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Theatre – Film – Comedy – Food

Virginia Woolf's Night & Day







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Cineworld, Edinburgh

Despite the prominence of the famous name in the title, Justine Waddell's movie adaptation of *Night & Day* bears only a passing resemblance to Virginia Woolf's 1919 novel, stripping away a lot of the author's thorny political nuance in favour of a lighter, more straightforward feminism.

Kit Hilbery (Haley Bennett) rails against the confines of her class and gender. Her parents (Jennifer Saunders and Timothy Spall) want her to marry her childhood friend, the affable William Rodney (Jack Whitehall), but Kit – an aspiring astronomer – has other plans. She wants to go to Cambridge. Okay, so women aren't actually allowed to study at the men's college she's applied to, nor permitted to join the Royal Astronomical Society, but Kit's nothing if not determined. Someone has to be the first, right?

Kit isn't alone in her fight against the old order. Her gay cousin, Cy (Misia Butler), has his own battles to face, and her new pal, Mary Datchet (Lily Allen), is an active member of the Suffragette Society, working full-time to change the world.

And, of course, there's always a bit of romance to complicate things. Kit doesn't fancy her fiancé, William, but there's more than a spark between her and Ralph Denham (Elyas M'Barek), the lower-class radical hired to edit her mother's sprawling book. But why shouldn't Kit strive for emotional fulfilment as well as intellectual? After all, she's used to reaching for the stars…

Directed by Tina Ghavari, the setting is vividly realised, and Bennett gives a spirited performance in the central role, imbuing Kit with an earnest vulnerability that ensures we're on her side. Whitehall also acquits himself well (I guess 'congenial toff' isn't much of a stretch for him), but it's Butler's brittle façade that gives the film its emotional depth.

I'm less keen on the (presumably deliberate) anachronism in Datchet's presentation: Allen's costume and hair are in line with current fashion, in contrast to the Edwardian garb worn by the other characters. What's more, we never get to know anything about her or her politics, beyond the fact that she thinks women should have the vote and prints pamphlets saying so. Still, Datchet is positively well-developed compared to Kit's Aunt Celia (Elizabeth Edmonds) and Cousin Joan (Sally Phillips), two fine actors whose talent is entirely wasted in these pointless roles.

Despite it's style and elegance, *Night & Day* is something of a mixed bag: not funny enough for a comedy, not political enough for a polemic and not romantic enough for a love story. It's an entertaining watch that doesn't quite cohere.

3.4 stars

Susan Singfield

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