



[The Woman in the Fifth](#)

Screened at [Cornerhouse, Manchester](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) February 2012

The fashion for established Hollywood actors to laud the films of the 1970s and lament the fact that adult films are no longer made continues with *The Woman in the Fifth*. While Ethan Hawke may not have the stature of Clooney or Pitt he too has spoken of this film harking back to a golden age. This is a self-consciously European film showing the terrible things that can happen to the innocent American abroad.

This story is of Tom Ricks (played by Ethan Hawke), a struggling American writer, broke and desperate, who has fled to Paris in the wake of a scandal that has cost him his job and his family. There he hopes to reunite with his six year old daughter, taken there by his estranged wife who has taken a restraining order against him and told the child that her father is dead. The woman is understandably disturbed by his arrival.

Tom's problems mount as his luggage and wallet are stolen, and finds himself staying in a run-down hotel where he takes a job as a night watchman. He spends his days stalking his daughter and working on an epic letter that will explain the past and his actions to her. His mundane existence is transformed by his meeting with Margit, a mysterious widow played by Kristin Scott Thomas – the woman who lives in the Fifth Arrondissement. She offers herself as his muse and through their relationship she convinces him he can rediscover his talent.

But as Margit provides a refuge, mysterious threatening events begin to darken Tom's daily life and his mental state becomes more unstable. The film's tone darkens and the mysteries become even deeper.

The film is based on the Douglas Kennedy novel, of a writer who walks the line between literary and commercial fiction, like Jodi Picoult he treats big issues, but there is sometimes less there than meets the eye. Last year's French film '*The Big Picture*' starring Duris and Deneuve, was a more satisfying adaptation of a Kennedy novel.

But 'The Woman in the Fifth' is beautifully shot by Ryszard Lenczewski and backed by a haunting score from Max de Wardener. Scott-Thomas is mesmerisingly beautiful and satisfyingly mysterious, whilst Hawke provides an interesting portrayal of a man falling apart. It is also a welcome return by Pawel Pawlikowski as Director, who made the wonderful 'My Summer of Love'.

This is an interesting, beautiful and rewarding film.