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Les|destinees

Jacques Charonne's novel *Les destinees sentimentales* follows a Protestant minister turned factory owner over the first three decades of the 20th century, and one suspects that director Olivier Assayas (*Cold Water*, *Irma Vep*, and *Late August, Early September*) was attracted to the material partly as a way of exploring his own Protestant roots. The hero (Charles Berling), doubting the fidelity of his wife (Isabelle Huppert), asks her to leave their home in the Charente region of France, and she takes their daughter with her. Years later he decides he was wrong, gives his wife the fortune from his family's porcelain factory, leaves the ministry, and marries a friend's niece (Emmanuelle Beart); his life takes another unexpected turn after his uncle dies and he's asked to take over the factory. Assayas is masterful in using offscreen sounds to conjure up a novelistic sense of milieu and in handling various cere-

monies (from a cotillion to a young woman's ordination as a deaconess), and the film's lush texture explains why he called it his anti-Dogma film (one lap dissolve that links lovemaking to an Alpine lake seems to come straight out of F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise*). Even at 173 minutes, this 2000 release is surprisingly brisk for a period picture: Assayas practically skips across the story, making his somewhat mysterious characters even more elusive. (The story is essentially framed by funerals, which only increases one's sense of life slipping past.) This swift pacing limits the film as well—despite its richness, I'm not sure how much of it lingers, apart from the melancholy one associates with Assayas's work. In French with subtitles; though shortened for U.S. distribution, the film's original title was the same as the novel's. Landmark's Century Centre. —Jonathan Rosenbaum