



Perfect Nonsense

Snow White gets that Tarsem touch in *Mirror Mirror*

MIRROR MIRROR: Directed by Tarsem Singh. Screenplay, Jason Keller and Marc Klein; screen story by Melisa Wallack. Cinematography, Brendan Galvin. Editors, Robert Duffy and Nick Moore. Music, Alan Menken. Starring Julia Roberts, Lily Collins and Armie Hammer. Relativity Media, 2012. PG. 106 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Are we currently hung up on fairy tales, or is it just Snow White? *Once Upon a Time* and *Grimm* carry the fairy-tale banner on television; on the big screen, *Mirror Mirror* beats the upcoming *Snow White and the Huntsman* to the punch. Fairy tale retellings abound in novels and comics, plenty of them featuring the girl with white skin, red lips and ebony tresses.

Why all the Snows? The cynic in me thinks the entertainment industry's powers-that-be like retelling familiar stories by long-dead writers, especially when those stories pit innocent girls against wicked, vain witches; the idealist argues that there's something deep and true about fairy tales that keeps them fresh, even though we're forever sanitizing their gory endings and then dressing them back up in grownups' clothes. If *Snow White and the Huntsman* looks to be the dark, adult version of the tale and Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is for children, *Mirror Mirror* is right in the middle, a sweet, light coming-of-age story about a resourceful, good-hearted teen.

Mirror Mirror's evil queen (Julia Roberts, having more fun than you might expect) knows that you already know the story: The queen must be the fairest of them all; pretty Snow White (Lily Collins) threatens her reign just by existing. After the queen tries to kill her, Snow hides out in the woods with seven dwarves until a prince comes along

to marry her. Director Tarsem Singh (*The Fall*, *Immortals*) and his screenwriters tweak the story just so, balancing Snow's innocence with her quick mind and willingness to learn. Her dwarf friends aren't miners, but thieves who set upon their targets while wearing the most ingenious stilts; her prince, Alcott (a thoroughly likeable Armie Hammer), learns not to underestimate a woman with a sword — and not to refer to dwarves as children.

Collins' Snow is sweet, and her thief-in-training montage is utterly charming (and lets Snow be capable of far more than just housekeeping). But Snow White's story is always driven by the queen's jealousy and fear. The filmmakers conceive of her fantastical mirror as a doorway that opens, impossibly and beautifully, into a psychological bubble, a hidey-hole where she's locked away some powerful part of herself. Is the queen simply vain, or does she fear a world when a woman's only power is her looks? This queen also has a habit of overtaking the townsfolk, but that little bit of timeliness is of far less interest than the film's visions of insecurity, innocence, and the balance and passing of power between (step)mother and daughter.

Mirror Mirror looks as light as a meringue, and for the most part, it is; the psychological elements dust the playfully pretty pictures as lightly as the snow that incessantly falls in this magical realm. Still, it inhabits a very Tarsem space, a place where men wear funny gold hats, landscapes conform to no familiar rules of nature and modern women fit neatly into ancient fairy tale structures. When the musical number hits as the credits roll, it makes perfect nonsense. **EW**

Four Lovers

Director Antony Cordier's *Four Lovers* is a film that travels far beyond the borders of most comfort zones. When Rachel (Marina Foïs) brings home new friends Vincent (Nicolas Duvauchelle) and his wife Teri (Élodie Bouchez) to have dinner with her and husband Franck (Roschdy Zem), there is distinct chemistry among the four.

Forget about the nagging whys and hows of the situation: This film skips the entire setup and goes directly for the guts. Of course these two couples will swap partners, and of course it will be amazing and easy. And, at first, it is. Missing are the egos and the power struggle.

Vincent breaks first. Cultural ideals that might seem inherently American in nature are revealed as universally human. The women get jealous; the men get competitive.

The lightness of American romantic films is absent. In its place, however, is a murky depth that is somehow comforting in its oppressive presence. You want to believe that everything is possible. That adults can move so seamlessly in and out of relationships, knowing and believing that each step lands on firm ground, explicitly trusting their own and their partner's decisions. So when [spoiler alert] the final straw in this relationship(s) is an affair, you can't help but feel that it was you, in fact, who was lied to.

More than anything else, *Four Lovers* leaves one pondering the central question posed by Rachel herself: "Can you love two people at the same time?"

Four Lovers opens Friday, April 6, at Bijou Cinemas; bijou-cinemas.com — Sarah Decker



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