

## Mothering Sunday Review

Cinema is an indispensable and essential part of the mechanism called art. Seemingly different at first glance, at the core of all the diverse art forms lies one primary purpose that unites them – storytelling. Even in the past, artists have realized that art is like a closed loop and a story can be interpreted in all sorts of ways. As an example, I give the most ancient of all stories, namely the biblical one. I've lost count of all the books, sculptors, paintings, songs, trying to "rediscover" painfully familiar characters. With the appearance of the first films, the idea of a book adaptation was also born. After all, why does every film plot have to be necessarily original when there are so many stories already written just waiting for their characters to be brought to life by the camera and the director's imagination? In recent years, film adaptations have become a necessity and an inevitable part of marketing any newly published novel. Every successful book could potentially lead to a film adaptation with a minimum of 10 nominations for prestigious awards. However, as in life, so in the world of film adaptations, there are spectacular successes ("The Lord of the Rings"), but also resounding failures ("The Dark Tower"), and also books that are still waiting for their dignified screen adaptation years from now. gathering dust on the shelves or shame of previous attempts at filming. However, there are also books that are almost impossible to adapt and are a huge challenge, either because of their nature or because of the endless number of monologues that simply cannot be visualised.

"Mothering Sunday" is, at first glance, a small-page novel published by the British author Graham Swift in 2016, containing no small number of internal monologues and torments of the main character, as well as more than 3 timelines with frequent flashbacks. Despite the slight challenges, I dare say that French director Eva Husson's bold decisions have paid off and "Mothering Sunday" is not only an authentic adaptation, but much more than the average British period drama.

The film of the same name was screened for the first time in the "Cannes Premiere" selection at the Cannes Film Festival on July 9 2021, where in the company of director Eva Husson, lead actor Josh O'Connor, producers, as well as composer Morgan Kibbie, we were transported to the comfort on a spring day almost a century ago, when the wounds of war have not yet fully healed. The first few frames do not introduce us directly into the action of the plot and find their context only at the end of the film, when they also close the circular composition of the plotline. Moments later, we are also introduced to our main character, Jane Fairchild (Odessa Young), who also reveals the first major theme of the film, namely the class division in the early 20th century. It doesn't take long to grow attached to Jane. She is a hard-working, witty, well-intentioned and full-of-potential girl who just got the short end of the stick in life. She works as a maid in the home of the aristocratic Niven family. The married couple, played by Oscar winners Colin Firth and Olivia Colman, resemble a ticking bomb waiting to go off. The tension between them and the seemingly buried pain of losing their sons in the war is more than palpable on screen. After the Nivens head out for a celebratory lunch for their neighbors' son's engagement, Jane heads to the house of her lover Paul (Josh O'Connor), who—surprise—turns out to be the neighbors' son to be married. So far so good, we have our conflict, then the timeline abruptly changes and we are introduced to an elderly woman, standing in front of a typewriter. It is not difficult for us to guess this is the elderly Jane remembering all these events. We jump back to the distant 1924, where Paul and Jane spend their last hours together in the empty house before he joins his fiancée for lunch.

During this time, we are also introduced to the other timelines - that of the aristocrats having lunch with the depressed fiancée on the same day, the first meetings between Paul and Jane in the recent past, and the now matured Jane and her husband (Sope Dirisu) in the near future. Each of these represent a crucial event in Jane's life that subsequently influenced her writing career and shaped her to be the person in front of the typewriter years later.

Similar to many British production simplicity, elegance and sheer class flow from the screen. Director Eva Husson as usual has an affinity for impactful stories, much like her previous Cannes selection film "Girls of the Sun". Husson herself has often shared her astonishment at the sensitivity of the story of *Mothering Sunday* after reading it, which left her tearful and speechless, and her strong aspiration to adapt it precisely from Alice Birch's impressive screenplay. With Birch's work as a foundation, Husson deftly captures the desperation flowing from each character. At times, the sense of helplessness in the face of the injustices of the world and society is so suffocating that you keep hoping for even a momentary glimmer to illuminate their wretched fates. Alas, this never happens, and the characters continue to languish in the captivity of their own prison. In stark contrast to this is the cinematography shot by Jamie Ramsey, which is simply a feast for the eyes. The rich and saturated colors as well as the use of natural light, which so gracefully filters through the windows and illuminates the bodies of our main characters, make you forget about the adversity for a moment. One of the main features of the book is that it is told entirely from Jane's perspective. Every single event is refracted through the prism of her gaze, and nothing we see is unprecedented truth. It is thanks to the cinematography and creativity of Husson that Jane's internal dilemmas, often 10 pages long, are adapted without annoying and intrusive voice over, but only through fragmented scenes, which are deliberately shot one idea more out of focus, like a fever dream, as if the audience itself is Jane struggling to remember clearly the events of this fatal Mother's Day. Additionally, the soundtracks of period dramas aren't usually that memorable, but here the music was like a mirror of Jane's inner world and helped to avoid dry monologues.

Considering how short the book is, it seemed unclear to me what possibly they could fit into an almost 2 hour film, but screenwriter Alice Birch, who seems to have tried to stay as true to the plot as possible, has taken some liberties with some secondary characters. At first, this seems as an unnecessary screen time filling, but it actually leads to flashing out and further developing flat characters, such as the fiancée Emma who in the book is only mentioned by name. This takes us out of Jane's mind for a moment and gives us a different perspective on the events, also deepening our emotional connection with the other characters.

I can safely say that the acting is what raises the bar of the film. The entire story hinges on the intimacy between our two characters, Paul and Jane, and I don't mean raging hormones represented through steamy love scenes. No, here the intimacy is between the agony of two souls, forced to put aside their desires by unfortunate circumstances. The passion of the first thrill of love and the doubts of two young people on the threshold of mature life are faithfully represented by Odessa Young and Josh O'Connor. The chemistry between them is palpable even in the scenes when they are apart. This leads to having a hard time understanding the relationship between Jane and her fiancé as it never reaches the authenticity of the relationship between Paul and Jane. Odessa Young manages to recreate Jane's divisiveness, and at the same time the naivety of youth, without saying a word, but only through her expressions. Young, who is increasingly gaining popularity in Hollywood circles, makes a

strong impression with her delicate acting and proves herself as a lead actor who can successfully carry an entire film on her shoulders. Josh O'Connor did not disappoint either. One of the many British actors who have ventured beyond the island's borders, O'Connor returns to his roots, playing a conflicted young man who fights the stereotypes of the typical lead character. Known for his ability to show the most vulnerable features of his characters - a quality not common in male portrayals in American films - O'Connor touches strongly with his emotional transformation of a young man, suffocating under the pressure of those around him. A real masterclass in acting is also the performance of Colin Firth and Olivia Colman, who make the most of their limited screen time.

Now we can also move to the less impressive qualities of "Mothering Sunday" – the pace and the "torn" storyline. It's that European cinema is famous for its slow pacing, but here it's too drawn-out. Even though there were so many different events, at times it seemed as if 30 minutes had passed without anything happening. Certainly, if the plot of the film had been more tightened, the flow would have been smoother. The other major problem is the chaotic changing of plotlines. Similar to Greta Gerwig's "Little Women", "Mothering Sunday" doesn't skimp on jumping from one timeline to another, leaving the audience with no clue as to the actual sequence order. No indication, not even in the color palette, can tell the viewer if he is in 1924 or nowadays. This, no doubt, doesn't have as much effect on people who have read the book and who anxiously await their favorite moments, but there's no denying that if one went in to watch the movie blindly, they'd come out with a migraine from trying to piece together the disjointed events.

In conclusion, I will just say that "Mothering Sunday" resembles a farewell letter, which poetics we can enjoy, but they still can't manage to hide its depressing nature. Side by side with the characters, we experience their dilemmas and although the film could have been one idea shorter and more concise, there is no doubt that when you leave the cinema you feel as you have somehow fully witnessed the entire life path of a character, indirectly marked by the war and the actions of others and who in spite of all manages to flourish.