

Revolutionary Road

Fresh off her fine work in *The Reader*, Kate Winslet again shines in a period piece from another novel, *Revolutionary Road*, a 1961 work by Richard Yates. Focusing a microscope on dysfunction in the Connecticut suburbs during the 1950's, the narrative follows the Wheelers, Frank (Leonardo DiCaprio) and April (Winslet) as they muse about a life beyond their stultifying world on Revolutionary Road (heavy irony here, since there is nothing "revolutionary" in this 'burb).

They moved there only because April was pregnant, and now they live there "for the kids." Frank works at—and mocks--his dreary job in the city, while April feels cooped up between her prim house, her little kids, and their nosy neighbors, led by fussy real estate agent Helen Givings (Kathy Bates). A dream of a life in Paris beckons: April comes up with the idea and desperately wants to help Frank "fulfill himself" there; Frank, in turn, "wants to feel things" and thinks Paris might do the trick. Plans are fussily made, yet they are but thin dreams, eventually killed by the couple's own stumbling egotism and an unexpected pregnancy.

The Wheeler's life is all inchoate desires, longings that cannot be placated. The capper on their doomed future is provided by the film's truth-teller, John (Michael Shannon, in a stunning turn), the troubled son of Helen, who viciously chastises them about their impossible dream at their own dinner table in a shattering scene.

Not surprisingly, things do not end well. This is a kind of subterranean horror story told in the sweet light of calm neighborhoods and neat homes (the superb photography is supplied by Roger Deakins). In director Sam Mendes' hands and through Justin Haythe's script, *Revolutionary Road* has tinges both of *Madame Bovary* and a Theodore Dreiser novel in its depiction of thwarted lives. By the way, Mendes (the husband of Winslet) has been down this road before: his first film was that corrosive suburban study *American Beauty* (1999).

DiCaprio—in his first pairing with Winslet since the gigantic *Titanic*—is very effective playing off the actress as her charming but smarmy partner, a man who covers up his own emptiness with wise cracks, affairs, and easy complacency. It's a performance to like if not a character to like.

Kate Winslet here, reminiscent of her splendid performance in *Little Children*, convincingly plays a woman lost and struggling for control, and she does it in an impeccable American accent and with 20 variations on yearning. To watch her being crushed after her tepid acting in an amateur play takes on a special meaning: Kate Winslet crying over a bad performance!

(The film is rated "R" for mature themes and sexuality; running time is 119 mins.)

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