

# Film Review: Effie Gray (2014) at the Scottish National Gallery



Until late September, the impulsive, almost scintillating work of English artist and art critic John Ruskin, is being displayed the National Portrait Gallery in the exhibition, 'Artist and Observer'. In celebration of this, National Galleries Scotland invited director Richard Laxton to bring his much anticipated and consistently delayed feature, Effie Gray, to the city. After several attempts to release it and intrusive copyright claims getting in the way, Effie Gray met its first public audience in Edinburgh rather than Cannes. In front of a packed out crowd of art lovers in the National Gallery's Hawthornden Lecture Theatre, eager to delve into the life of Ruskin's wife and inspiration, that he grew apart from so quickly.

*In 19th century Scotland, an artist and his significantly younger partner wed, moving to his parent's English home where she is exposed to greater riches and high society. As her husband works in his own space, the young woman soon realises that this societal shift will change her attitudes and expectations in life.*

Effie Gray is a deftly crafted period drama that flourishes in the hands of its screenwriter and co-star, Emma Thompson. Often, her unique wit and intelligence shines clearly on screen even when she isn't there. She's a wonderful wordsmith, bringing issues to what could be a rather dreary, overdone idea and injecting it with great life. The story follows the couple through their wholly depressing relationship. The eponymous character lives a life of lustrous riches whilst

appearing wholly unsatisfied, allowing the viewer to delve into a 19th century film that doesn't all revolve around a ball room and grand dinner table. In its more quiet moments, it can grow slightly lethargic almost grinding to a halt. But this relaxation makes you notice the finer details that appear in its beautiful shots.

Starved of intimacy and the freedom to do as she pleases, Dakota Fanning delivers a grower of a performance in the film's lead role. She starts off slightly wooden and cliched and yet, over time embodies her character both physically and mentally, appearing glassy eyed and emotive by the time the credits roll. Her accent is distracting though, leaving us wondering if her Scottish attempt could've been *that* bad?

Effie Gray may be rather sombre and bleak, but its execution is so beautiful that it's apparent flaws can be partially forgiven. This is period drama that ventures outwith the usual tackiness of sweeping romance.

**The John Ruskin is currently open at the National Portrait Gallery, Queen Street.**

**Effie Gray opens in UK cinemas in October this year.**