



TRANSCRIPT



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Cinema Review
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Duplicity
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Because I write movie reviews, friends of mine have shown some surprise when I tell them that I don't see all of the movies that are released. I explain to my friends that I like to be selective about the movies that I choose to see. I tell them that if I was obliged to see every movie that hit the screen, I would find myself sitting through a lot of movies in which I had no interest and, worse, that I would be watching a lot of movies that were really bad. The task of reviewing would become a chore instead of a pleasure.

Besotted by movies, as I am, I will readily concede that there are too many movies released each year that should never have been made. It puzzles me somewhat how this can happen, given the tortuous process of development – typically taking many years - that almost all movie projects have to endure before they get the greenlight to go into production.

Nonetheless, despite what should be a rigorous process of quality control, bad movies still manage to get made. By “bad” I'm not necessarily referring to movies that you or I may not like because they are unpleasant or in poor taste. For instance, gruesome “slasher” movies, which are carefully designed to scare the willikers out of a certain demographic, are not to my taste at all and I will do my best to avoid them.

However, it is quite possible that some of these movies are actually well made with carefully-crafted screenplays and plenty of astounding special effects. “Bad” movies, on the other hand, are those movies that you go along to see with a reasonable expectation of some satisfying entertainment, but which then turn out to be time-wasting, and money-wasting, disappointments. You may have built up your expectations from seeing the trailers or just being exposed to some of the “hype”.

In the past I have reviewed some very bad movies on this program – *The Da Vinci Code* and Baz Luhrmann's pretentiously-named *Australia* – come to mind. Generally, the source of a bad movie is to be found in a badly-written screenplay. Or, sometimes, the central concept on which the movie is based is just plain silly – as with *The Da Vinci Code*. As I said, I try to avoid such turkeys by choosing carefully from what's on offer but, with all the care in the world, I can still make mistakes.

Such was the case when I went to see a recent release called *Duplicity*. This is a really, really bad movie. One to be avoided like the plague. I would give it perhaps one star – and I would do even that reluctantly.

So how was I conned into going to see it? Well, to start with, the theme of the story seemed to hold out some promise. I had gathered that it was a spy story with a difference. This time, about

industrial espionage, with two former real-life spies ferreting-away to find out the secrets hidden inside a couple of big companies.

To this point the story seemed to hold the possibility of an absorbing dose of conspiracy-theory, perhaps something like *The Insider*, that edge-of-seat thriller of a few years ago in which Russell Crowe played a tobacco industry whistle-blower. Then there was the leading lady – Julia Roberts – making a comeback to the screen after an absence of a year or two indulging in the joys of motherhood.

When it comes to conspiracy-theory thrillers, Julia has shown in the past that she can really deliver the goods. Back in 2000 she won, and well-deserved, the Best Actress Oscar for the namesake-role in the industrial cover-up thriller, *Erin Brokovich*. And, well before that, there was *The Pelican Brief* in which Julia was just terrific in the role of the young law student whose life is placed in jeopardy because she has stumbled upon an assassination plot. And, let me say, in *Duplicity*, Julia Roberts is certainly not the worst thing about it. It's not her acting that is at fault, it's the role she is given to play.

And the same goes for her co-star, Clive Owen. He's a chap with plenty of screen presence too, but, for goodness sake, he too needs something to work with and the screenplay of *Duplicity* does not supply it.

There's nothing I like better than a tightly-written conspiracy-theory movie, with an intricate plot that challenges the viewer to keep up with the twists and turns. But it must have a logical structure embedded somewhere within it and I failed to find this in *Duplicity*.

I felt that the presentation of the story was confused and confusing. Its style is a nod in the direction of the old screwball comedies of the forties and fifties. That is to say, that there is nothing to make us really care about anything that happens in the story and any dramatic aspects of the plot play second fiddle to the on-again off-again romance which develops between the two leading characters.

However, in the screwball movies, there was usually a story of sorts whereas, in *Duplicity*, the viewer has absolutely no idea what is going on for most of the time and the final resolution – if you can call it that – is unsatisfying and simply irritating.

The writer-director responsible for this half-baked mess is a New Yorker called Tony Gilroy who, in the past, has given us some very good action thrillers including the Jason Bourne trilogy. The first two Bourne movies were great, whiz-bang entertainment but the third was not quite so good. Maybe this suggests that Gilroy is losing his touch and, if this is so, it does not bode well for his latest writing effort, another conspiracy-theory subject called *State of Play*, which stars Russell Crowe.

However, the storyline for that movie is drawn from a popular British television mini-series so, hopefully, Gilroy will at least have had a better *theme* to work on than the nonsense of *Duplicity*.

Duplicity will no doubt turn up in the video stores soon. When it does, you can happily give it a miss. My apologies for the rather grumpy tone this time. I hope I'll have something better to talk about next time.

Bye for now. I'll see you in the back stalls.