the Army's actions.

The power of the movie lies in the sensitivity of the problems of the war at a personal level. Although there are clips from Vietnam — clips of wounded soldiers, body bags and fighting, the movie focuses on the emotional effects on civilian-soldier, soldier-soldier and wife-husband relationships through the personal



Sgt. Clell Hazard (James Caan) and Samantha Davis (Anjelica Huston) find themselves drawn to one another despite their ideological differences about the war in "Gardens of Stone"

lives of Hazard and Willow.

Between the summer of 1968 and the cold harsh winter of 1969, like many of the young soldiers, Willow moves up the ranks, marries an old sweetheart, is assigned to the front and returns home to be buried at Arlington. His funeral opens and closes the film.

Although the movie seems to jump from scene to scene, the fast pace of the movie is effective because it correlates with the fast pace of the war. Under Francis Ford Coppola's excellent direc-

tion, the movie takes the audience on an emotional rollercoaster.

After a five-year box office break, Caan shines in his role as a compassionate, yet stern army sergeant. The untraditional role contrasts his image from other films as the sportive, macho younger man. Caan played a ghost in the 1982 film, "Kiss Me Good-bye," a sports star in "Rollerball" and the Mafia chief in Coppola's "The Godfather."

Caan handles the emotional script with flair. He portrays both the strict, disciplined sergeant and

the drunken, foul-mouthed soldier. On the softer side, he is the romantic gentleman and the grieving father.

Complementing Caan and Sweeney, James Earl Jones plays Goodie, the master-sergeant who keeps Hazard in line. Goodie is a big-hearted "bear" who provides a comical element in the movie. Comical relief is a necessity in a movie with such a powerful and serious tone.

Huston and Mary Stuart Masterson, who plays Willow's teenage bride, provide the love interest in "Gardens," yet from a different perspective. Huston's character plays a major role in the antiwar conflicts. As an activist, Huston strongly opposes the war and contrasts the typical female role in a war movie. On the other hand, Masterson is the civilian wife who is not as weak as expected.

Because "Gardens" combines outstanding acting with a powerful script under Coppola's direction, the movie is an emotional, poetic drama of the Vietnam war.

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