



Too many books spoil the broth

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
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There is a distinct sense of unevenness in 'Julie & Julia,' a movie about a woman whose book revolutionized American home cooking, and another who blogged her way through it

Julie & Julia boasts that it is based on two true stories: that of Julia Child, the diplomat's wife turned chef whose book *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* revolutionized the American culinary scene, and Julie Powell, whose blog about working her way through that very same book was turned into a best-selling chick-lit novel.

In effect, packed into the two hours of the film are not just two true stories, but two books, three if you count Child's *My Life in France*, from which much of her story is taken, and a blog. As most movies face problems adapting just one novel into film format, it is hardly a surprise that *Julie & Julia* is constantly in danger of falling apart from an excess of ingredients.

There is nevertheless much to admire, not least Meryl Streep's performance as Julia Child, the large American woman who barrels her way through France with a trans-Atlantic gusto that shocks and delights the Continentals in equal measure. Streep creates a portrait of Child that possesses considerable depth, but her story, from her discovery of the delights of good French cooking to her efforts to study the cuisine seriously and eventually publish a book demystifying it for an American audience, is little more than a sketch.

The lack of detail is necessary, for the story must constantly cut forward to Amy Adams' (as Julie Powell) struggle to find meaning in her life through

Film Notes

JULIE & JULIA

DIRECTED BY:
NORA EPHRON

STARRING:
MERYL STREEP (JULIA CHILD), AMY ADAMS (JULIE POWELL), STANLEY TUCCI (PAUL CHILD), CHRIS MESSINA (ERIC POWELL), LINDA EMOND (SIMONE BECK)

RUNNING TIME:
123 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY



Meryl Streep, above right and bottom left, and Amy Adams, top left, star in *Julie & Julia*, directed by Nora Ephron.

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egg yoke" never really emerges, and the seriousness of Child's endeavor gets smothered in chick-flick marshmallow.

At its heart, *Julie & Julia* is a film about publishing: the emotional payoffs are Child eventually finding a publisher for her revolutionary 700-page cookbook, and the realization of Powell's dream to monetize her blog (something she has done with remarkable success; this film also boasts that it's the first motion picture based on a blog).

There is also a distinct sense of unevenness about the movie. Amy Adams is no match for Streep, and Child's memoirs of her life in France, even in the sparse form they are presented here, are significantly more interesting than Powell's one-year blog project and minor relationship blunders. The loving attention paid to period detail, which makes the 1960s sections so lush, also gives the modern sequences a low-rent made-for-TV feel.

So while *Julie & Julia* is not a terrible film, there is nothing very satisfying about it either. Ephron tries to do too many things at once and, skilled director that she is, gets through the task, though with a palpable sense of effort. Clearly she intended the film to be a light soufflé, but it has ended up a rather stodgy pudding.