

Malick's 'Days of Heaven'

— Small plot, big message

Clarke Taylor looks at some of the new films

Four films have opened which, whatever the individual verdict, illuminate for audiences the possibilities available to Hollywood. For this reason alone, they are interesting to watch, provocative — memorable.

The best of the lot is Terrence Malick's "Days of Heaven," a stunning visual experience, thanks to cinematographer Nestor Almendros (and contributions from Haskell Wexler), and a fascinating fable about the precariousness of life, thanks to writer-director Malick. Like his previous "Badlands," this film deals on Malick's own moral plain, but unlike the earlier film (based on the real-life manhunt for mass murderer Charles Starkweather), the story line is spare. Action-crazed audiences will have to settle into the luminous pictures on-screen and carefully listen to the voice-over narra-

tive, which really defines the message of the film: we'd better hold on to what we have, value our treasure.

Malik has also introduced new faces Richard Gere (who acts with his eyes in the film), Brooke Adams and Sam Shepard (previously known as a playwright: "Tooth of Crime," etc.) to form the love triangle that provides the tension of the film; and a young Brooklyn youth, Linda Mantz, who guides us through the experience.

Not so far removed, in tone, from Malick's film, "Who'll Stop the Rain" deals with values in life —

"Coming Home," or even "Heroes," but rather with the impact the war has had on the lives — and the bodies — of the three leading characters, all of whom have been involved — swept up, really — in smuggling heroin out of Southeast Asia.

Michael Moriarty, as the innocent who sets the fateful course of action, looks swept-away himself in the film, and his ghostly character is all but lost in the presence of Nick Nolte, who in one of the finest performances of the year to date, captures the rage with which a sensitive GI witnesses the collapse of the world around him. Tuesday Weld, as the women caught between these two, anguished men, and herself addicted to the poison they've transmitted to her "normal" American life, is erratic in her performance. But the direction of Karel Reisz holds all the performances in loose bounds and his audience in generally rapt attention.

"Bloodbrothers" is another film that explores relations between strongly independent persons who are bound together; this time, the bond is an Italian working class family in the Bronx. Again, brutality lies always on the edge, and particularly harsh for the screen — and truthful — is the physical abuse within the De Coco family. These people are always brawling, whether they know it or not; they're unrelenting, and so is Robert Mulligan's film.

Based on the novel by Richard Price, the story attempts to follow Stony (Richard Gere) on his inevitable way out of his milieu. Paul Sorvino, as his uncle and Tony Lo Bianco, as his father are convincing as life in their efforts to keep Stony "in construction" work — immovable. And Richard Gere is just as adept at making his character's painful ambivalence real. Gere's animal energy is released in this film, and although his mannerisms are reminiscent of Brando, perhaps a Mediterranean James Dean, he is fashioning his own, unique character for the screen. He needs time and good roles to fashion more fully.

The roles here are incomplete, each life treated with the care of a TV-movie, and Stony's final "escape," with his small brother at his side, is too near our memory of John Travolta's Manhattan odyssey in "Saturday Night Fever," and just as incredible. But the surface of truth is scratched in this movie, which is why it found its way into the New York Film Festival, no doubt. Glimpses of wife-beating, child-beating — and soul bearing — are within our understanding, even our experience, but rarely played with any clarity on screen.

Robert Altman's "A Wedding" also deals with too many roles — 48 of them, wandering aimlessly on, around and off the screen.

Continued on Page 100