

Young Adult

reviewed by [John Petrakis](#) in the [January 25, 2012](#) issue

Judging by the ads, you might think that this tale of a former high school prom queen who returns to her small Minnesota town to reclaim her old boyfriend is a light story filled with big yucks and a happy ending. But director Jason Reitman and screenwriter Diablo Cody (the team behind *Juno*) are serving up a dark story about wasted lives and shattered dreams that coyly takes a few cheap potshots at the clueless folks who populate a small town.

Mavis Gary (Charlize Theron) is a semisuccessful writer of teen literature who leads a lonely life. Her only companions are a small dog and numerous bottles of scotch. When she discovers that her high school boyfriend, Buddy (Patrick Wilson), is now married with a new baby, she gets it into her booze-addled brain to head back to her old haunts and save Buddy from his fate, figuring that deep down he must be miserable and still pining for her. Since the film reveals very early on that Buddy is not unhappy and is not missing Mavis in the least, all that is left is for Mavis to humiliate herself again and again, a pathetic situation that we are somehow supposed to find amusing.

Thankfully, the movie includes the odd but moving friendship between Mavis and Matt Freehauf (Patton Oswalt), a former classmate who was low on the school's social food chain. Matt's only distinction in high school was being the victim of a hate crime (a bunch of jocks thought he was gay), which left him with a broken pelvis and permanent physical damage. The scenes between Mavis and Matt, both crippled in some way and living in the past, are so superior to everything else in this movie that you wonder why the goofy Mavis and Buddy story is included. A small but solid movie lurks inside the film, but it is covered with so much formulaic goo that it is easy to miss.