

## Naomi Watts, Robin Wright Fake It in 'Adore'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 5, 2013 - 9:14am

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – For a movie that should be about passion, sex, and scandal, “Adore” is surprisingly and depressingly tame. Two great lead actresses are left floating on a dock by a script that doesn’t treat them like real characters and a team that cast two inferior actors opposite them. For “Adore” to work, this tale of forbidden love needs to have an equal playing field. The major problem with this film is that we never see what the leads do in their sexual partners other than physical specimens and the lack of believability at the core of “Adore” leaves it lame.

Roz (Robin Wright) and Lil (Naomi Watts) have been friends for years. Writer Christopher Hampton and director Anne Fontaine set up a bizarrely episodic structure from the beginning as “Adore” will regularly leap forward several years at a time without much change in appearance by its characters, almost as if the filmmakers are trying to confuse their audience but more likely just filmmaking laziness. Lil loses her husband at a young age and raises a strong, healthy young man named Ian (Xavier Samuel, who, for the casting to work, Lil had to have at 15).



Adore

Photo credit: *Exclusive Releasing*

Lil & Ian spend summers with Roz and her son Tom (James Frecheville) and husband Harold (Ben Mendelsohn) in New South Wales. Harold takes a job in Sydney, leaving the two mothers and their two sons to frolic in the blazing sun until passion overtakes at least one of them. Lil’s son Ian seduces Roz one night after the latter has a few too many drinks, and, before they can even enjoy their tryst, Tom catches them, spotting his mom coming out of his best friend’s room carrying her pants after their first night together. (Movies like this can never let characters enjoy their secret affairs even for a night before being caught.) Tom responds emotionally and then lashes out by seducing Ian’s

mom, Lil. The two mothers and their sons are upfront and honest about their unique dynamic from the beginning, being clear with each other about the bizarre situation happening in their beach house but keeping it from the rest of the judgmental world. Of course, that can't last.

When it debuted at Sundance, a place where earnest soap operas like this one stand out in ways they wouldn't outside of the cynical mountain air, "Two Mothers" (as it was called then) was audibly derided. Everyone told me how horrendous the film was, wondering if it would even be released. Most of those responses were a bit extreme. They ignored the good work done here by Wright and the truly great work done by Watts. But they weren't too far off. Just exaggerated.



Adore

Photo credit: Exclusive Releasing

What did the Sundance crowd miss? A performance. As she often does, Watts takes a role that would have felt thin in the hands of another actress and gives it weight. Lil is easily the most interesting character in the film and there are glimpses of the movie that "Adore" could have been in her performance. Lil feels more inherently alone due to her being a widow and her affair feels more a response to that loneliness and how she thinks she should respond to the more passionate affair between Roz and her son than actual passion on her own part. The differences between the two affairs are way more interesting than the similarities, especially when they collapse, but Hampton and Fontaine don't explore them nearly enough, choosing sun-kissed shots of beautiful people in the water over character development.

As great as Watts is and as good as Wright is, Samuel and Frecheville are miscast, to be nice. If the genders were reversed, it would be not unlike casting two powerhouse actors in lead roles and then inexperienced supermodels, cast purely for their looks, in the roles of their daughters. It's a fatal flaw in the film. I understand the motivation. Roz compares their boys to Gods early on and they needed to be physical specimens for the passion of the piece to be believable.

However, did they need to be so dull? Ian and Tom are plot devices for most of the film and they're not believable when the actors are forced to carry any sort of dramatic arc. These are daytime soap level performances and characters opposite two of the best actresses alive. It makes one start to wish they'd just exit stage right and leave the two only interesting characters in the piece with each other.

*"Adore" stars Naomi Watts, Robin Wright, Xavier Samuel, James Frecheville, and Ben Mendelsohn. It was written by Christopher Hampton and directed by Anne Fontaine. It will be released in some markets on September 6, 2013 and is currently available On Demand.*



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