

## ‘The Sense of an Ending’ Ponders a Vague Mystery

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 17, 2017 - 10:56am

- [British](#) [2]
- [CBS Films](#) [3]
- [Charlotte Rampling](#) [4]
- [Emily Mortimer](#) [5]
- [Harriet Walker](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Jim Broadbent](#) [8]
- [Joe Alwyn](#) [9]
- [Julian Barnes](#) [10]
- [Movie Review](#) [11]
- [Novel](#) [12]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [13]
- [Ritesh Batra](#) [14]
- [The Sense of an Ending](#) [15]
- [University](#) [16]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “The Sense of an Ending” is a highfalutin title, automatically putting most folks into book club mode. It is adapted from a novel, and the narrative has the same page turning-type rhythm. An old man, portrayed by Jim Broadbent, is encountering his past, while his current situation remains untenable.

The “ending” is what the story is driving towards, and it involves a past that is hard to grasp in the complexities, since it involves university days, girlfriends, best friends, parents and post adolescent anger. There is a secret among all this, which is buried under layers of feelings and the years. We are all products of our past, and what haunts us about it defines much of our emotional make up. That is the theme of “The Sense of an Ending,” and that theme is established early and is not much affected by the reveal of what actually happened.

Tony (Jim Broadbent) is long divorced and curmudgeonly, but his only daughter (Michelle Dockery) has decided to have a baby as a single women, and he is helping her through her pregnancy. His ex-wife Margaret (Harriet Walker) is still in the picture, but their relationship remains tentative. His life is further woken up when he receives notice that a diary has been left to him by the mother (Emily Mortimer) of an old lover, which involved an incident that happened to him nearly 50 years earlier in university.



Tony (Jim Broadbent) at the Crossroads in ‘The Sense of an Ending’



Photo credit: CBS Films

In flashbacks, we learn that Tony was in a love triangle with Veronica (eventually portrayed by Charlotte Rampling) and his complex friend Adrian (Joe Alwyn). In his younger days, the stab of Veronica and Adrian pairing up caused Tony to write a hateful letter. That letter is what haunts the present day, and causes the Veronica of now not to send Tony the diary. The old man becomes obsessed with his past again, which could lead to that sense of an ending.

This was a quiet story among fairly ordinary people, and that is the charm of the work. Adapted from a novel by Julian Barnes, it has the pacing of literature, with events accumulating until the reveal breaks them open. Tony's life in the present is what he ignores, in the rehashing of a long gone past that seems like it wouldn't matter anymore. But people are peculiar, and hang on to stuff that might not have any consequence, and that is the intrigue of this story.

Jim Broadbent (Slugworth from "Harry Potter") is in his usual reliable performer mode, and gives Tony some layers to crack. Harriet Walker, as his ex-wife, was in the background, but gives an inflection to a throwaway role that provides clarity to both Tony and their relationship. Charlotte Rampling is not given much to do as older Veronica, but effectively wears a mask of pain. Emily Mortimer (the "Em" in HBO's "Dot & Em") portrayed an unusual mother, against her type, and pulls it off with some nice touches from director Ritesh Batra.



Veronica (Charlotte Rampling) Confronts Tony in 'The Sense of an Ending'

Photo credit: CBS Films

Because the story was adapted from a novel, and has a decent amount of flashbacks, there was also a sense of not knowing what is going on. The piling on of elements in this tale gets a bit too high before something is revealed...and then once that plot surprise takes place it didn't feel as lofty as the set up. That's merely opinion, because fans of the "British atmosphere" – combined with thoughtful literary touches – will like this film, as I did.

To me, the glimpses of British culture that we get in the movies always teach us a little about ourselves, because so much of this country has British roots. Did the colonies break from the motherland because of repression or in spite of it? The British people never seem to let us know.

*"The Sense of an Ending" continues its nationwide release on March 17th in Chicago. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Jim Broadbent, Charlotte Rampling, Harriet Walker, Joe Alwyn and Emily Mortimer. Screenplay adapted by Nick Payne, from the novel by Julian Barnes. Directed by Ritesh Batra. Rated "PG-13"*



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