A film about the war which touches without preaching

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Paris, and he tells his mother that he hates her for making him go. It is a poignant moment, but Julien's outward poise is the tension that has already been created within him by the war. From there, the film shifts to the school, where Julien forgets the outside world and goes about being a studious and playful seventh grader. He reads novels after going about being a studious and playful seventh grader. He reads novels after

What distinguishes Malle's depiction from the recent spate of coming-of-age films, however, is that Julien is neither a child claiming to be an adult, nor an adult pretending to be a child. When the three young Jewish boys arrive at the school, one of them, Jean Benzaee (Raphael Fejto) is assigned the bed next to Julien's. Julien acts just as a typical tough kid would: he introduces himself by saying "I'm Julien. Don't mess with me."

But while he and the other kids play pranks on Jean and tease him untolentingly, Julien also finds himself intrigued by the quiet, reserved manner in which Jean bears all the abuse. Slowly, with numerous ups and downs, Julien becomes friends with Jean. Once he discovers that Jean is Jewish and that his real name is Kippelstein, Julien begins to cradle an already emerging adult awareness with his yet potent youthful exuberance.

Raphael Fejto as Jean Bonnet in Au Revoir Les Enfants.

Malle likes to work with inexperienced young actors, and in this film he draws upon their natural inclinations and reactions so masterfully that the distinction between actor and character is erased. The film creates not a flat stage for the actors to work on, but a fully articulated and three-dimensional world for the characters to inhabit and live in. The balance between the narrative and its context is impeccable.

It is fortunate that Malle waited all those years to make this film — the perspective gained from experience enabled him to crystallize all his humanity and all his filmmaking skills into a solid film that defies trivialization or dismissal.

Malle has shown that despite the staggering amount that has been written already, there yet remains much to say and remember about the horrors of the Nazi era. A film like Au Revoir Les Enfants arrives only rarely, a precious event that will be remembered for years.

Les 400 Coups.

Gaspard Manesse as Julien Quentin in Au Revoir Les Enfants.

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