

## ‘Miss Sloane’ Thrills Politically, But Drags Narratively

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on December 9, 2016 - 7:27pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Nothing says the holiday season like a film about lobbying and politics. If you read that sarcastically, you’d be wrong. “Miss Sloane” offers a female spin for an otherwise male dominated political landscape. Most of you are trying to tune out politics after the elections, but this film builds off of that momentum by reminding us how we arrived to that point.

In all these films about politics, rarely do we encounter such intellectually aggressive character as Elizabeth Sloane. She is a chameleon of a character that is always the epitome of style and sophistication but can change her personality when it suits her end goal. Director John Madden tries to keep up by attempting to introduce Hitchcockian thriller elements and emotional, moral out-pours in the vein of a Sidney Lumet film, but ultimately falls plainly into a political film limbo that inhabited by all of the mid-grade political films that have come out. Madden tries to create a shroud of mystery around the character by focusing on visual misdirection and political theater, but the only person he seems to have fooled is himself. The predictability of his techniques coupled with the story makes it all less than effective. The good thing is that Chastain stands out stylistically enough to keep your attention and detract some of it off the technical slump the film falls into.



Jessica Chastain as lobbyist extraordinaire Elizabeth Sloane in 'Miss Sloane'

*Photo credit: EuropaCorp*

The most blatant problem with “Miss Sloane” is that it feels like it was written by a man. First-time screenplay Jonathan Perera creates this story but seems to take too many elements from past political films, usually with male leads. This leads to creating a fairly predictable story where the misdirection is obvious and the red herrings are personified by a redhead. In these types of films, the male lead is usually a womanizing alcoholic with a god complex and an ego as big as their presumably large penis. They tend to be morally gray, willing to sell out their own family if it means winning. Aside from switching the genders, Perera gives Sloane a prescription pill problem over alcohol, a prostitute who he tries to force into the position of love interest even though he is so shallowly developed, and commits one of the worst errors in judgment by falling into several female-centered tropes, like that of the emotional female.

Elizabeth Sloane is the most composed person in public, but Perera shows her on the verge of hysterics in her private life. This was used as a way to make the character more sympathetic but instead feels like the condescending origin of the word ‘hysteria,’ claiming that women are more prone to irrational, emotional outbursts simply because they have a uterus. They also focus on the career-focused woman, showing Sloane to be a female at the top of her field, but at no point is she shown as a role model. If anything, we are constantly shown how “career-obsessed” women are willing to forego their morals and relationships for a chance to succeed. Aside from Sloane, we see how her friend is willing to lose their relationship to stay with a company that may or may not promote her at some point, and we see another co-worker who is willing to turn to espionage for the enemy for an empty promise of position. This could just be an accurate look at the state of the glass ceiling in business, which I would have been completely for if the film did not undo that intention by introducing a character that wasn’t focused on career advancement and turned her into the only female with any morals in the entire film.





Jessica Chastain consoling Gugu Mbatha-Raw in ‘Miss Sloane’

*Photo credit: EuropaCorp*

Jessica Chastain is no stranger to playing strong female characters in a position of power. If anything, it is something she excels at. Her character Elizabeth Sloane is no exception. Like Chastain’s character, her performance is all about control and she has no problem taking control of the entire film. She is aggressive, authoritative and calculating. Every move takes her closer to her endgame. Chastain shows her range by delivering a domineering, emotionally muted performance while showing her vulnerability behind closed doors and the extent of her charm when she uses it to manipulate others. She is not a hero, but more complexly she is an anti-hero whose decision to oppose a major lobbying party was built less out of morals and more for the challenge of it. Ultimately, this makes for a much more intricate and complicated character.

Chastain may be the unapologetic captain of this ship, but her second in command injects the film with the needed amount of pathos to keep it from becoming emotionally distancing to the audience. Gugu Mbatha-Raw provides enough emotional depth for both characters. She represents unbridled idealism in a system where ethics seem to be optional. Seeing Mbatha-Raw transform from the soft-spoken character we have seen her play before into a full-blown, confident activist proved to be a satisfying character evolution and one that inadvertently provided a hopeful light into a system that works too often in the shadows.



Jessica Chastain facing the courts completely unafraid in ‘Miss Sloane’

*Photo credit: EuropaCorp*

Despite its many, many flaws, “Miss Sloane” triumphs in the fact that at least it tried. It tried to showcase the power of the female perspective in a democratic patriarchy. It tried tackling on a relevant issue that is even more important now than it was when this script was likely written. It succeeded in delivering a good argument on gun control and even has a scene or two that would pass the Bechdel test. The timely subject matter and engrossing performances from the female leads push this film forward and prove that in this case, almost does count.

*“Miss Sloane” opens everywhere on December 9th. Featuring Jessica Chastain, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Alison Pill, John Lithgow, Michael Stuhlbarg, Mark Strong, Jake Lacy, Sam Waterston and Ennis Esmer. Screenplay by Jonathan Perera. Directed by John Madden. Rated “R”*



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