



Thursday December 29th 2022

Love and Friendship

UK/Ireland/France/Netherlands 2016 90mins Cert U

Writer-director Whit Stillman takes on Jane Austen's epistolary novella *Lady Susan* and, trying all he can, knows how to make a success of it - with good, highly civilised, polished results that will delight the many Jane Austen fans.

Set around 1800 (the film being a 'period', rather than a 'costume', drama), the central character is Lady Susan Vernon (Kate Beckinsale), a relatively young, impoverished noblewoman forced to take up temporary residence with her reluctant debutante daughter at her in-laws' estate. Lady Susan's personality is devious, shrewd, calculating, unprincipled and cunningly flirtatious - which might have been problematic for Beckinsale in portraying such an unsympathetic character. However, she gets to work with relish and skill and pulls it off. It is a good role, a big, splashy star role, but she makes the very best of it.

Morfydd Clark plays Lady Susan's rather sullen daughter Frederica, Tom Bennett the witless potential suitor Sir James Martin (a master of the social *faux pas*) and Xavier Samuel the highly eligible bachelor Reginald De Courcy, whom both mother and daughter fancy. Lady Susan is also a matchmaker and, luckily for her (and us), she has a confidante in the equally chilly but somehow mesmerising Alicia Johnson (Chloe Sevigny).

Jane Austen's acid wit and satire of the social mores of the day are of course what gives the film its sparkling dialogue and narrative drive - it's a refreshing change for an Austen adaptation to be something other than *Pride and Prejudice*! For an American director, Stillman gets the essential nature of Austen's writing pretty much right and properly conveys the idea that his film is a work of respect and a labour of love.

Love and Friendship is only his fifth feature film in 32 years - after *Metropolitan* (1990), *Barcelona* (1994), *The Last Days of Disco* (1998), starring both Chloe Sevigny and Kate Beckinsale, and *Damsels in Distress* (2011).

Kate Beckinsale won the Best Actress award for her role as Lady Susan at the 2016 Evening Standard British Film Awards and at the 2017 London Film Critics' Circle Awards. Whit Stillman won the Best Adapted Screenplay award at both the 2016 San Diego Film Critics Society Awards and the 2016 St Louis Gateway Film Critics Association Awards.

Acknowledgments: Derek Winnert, derekwinnert.com

"[Whit] Stillman respects and relishes Austen's creation but is no slave to it, inventing additional characters to help the story flow" Amber Wilkinson, *EyeforFilm*

"Whit Stillman's *Love and Friendship* is a Jane Austen [novella] transformed into cinema but it's also a film that has allowed itself to be 'contaminated' by literature - and that is the rarer, greater achievement"
Adam Thirlwell, *New York Review of Books*

Leading Players

Kate Beckinsale	Lady Susan Vernon
Morfydd Clark	Frederica Vernon
Tom Bennett	Sir James Martin
Chloe Sevigny	Alicia Johnson
Jenn Murray	Lady Lucy Manwaring

Production Credits

Director	Whit Stillman
Producers	Whit Stillman, Lauranne Bourrachot +13 others
Screenplay	Whit Stillman, adapted from Jane Austen novella
Cinematography	Richard van Oosterhaut
Music Editor	Editson Amsterdam

Coming soon

Jan 26th 2023

LES DEMOISELLES DE ROCHEFORT (France, 1967, 125mins, Cert PG) Jacques Demy's pastel-hued tribute to Hollywood musicals stars Catherine Deneuve and real-life sister Françoise Dorleac as twins whose provincial boredom is swept away when carnival comes to town. A jazzy score by Michel Legrand further enhances this charming, light-hearted operetta. "Everything about this film is hopping - there are no dead spots" Dennis Schwartz, dennisschwartzreviews.com



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