

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Abuse</b>
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Source	<i>Village Voice</i>
Date	1983 Jun 26
Type	review
Language	English English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Abuse, Bressan, Arthur Jr., 1983

**ABUSE.** Directed, written, and edited by Arthur J. Bressan, Jr. Produced by Steven R. McMillin. Released by Promovision International. At the Cinema 3.

Arthur Bressan's *Abuse* opens like a combination of Disney's *Cinderella* and Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks*. Fourteen-year-old Thomas (Raphael Sbarge) is being force-fed glasses of milk by his screeching parents until he collapses in convulsions on the kitchen floor. A didactic drama of child abuse, Bressan's film is never as prosaic as it means to be. Like Sam Fuller's *Verboten!*, *Abuse* is sincerely sensational—a social-issue tract that keeps lapsing into giddy fantasy.

According to an article in *Body Politic*, *Abuse* was nixed by some 34 distributors before Promovision International—the outfit that gambled on *Taxi Zum Klo*—acquired the rights. This is hardly surprising. Far more problematic than the film's old-fashioned black-and-white cinematography or its voluptuously masochistic scenes of domestic violence is Bressan's conflicted line on the explosive issue of man-boy love. "I think I've found the star for my movie!" exults Larry Porter (Richard Ryder), a thirtyish graduate student doing his diploma film on child abuse, upon discovering the battered, cigarette-scarred Thomas lying in a West Side hospital. Thomas, meanwhile, regains consciousness long enough to glom the personal ad ("Abused? Call BE 4-5789") stenciled to Larry's T-shirt and commit it to memory.

The two get together, although, both gay, they don't actually get it on until late in the movie. By then, Bressan has had ample time to punch across the facts of child abuse (200,000 beatings reported annually) in all their atrocity—and pathos. Then, after his dissertation is completed, love-smitten Larry takes it upon himself to rescue Thomas from his relentlessly gruesome parents. Friends and professionals warn Larry that he's way out of line, but the final shot implies that, chucking everything, he and Thomas have taken off for points unknown.

Now this is romantic by any standard (imagine, if you like, Jennifer Jason Leigh in the role of Thomas) and, although Bressan dramatizes Thomas's brutalization with self-serving aplomb, he has no perspective other than blithe optimism on the love affair which ultimately motivates his film. Nabokovian irony may be beyond Bressan's grasp, but you keep waiting for Larry to break into voice-over, to annotate his impossible erotic obsession as, for example, Dana Andrews does in *Laura*. *Abuse* is a story of l'amour fou, and locked inside there's a noir struggling to get out.

In the not-so-bitter aftermath of what's been humorously termed "the great *Jeanne Dielman* debate" (as well as the wake of an excellent notice in *The New York Times*), Chantal Akerman's extraordinary film found a distributor, was attended by *New York* and *Newsweek*, and got favorably rereviewed in the *Voice*. Last Friday, *Jeanne Dielman* quietly replaced *Wizard of Babylon* at the Film Forum 2. See the movie and tell me if the hooplah and subsequent bluster weren't, in fact, worth it.