

**Admiring glance**  
Willy (Dominic West) recognises the talent of Colette (Keira Knightley)

poets". He is a dandy, a preening bon vivant, in love with his own voice. He writes stories and music reviews and likes to flirt with his hostesses in the smartest salons.

Willy is a "literary entrepreneur". He has no qualms about putting his name on Colette's semi-autobiographical stories and basking in what should be her glory. West plays him as a flamboyant and likeable figure with a flair for marketing.

They're an attractive couple with a shared sense of mischief. We are aware from the outset that Colette is cleverer and more talented than her husband, who blithely fritters away the money they earn on gambling, race horses and women. It is also clear that he is the one who (whatever his motives) kick-started her career.

The film-makers use waltz music and montages as we gallop

## Willy and Colette are an attractive couple with a shared sense of mischief

through the 1890s and early 1900s. Midway through, the film turns briefly into a farce as both Colette and Willy become enraptured by Georgie Raoul-Duval (Eleanor Tomlinson), a bisexual "wayward debutante from Louisiana".

Colette is far too strong a character to fall prey to romantic despair or to allow her spendthrift and philandering husband to upset her. Yet her ability to cope means the film is often short on tension. Whatever the situation, she makes the best of it. None of her relationships, whether with Willy or, later, with the androgynous aristocrat, Mathilde "Missy" de Morny (Denise Gough), are especially turbulent.

The film deals with a relatively small part of its subject's story, long before she wrote *Gigi*. This is the author in her formative years, and as a portrait of an artist as a young woman, the film is intriguing, Knightley excelling in the title role. But, as drama, it feels a little under-charged. **THE INDEPENDENT**

## Ripples but no waves in staged melodrama

**LIFE ITSELF (15)**

★★★★★

Dir: Dan Fogelman, 117 mins, starring: Oscar Isaac, Olivia Wilde, Annette Bening, Mandy Patinkin, Olivia Cooke, Laia Costa, Antonio Banderas

Life is the "ultimate unreliable narrator". That is one of the greeting card-style nuggets of wisdom shared in Dan Fogelman's trite and manipulative saga.

Fogelman is one of many filmmakers in recent years to explore the butterfly effect: a small action by one character has a seismic ripple effect on the lives of others.

Oscar Isaac plays Will, a dreamy New Yorker who, as a young student, waits for the perfect moment to ask out Abby (Olivia Wilde). They are so madly in love that it is inevitable that fate (or Fogelman) will play a few tricks on them.

Some of the dialogue is stilted and self-conscious. Abby can't resist talking about her thesis at length. By exploring the role of unreliable narrators in literature, she thinks she has discovered the secret of life itself.

Fogelman tells the story out of sequence. It is full of flashbacks and leaps into the future. Will is shown in sessions with a therapist (Annette Bening), failing to pull himself together. In one scene, the sweet-natured figure from earlier has turned into a raging, drunken, disturbed hobo.

The New York scenes are followed by a large section set in rural Andalusia, where the locals endure equally complicated emotional lives.

Just as Will courted Abby, proud and hard-working farm worker Javier (Sergio Peris-Mencheta) sets out to win the hand of the shy and charming Isabel (Laia Costa). The couple's idyllic life is disturbed by Javier's boss, Vincent (Antonio Banderas).

Vincent is a grizzled and menacing figure but one prey to self-pity, too. Like most of the others here, he has been bruised emotionally by horrific childhood experiences. We can't tell whether he wants to help Javier or steal Isabel. At least Banderas brings some charisma to his role.

In an otherwise bland affair, English actress Olivia Cooke shows some welcome rebellious attitude as a young woman scarred emotionally by events in her earliest infancy and ready to hit out at anyone who teases her.

The film touches again and again on the misery in its protagonists' lives but never steps too far into the darkness. For all the talk about unreliable narrators, we can almost always guess how events will unfold. Coincidences abound and you are always so aware that Fogelman is pulling the strings that it is impossible to lose yourself in his story. **THE INDEPENDENT**



**Star-cross'd?**  
Laia Costa and Sergio Peris-Mencheta as Javier and Isabel

**REEL = TALK =**

ALICE JONES



## 'Peep Show' writer darkens Sundance

A film written by Sam Bain (above) has been added to the line-up for this month's Sundance Film Festival. *Corporate Animals* is a horror comedy starring Demi Moore as the CEO of an edible cutlery company whose team-building trip takes a dark turn.



## Bale's Cheney keeps his shirt on

Christian Bale (above) gained 60lb to play Dick Cheney in the biopic *Vice*, but a trailer shot of him in boxer shorts did not make the final cut. "One problem with a movie that's six decades long is that it's six decades long," said director Adam McKay.



## 'A Quiet Place' sequel to expand world

John Krasinski has revealed details about a sequel to his cult hit *A Quiet Place*. It will revisit the apocalyptic world from "another perspective": "The world is the star of the movie. You can drop whoever you want into it and everyone feels connected to it."



## Spice Girls' cartoon heroes knocked back

The Spice Girls return to the stage this summer but their return to cinemas – following the 1997 film *Spice World* – is looking doubtful. The group has signed off on an animated superhero movie based on their alter egos, but it has yet to be picked up by a broadcaster or distributor.

**Film Matrix**

## WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE NEW RELEASES



**COLETTE (15)**

"Colette is a character-driven movie, but also one that is sending a message about social mores and their malleability." **The Wall Street Journal**

"Westmoreland's Paris is scrumptiously decadent – and seedy – as Colette navigates the city's gossip social scene." **New York Post**



**LIFE ITSELF (15)**

"The all-too-tidy web by which Fogelman's ensemble of characters interconnect plays as hackneyed and contrived." **South China Morning Post**

"Made for people who can't be trusted to understand storytelling unless it's laddled on and explained via montage and voiceover." **IndieWire**



**RBG (PG)**

"Informs, and even delights with its portrait of one of the more remarkable lawyers, judges, and feminist icons of our time." **Village Voice**

"A celebration of the octogenarian not just as a pop-culture folk hero and millennial meme but as a wife, a warrior and a true iconoclast." **Entertainment Weekly**



**ONE CUT OF THE DEAD (15)**

"Opens with monster mayhem before turning into a funny satire of genre film-making and then a charming family comedy-drama." **Variety**

"Endlessly head-spinning, turning a riotous genre treat into a love letter to both film-making and film-watching alike." **The Daily Telegraph**