

‘The Woman in the Window’ is a Muddled Experience

The bestselling novel translates to an indecision between compelling drama and cheesy horror in Joe Wright’s new adaptation

Everybody’s running away from their problems, and for Anna Fox (Amy Adams), her only source of escape lies in alcohol and spying into the homes of her neighbors. Anna is an agoraphobic child psychologist, confined to her home from past traumas and anxiety, taking up the role of a vigilant observer—but not of her own troubles. When the Russell family moves in across the street, she becomes witness to an unstable family dynamic, and then, a violent criminal act.

The Woman in the Window is a mystery/thriller film, adapted from A.J. Finn’s novel, and directed by Joe Wright—who has also directed the film adaptations *Pride and Prejudice* and *Atonement*. While the film has been released since May of this year, it was originally intended to be out in 2019. Potential release dates had staggered as complications arose—like the necessity of re-shoots after [test screenings left viewers confused](#), and the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that the complexity of the plot may have been a challenge to fully encapsulate, especially in a film that renders just under two hours. And the disjointed timeline may only have weakened effective ways to convey the elaborate premise. Although the plot registers, the overall message becomes a hazy question in the center of two competing film styles.

The sound design and Bruno Delbonnel’s cinematography are the main highlights of this film, wielding their own unease and suspense in efforts to disguise an unremarkable script. Anna’s house is comprised of dim lights, harsh shadows, and a cold undertone of blue—with moments tinged in bursts of illuminated colors from red and yellow sheer curtains. The camera movements capture the twisted feelings that coincide with the plot, with an exceptional sequence of tilting motion during Anna’s inebriated disposition. The sound and music, designed by Paul Carter and scored by Danny Elfman, is another transformative facet of this film, eliciting tension with eerie and impending string arrangements. A lot of reference is made to some of Alfred Hitchcock’s work—with the visual presentation of voyeuristic shots into neighbors’ homes that evoke the presence of *Rear Window* (1954) and slight sonic allusions to *Psycho* (1960). But these elements become obstructed by cheesy graphics and effects that are more reminiscent of slasher-horror films than Hitchcock’s artistic command of the thriller. It’s a jarring shift in tone that invokes incredulity and a sudden detachment from the film.

As part of her nightly routine of ‘absconding,’ Anna downs rose-colored goblets of wine in combination with prescription medication, resulting in an unreliable and warped sense of reality. However, despite the ease afforded for outsiders to declare her character as ‘delusional,’ ultimately no one is to be trusted—and 911 dispatchers and detectives aren’t dependable either. First impressions of this film may appear to be serious, but the differing combination of styles and loose assemblage of plot make for a muddled experience—one that feels like a skimming of chapters than an involved read.