

Clooney's *Tender Bar* adequate at best



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For the Keizertimes

I like to think that I have lived a fairly interesting life so far, but I am under no illusions that anyone would ever care to read a book or watch a movie about it. It's a good life and it's my own, but it just doesn't have a narrative that would compel or interest anyone with the possible exception of my closest friends and family.

Biographies need to have a little something special to them if they are going to entertain, and it certainly doesn't hurt if the subject is a larger-than-life figure that everyone knows. *The Tender Bar* is a fairly well made (if not mind-blowing) film about the life of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist J.R. Moehringer that is mildly interesting in the first half, a slog in the second, and ultimately has very little of interest to say.

Directed by George Clooney, *The Tender Bar* (a pretentious and awkward name that I absolutely despise) is, in a word, adequate. The cinematography is fine (with the exception of a goofy-looking zoom-in here or there), the acting is fine (Ben Affleck as Uncle Charlie is the clear standout), and the script is, you guessed it, fine.

The first third of the film that focuses on a younger Moehringer (played by Daniel Ranieri) with occasional jumps

to Tye Sheridan's version of the character a few years later is interesting enough with its themes of fatherhood and family, giving the proceedings a nostalgic feel despite the commonplace tropes of the story.

But when the narrative moves completely over to Sheridan the pacing slows to a nasty crawl that is not alleviated by anything we as an audience have not seen thousands of times before. Sheridan's version of Moehringer goes to college, meets a girl, falls in love, experiences heartbreak, doubt, all that fun stuff. He gets a job but doesn't get the job he wanted, finally confronts his father, blah blah blah. Not helping matters is the fact that Affleck, the best part of the film, is mostly thrust into the background at this point and that Sheridan shows the emotional range of a particularly stoic cardboard box.

And somehow, *The Tender Bar* just

kept going and going. I was stunned when I learned that the entire film clocked in at only 104 minutes, as it felt like at least 180.

Could this have been improved by tighter editing and more succinct scriptwriting? Perhaps. But honestly I think the true culprit was the fact that Moehringer's story isn't that unique. Countless protagonists in literature have daddy issues. Everyone doubts themselves and everyone gets rejected by people they love and jobs they want.

And instead of giving the audience the "oh, this guy is just like me, how relatable," feeling *The Tender Bar* instead comes off as someone telling a story that they think is fascinating and unique when it just isn't. When it comes to being a piece of entertainment, *The Tender Bar* doesn't really justify its existence, I am sad to say.

The Tender Bar (ugh... that name...) is now available on Amazon Prime.



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