

# WALL STREET JOURNAL

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BY JULIE SALAMON

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"Map of the Human Heart" leaves you feeling drained, the way some dreams do. There's a mystic intensity to this wide-ranging story of doomed romance set in a distant time and place.

It's about a young Eskimo boy who's half white. He's taken from his arctic home by a Canadian explorer who discovers the boy has tuberculosis. The boy, a mischievous explorer himself, isn't all that happy in the hospital run by nuns until he meets his kindred spirit – a rangy troublemaker, a girl who's also half white (and half Native American). That's in 1931 and the picture follows them through separation, reunion and separation – over a period of 30 years.

These details don't explain the picture's spirit, the way the New Zealand director Vincent Ward has convincingly turned this expansive story into recognizable memory. Through calculated imagery – a pervasive yet inobvious sense of ghostliness – and sound, he lets you watch the characters yet also feel what it's like to be them. This may sound a little mystical, and it is, the way movies can be.

Yet the characters never seem like props for the camera. The parts are strongly written (by Louis Nowra from a story by Mr. Ward) and incredibly well acted. It's rare to see a film in which characters appear as children and adults are convincing as both. This is that rare film. Jason Scott Lee and Anne Parillaud are superb as the grown Avik and Albertine, despite the not-always-convincing dubbed voice that speaks English for Ms. Parillaud. Astonishing, however, are Robert Joamie and Annie Galipeau, the spirited young actors (both performing for the first time) who play the lovers children.

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VIDEO TIP: Mr Ward is an original thinker. If you don't believe me, just look at "The Navigator: A medieval Odyssey," a fantastic voyage from the English village of Cumbria in 1348, in the middle of the Black Plague, to contemporary New Zealand.