

Fried Green Tomatoes: A Review

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Let me just say at the outset that I have not read the book, and therefore cannot contribute to the debate on whether or not the movie betrayed its roots by not naming the relationship at its heart, in order to attract a mainstream audience. Let me say also that the debate does not concern me much. Whether explicitly stated or not, *Fried Green Tomatoes* is without question a love story between two women. It is the truest representation of the texture and feeling of women's love that I have ever seen in a film (although admittedly, the pickings in this category are slim). That love is what heterosexuals are looking at when they see this movie, whether they recognize it or not.

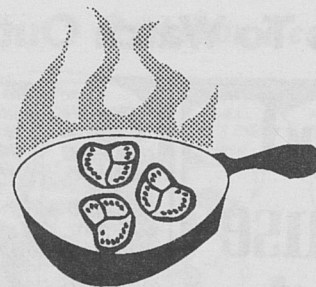
Refreshingly, *Fried Green Tomatoes* manages to avoid many of the plot staples of lesbian film and fiction. Coming out is not an issue, and homophobia is not a factor. Nobody gets left at the end for a man, and the relationship does not break up from the weight of its own significance.

Fried Green Tomatoes is about memory, and the interplay between past and present. It is also about the transforming power of women's love and women's autonomy. The

movie unfolds as two connected stories, set in Alabama 60 years apart. The primary story, which extends over a period of 20 years, is told in flashbacks.

Evelyn Couch (Kathy Bates) is an overweight, insecure, conventional Southern housewife, the kind of woman who takes Total Woman classes to put the romance back into her middle-American marriage, and apologizes when someone bumps into her at the supermarket. As the movie opens, she is driving with her husband Ed to visit Ed's aunt at a nursing home. They take a wrong turn and find themselves in the abandoned town of Whistle Stop, Alabama, where under the peeling paint on one of the buildings they can make out the words, "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe."

At the nursing home Ed's aunt refuses to see her and Evelyn goes off to a lounge to wait. There she is approached by a talkative and friendly old woman in a bathrobe (Jessica Tandy), who says her name is Ninny Threadgoode and that she comes from Whistle Stop. Mrs. Threadgoode begins telling Evelyn the story of Idgie



Threadgoode (Mary Stuart Masterson), who she says is a cousin of hers, and Ruth Jamison (Mary Louise Parker), who meet at a wedding in 1920, when Idgie is about 11 and Ruth is 17.

They meet again several years later when Ruth spends the summer with the Threadgoodes. Idgie, always a tomboy, is by this time completely uncontrollable. She smokes, drinks, plays a mean game of poker, and hangs out at a dive down by the river. Idgie's mother hopes that the ladylike Ruth will be a good influence on Idgie. Instead, the influence goes in both directions and as the summer progresses, Ruth and Idgie begin to fall in love.

At the end of that summer, Ruth leaves to marry Frank Bennett, who, we find out, beats her. Idgie rescues Ruth, who is pregnant, and brings her back to Whistle Stop. They open a cafe together, which becomes the focal point

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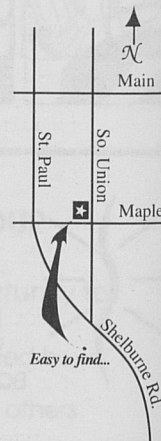
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