

Mark
WHELAN

THE BEST FILMS OF THE DECADE:

A SEPARATION

There is a laborious level of intensity creeping beneath the surface of *A Separation* (2011). From its haunting opening sequence--a voyeuristic first-person-view concentrated directly on a married couple in dispute lamenting their grievances to a magistrate--Asghar Farhadi's potent family drama starts out with what appears to be a trivial dilemma. It is this seemingly benign circumstance of a couple's dissension that inevitably leads to greater conflict. Like a drop in water, the ripples are immanent and their consequences inevitable.

Farhadi has traversed similar territory in his other works *About Elly* (2008), *The Past* (2013), and *The Salesman* (2016) which won him a second international film Oscar, but has rarely seized the raw outcome sustained throughout *A Separation*. There is not a shred of falsehood detectable amid this complex and persuasive examination of an ordinary family living in Tehran.

It is tempting to shower praise solely on Farhadi, but if there are focal components to the ongoing conflicts that perpetuate both externally and internally throughout the film, they are masterfully conveyed through Payman Maadi and Leila Hatami.

As a man desperately attempting some semblance of control as his world crumbles around him, Maadi's portrayal elicits our immediate attention and empathy, while Hatami, the instigator of their failed pairing, is every bit his equal. The precious few moments they share on screen are seeped with bittersweet unease.

A Separation is not a typical inspection of a deteriorating partnership, but rather a commentary on how a single problem between two consenting adults can maneuver and influence others openly and implicitly. It has trenchant annotations on honesty, loyalty, and commitment, as well as some provocative statements regarding religion and hypocrisy.

Of all the films I've viewed the past decade, none have managed to hit me in the gut the way *A Separation* has.

From start to finish, its ring of truth resonates long after the final credits. It is an overpowering and captivating experience...and the best film of the decade.



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A Separation (2011)

D: Asghar Farhadi

C: Payman Maadi, Leila Hatami, Sareh Bayat, Shahab Hosseini, Sarina Farhadi, Merila Zare'i, Ali-Asghar Shahbazi, Babek Karimi, Kimia Hosseini, Shirin Yazdanbaksh

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