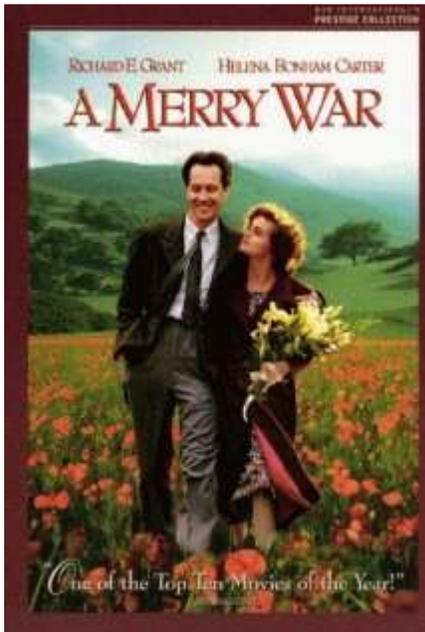


A Merry War



Director: Robert Bierman:
Writer: Alan Plater: - based on the novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* by George Orwell
Source: George Orwell
Cast: Richard E. Grant, Helena Bonham Carter, Jim Carter, Harriet Walter
Producer: Peter Shaw
Year: 1997
Rated R
Parental Rating: Cautionary; some scenes objectionable
Country Of Origin: U.K.
Running Time: 101
Format: Color
Genre(s): Comedy; Drama; Romance
Production Co(s): Aspidistra Productions, Ltd.; John Wolstenholme Film and TV Entertainment; United British Artists
Released By: First Look Pictures

This intermittently amusing but always thoughtful adaptation of George Orwell's autobiographical novel, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, features Richard E. Grant as Gordon Comstock, a would-be poet who supports himself as a copywriter in 1930s London. When Comstock's first book of poetry receives a good review in the *Times*

Literary Supplement, he decides to cast off the trappings of what he considers to be his demeaning and predictable life (job, marriage etc.) to become a full-time poet and free man. Comstock's subsequent free-fall into penury and degradation (remember that Orwell's nonfiction works include the terrifying *Down and Out in Paris and London*) is, fortunately, leavened with humor. Comstock isn't the most sympathetic of protagonists: He leaches money from his hardworking spinster sister Julia (Harriet Walter), and treats both his upper-class publisher Ravelston (Julian Wadham) and his devoted girlfriend Rosemary (Helena Bonham Carter) exceedingly badly, spurning them viciously whenever they try to pull him back into the safety of the middle-class fold. But Comstock's rants and whines about the bitter pills life forces one to swallow will resonate with anyone who's ever done work they considered morally reprehensible or without integrity. Less convincing, however faithful to the novel, is the ending: Spurred by Rosemary's unplanned pregnancy, Comstock happily decides to take back his old job and settle into the very life of middle-class mediocrity against which he railed so vigorously, going so far as to embrace that emblem of bourgeois conformity and staple of overstuffed English parlors, the humble aspidistra plant.



--Sandra Contreras