

Film Review: Brilliant Staging Bolsters Emotionally Hollow ‘Anna Karenina’

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on November 16, 2012 - 9:32am

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CHICAGO – Though cinema is first and foremost a visual medium, too many modern directors have become prone to using it as a stage for long-winded exposition. No matter how polished the lensing is in a film like David Fincher’s “Girl With the Dragon Tattoo” remake, the picture basically amounts to a series of dense dialogue passages interrupted by violence.



Rating: **2.5/5.0**

Few filmmakers exploit the visual possibilities of cinematic storytelling with more verve and invention than Joe Wright. Though his critics have accused him of favoring style over substance, he has consistently proven adept at allowing his images to speak volumes. Consider his stunning tracking shot along the Dunkirk beach in “Atonement,” which conveys the hell of war with more poetry and immediacy than any monologue. Or the pulse-pounding sequence in “Hanna” that portrays a man’s mounting paranoia as a group of thugs gradually materialize before cornering him in the subway.



[Read Matt Fagerholm’s full review of “Anna Karenina” in our reviews section.](#) [12]

“Anna Karenina” is unquestionably Wright’s most ambitious effort to date, and it exemplifies his strengths and his shortcomings in equal measure. On one level, the film is a brilliantly surrealistic reinterpretation of the Tolstoy classic that externalizes many of the novel’s headiest complexities. Yet on another level, the film suffers from heightening its melodrama to such an extent that there’s precious little left to reveal beneath its polished surface. It’s an experience akin to sampling the holiday window displays at Macy’s. Each room exudes a warm, transfixing glow, but the hollow figurines fail to hold one’s interest for more than a few seconds. The characters in “Anna Karenina” prove to be equally tiresome, as they go through the motions of a familiar melodramatic plot like colorful cogs in an archaic clock. It’s the first Wright film that left me unmoved, though its first forty minutes are nearly worth the price of admission alone, as cinematographer Seamus McGarvey (“We Need to Talk About Kevin”) conjures some of the year’s most breathtaking imagery. Yet despite the efforts of a (mostly) first-rate cast, the picture runs out of steam in its last two thirds as it chugs toward its inevitable conclusion. In her third collaboration with Wright, Keira Knightly appears effortlessly comfortable in her period attire, but her performance is constrained rather than enhanced by the film’s intricate choreography (arranged by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui). In a way, Wright’s metaphor for the suffocating protocol of Russian society works all too well, since it ends up suffocating the drama itself.

‘Anna Karenina’ stars Keira Knightly, Jude Law, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Domhnall Gleeson, Alicia Vikander, Olivia Williams, Matthew Macfadyen, Kelly Macdonald and Emily Watson. It was written by Tom Stoppard and directed by Joe Wright. It was released November 16th at the Landmark Century Centre Cinema. It is rated R.



[Continue reading for Matt Fagerholm’s full “Anna Karenina” review.](#) [12]



Keira Knightly stars in Joe Wright’s Anna Karenina, a Focus Features release.

Photo credit: Laurie Sparham

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