



Chris Cooper and Rachel McAdams

Married Life

Directed by: Ira Sachs

Screenplay by: Ira Sachs & Oren Moverman

Based on the book *Five Roundabouts to Heaven* by John Bingham

Cast: Pierce Brosnan, Chris Cooper, Patricia Clarkson, Rachel McAdams, David Richmond-Peck

Rating: PG-13

Running Time: 90 minutes

Screen Savor Movie Review: Married Life

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By Kimberly Gadette

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Poor Harry. He's married to a woman whose always available for him, frequently clothed in come-hither negligees. She thinks that the foundation of a good marriage is sex, stating, "It all boils down to bed." Poor Harry, sad Harry. He laments his woes to his best friend Richard who says, with quiet irony, "Well, we all have to put up with something."

That ironic tone comes in to play immediately, the opening credits scrolling against florid wallpaper patterns and animated dollies swinging to Doris Day's "I Can't Give You Anything But Love." The forced gaiety and color fades away as the face of unhappy Harry (Chris Cooper) emerges, staring out over a 1949 Manhattan cityscape from his office on high.

Adapted from John Bingham's 1953 British crime novel, *Five Roundabouts to Heaven*, this sumptuous, post-war look at the deceptions of love is delivered to us via an extraordinarily clever package soaked in one part John Cheever, one part Alfred Hitchcock.

If only Harry could leave his wife Pat (Patricia Clarkson) for his new inamorata Kay (a peroxided Rachel McAdams). Yet he's so certain that his desertion would cause his spouse to collapse in life-altering grief that he wishes to spare her — by killing her. It's the very least that a loving husband could do.

The film is told in part by present action, in part by a voiceover from Richard (Pierce Brosnan). Though in the scenes Richard knows nothing of Harry's murderous intentions, the voiceover is omniscient, creating a split duality between present and future. Given that the voice faithfully reports every ensuing date, it heightens our sense of suspense and expectation.

So, too, does the clever depiction of the blue bottle laced with poison. A la Hitchcock, the bottle gets many close-ups of its own, a time bomb ticking toward Pat's untimely death. Will Harry get away with it? Will the tables turn? Who's the blonde and what does she really want? Is Richard all that concerned for his married friends, or is he outwardly supportive while intent on his own agenda?

The film's attention to detail is superb. The cinematography swoops loving over smoky, post-Deco eateries, the offices, the East Coast habitats of the upper class. Costume detail is elegant and exacting, down to the bands circling the men's hats and the minutiae on the women's ensembles. The soundtrack soars, particularly in the lush and haunting romantic theme that carries both Harry's and Richard's perception of perfect love, as represented by the mysterious Kay.

Writers Ira Sachs and Oren Moverman made some interesting choices in their adaptation. In the book, the wife is stereotypically cold, while the new girlfriend radiates sexual heat. In the film, by transforming the wife into a hot-blooded woman, the story takes on a much more interesting twist. It's not so much about sex as it is about old versus new, with an added dollop of self-deception. The tired refrain of "she doesn't understand me" gets an added wail of "she only wants me for sex," creating a far more complex examination of the human psyche when welded to another in that self-described bond called marriage.

Pierce Brosnan has a field day with Richard, his musings bending the drama toward black comedy. When Kay first appears, shimmering, beautiful, outdoing the likes of Lana Turner, Harry sings her praises by describing her love of books: "And she's a reader!" Brosnan settles back into his club chair, eyebrow raised, quietly sizing up Harry's idiocy with a simple "Mmm-hmmm."

The other three performers in this particular quadrangle are superb: Clarkson's steady wife with secrets of her own, McAdams as the lonely, compliant Kay and Chris Cooper tearing up the screen in a come-to-Jesus moment, stripped of all deception, forced to look deep into his own soul. Tot his Harry up as one more role in his cavalcade of stunning portrayals.

None of us has ever been able to successfully mine the mind of our lover. This film serves as a disturbing yet delicious, thought-provoking testament to that very idea.

Espousing this film: A perfect union of story, direction and acting. Truly, whole-y matrimony.