

THE WOMAN IN THE FIFTH

Directed by Pawel Pawlikovski
Screenplay by Pawel Pawlikovski
based on the novel by Douglas Kennedy
Camera by Ryszard Lenczewski



CAST

Tom Ethan Hawke
Margit Kristin Scott-Thomas

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Anyone who has seen Pawlikovski's much praised *Last Resort*, set in an unnamed (but clearly Margate), rundown seaside town, and featuring the plight of 'illegal' immigrants, which the film club screened in 2001, will be surprised at this latest offering which deals, in part, at least, with the glamorous world of literary soirées of Paris's 5th arrondissement (thus the title) and uses top Hollywood box office draws Ethan Hawke and Kristin Scott-Thomas.

It is "loosely based on Douglas Kennedy's 2007 novel and sits uneasily between the psychological thriller of its

literary source and the European art-cinema style of Pawlikovski.....and meanders between family drama.....a criminal subplot and Tom's love affairs with two women.....which arguably turns the film into a more ambitious project but the execution fails to make the disparate elements gel.....When Tom's estranged wife violently rejects him and calls the police, Tom starts lurking around parks, spying on Chloé as she plays with other children. This is part of a leitmotif connected with the gaze: a recurrent, inexplicable (until the end of the film) shot of little Chloé with her pink rimmed glasses in the woods; Tom putting on and taking off his own glasses; and his mysterious surveillance job for Sezer, the shady boss of his hotel. It's hard, however, to extract more meaning from this thematic thread." (Ginette Vincendeau, Sight and Sound, March 2012.

The Woman in the Fifth has elements of fantasy and reality, a mix which Pawlikovski used to excellent effect in *Last Resort* where the seedy backdrop of Margate with its closed-down Dreamland, greasy cafés and small-time soft porn industry reflect the disappointed hopes and fantasies of the Russian immigrant and her son. The Paris setting of this film, however, seems to add little to Tom's story who moves between his three different worlds in a state of confusion.

One could, of course, take the film to be the novel he is trying, but failing, to write. This would certainly explain the mysterious femme fatale, Margit, and her disappearance and, to an extent, some of the more baffling occurrences in the criminal underworld he finds himself forced to inhabit. There are moments here of nightmarish tension because of the unknown nature of the threat Tom faces. Whereas, however, the film could have been a "profound reflection on fictional narration it ends up seeming trite and, at times, even comic" and one is left wishing for the firm command of material Pawlikowski has shown in his other films. In spite of all the negative comments above, the film does manage to hold our attention. There is much which is of interest and there is good contrast between the 'normal' scenes of happy childhood, the dystopian world of crime and squalid hotels, and the fantasy and luxury of the literary world. It has a potential which will certainly make for good discussion!

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