



MOTHER AND CHILD
A RODRIGO GARCÍA FILM



MOTHER AND CHILD

(US, 2009, d. Rodrigo Garcia)

A simple title for a complex, always interesting and always moving portrait, mainly of women, but also of some men and loving and family relationships, mingled with a lot of pain and sorrow.

Rodrigo Garcia previously directed two films which explore female characters and relationships: *Things You Can Tell by Just Looking at Her* (1999) and *Nine Lives* (2005). He has written and directed for television, especially several episodes of *Six Feet Under* and *In Treatment*. He has great skill in writing credible characters, telling stories with feeling and directing them for unobtrusive maximum effect.

There are at least seven mothers and children here but there are three at the centre of the film. Annette Bening gives one of her best performances as a fifty year old woman who had



to give up her baby for adoption when she gave birth at age 14. A demanding perfectionist with a curt manner, she looks after her aged and infirm mother and resents her mother's friendship with their house cleaner and her daughter. A co-worker at the hydrotherapy centre, a sympathetic Jimmy Smits, alienates her at first but a series of events leads to her softening and the possibilities of happiness in her life.

An excellent Naomi Watts plays an ambitious, steely-controlled (even in seduction) lawyer who was adopted and whose adoptive parents are dead. Independent, she goes to work in an LA firm for Samuel L. Jackson in a very humane role.

Meanwhile, Kerry Washington finds that she and her husband cannot have children and want to adopt. They meet Cherry Jones as the kind nun who supervises the adoption program. The pregnant mother who is to give the couple her child bonds with the adoptive mother but things don't work out for either the marriage or the adoption, although there is a satisfyingly happy ending despite a great deal of grief. The mothers of the husband and wife are important in this story as offering other angles on the mother and child theme, supportive mothers and dominating mothers.

Somebody remarked that this is the material of television soap opera. Yes, this is often the contents of episodes, but Garcia's treatment of material and characters goes well below the surface of the stories and explores the feelings for mothers for their children. The men are at the edge of the portraits of the women and several of them don't come off very well at all.

The film runs for just over two hours which enables us to spend quite an amount of time with the three principal women, to share their lives, their emotions and their decisions, even when we don't agree with them or find them sometimes alienating. It is a tribute to the three actresses that they are convincing and take us into the interior lives of the women they are portraying.
