

THE POWER OF THE DOG

UK/Canada/Australia/New Zealand/USA | 2021 | 126' | Drama, Romance, Western | Rated R

Written and directed by

Jane Campion
Thomas Savage
(based on the novel by)

With

Benedict Cumberbatch
Jesse Plemons
Kodi Smit-McPhee
Kirsten Dunst

Original Music by

John Greenwood



Première:

02/09/2021 (Venice FF)

World release:

17/11/2021

What it means to be a man.

REVIEW

Montana, '20s. Two brothers, Phil and George, struggle to live together as they grow more and more different with every passing day. George, caring, sweet and a little naive, keeps confronting with Phil, whose only pleasure in the world seems to be to show his dominant position and his capacity for giving a dam just about the ranch and the men's work. While George paths his way into marriage with Rose, a widow with a teen kid from her previous marriage called Peter, Phil's attitude risks an unexpected turn...

Though it's difficult to try and sum up the judgment on the movie, it's easier if we try to isolate some pros and cons about the 5 chapters into which it is divided.

What is actually interesting is the increasing length of the chapters and the slow change of perspective from the portrait of all of the characters to privileging one (or maybe two) of their stories. Surely, there is a climax to the viewer's attention, though I find that the brief stops in the narration to underline the chapter division requires an intellectual effort that I'm not keen on; you might end up trying to figure out the reason behind the chapters, why this narrative device is used, rather than focusing on the incredible acting work that this movie actually has.

All of the characters are painted with a complexity and a care for details which helps when you want to try and empathize with them but at the same time creates an initial confusion on who the main characters of the story are since it's obvious, when you reach the end, that it is less of a choral movie than it seems. The main disappointment comes from the abrupt ending, right when we actually reach the climactic event - after almost two hours where the narration lingers aimlessly more than once.

When I have to evaluate the merits of this movie, one is clear as the light of day: Benedict Cumberbatch's performance. I know he's already been one of the most appreciated talents in Hollywood in the last few years, but my concern was (and still is, in a way) his inclination into a specific kind of role: the unappreciated man, with a set of fixed and precious values that this story helps to break down, or adjust, while developing his initially scarce relationship skills.

As I was saying before, also the rest of the cast gives a more than good

performance. Kirsten Dunst confirms a certain predisposition for dramatic roles with an inclination towards the depressive side, while Jesse Plemons confirms himself as a precise supporting actor, while playing something different from his past roles, quieter and with a stronger tie to a high moral standard. Their interactions are, at times, what helps focusing on something else than Cumberbatch. As this is one of the first characters that require some important introspection to be played, I also appreciated Kody Smit-McPhee's portrait of Peter, a boy who wants to become a man and protect his family, while, at the same time, searching for his adulthood independency. Stranded through the elements around him, Smit's correctly lacks the variety of expressions that could have resulted in a too empathic a performance.

I can only guess that the moments of rest, narratively speaking, were meant to rely on the music. Truth is, Johnny Greenwood - frontman of Radiohead - doesn't always get things right: the music accompanies the most dramatic moments of the story, but without a real contribution. Sometimes, silences could prove more useful than a music hazard.

"The Power of the Dog" firmly relies on a high-quality cast and could have also relied on the story, despite its slow-downs, with a slightly higher attention to the ending, which doesn't ruin the whole of the product but leaves the viewer with a sense of disappointment that, honestly, the movie doesn't deserve.

ASSESSMENT

POSTER	61%
TAGLINE	70%
TRAILER	90%
SATISFACTION	59%
DIRECTING	71%
SCREENPLAY	64%
PRODUCTION DESIGN	82%
CINEMATOGRAPHY	80%
CAST	87%
MUSIC	61%
TOTAL	73% = C