

Love and Other Drugs: Funny but Difficult

The pharmaceutical industry and especially Pfizer will hate Ed Zwick's forthcoming movie—*Love and Other Drugs*—which portrays drug reps as money-grubbing sex fiends.

But while the film, starring [Jake Gyllenhaal](#) and [Anne Hathaway](#), is loaded with sex scenes and Viagra jokes, don't be fooled: it's funny and enjoyable for the most part but deals with some very difficult and provocative themes.

In the film, neer-do-well salesman Jamie Randall (Gyllenhaal) takes up with the beautiful and insightful Maggie Murdoch (Hathaway) who, at age 26, has been diagnosed with Stage 1 Parkinson's Disease. Like Erich Segal's 1970 *Love Story*, the film portrays the joys of love but also the anguish that comes with any incurable illness—here, in the context of seemingly uncaring pharmaceutical and medical industries.

Hathaway is convincing, even mesmerizing as the artist and activist who brings old people to Canada to buy drugs. Gyllenhaal is believable and fun as a manipulative salesman who seduces, in one way or another, every woman he meets. The two portray their characters' evolving realization/questioning of what's important in life.

I enjoyed the film, but I left feeling unsettled and a bit disturbed—a result of tension between the funny and sad parts, worry about the future of the characters—and wonder about how I myself might deal with a loved one's serious health issues

My friend K commented that while he liked the film, he felt it was opportunistic—that Zwick and the actors will make a ton of money—while people with Parkinsons and other incurable, debilitating diseases will just go on struggling.

But I thought Zwick did a great job of personalizing and making more manageable what can sometimes seem like overwhelming problems, and that he has performed an important service by asking serious questions in a way that will be palatable to a mass audience.

I recently met Zwick— who was having a publicity photo taken at the Charles Hotel in Cambridge—and asked why he made the film. It wasn't for money, he said. He'd been impressed with Jamie Reidy's non-fiction book *Hard Sell: The Evolution of a Viagra Salesman*, on which the movie is based, and had personal experience with a situation like the one the movie describes.

For the pharmaceutical industry...it's not a pretty picture. But I guess they'll have to—and have the resources to—fend for themselves.

The film is to be released in late November. In the meantime, here's a link to the official site and a trailer:
<http://www.loveandotherdrugsthemovie.com/>

—Anita M. Harris

New Cambridge Observer is a publication of the [Harris Communications Group](#) of Cambridge, MA.