



TRANSCRIPT

Cinema Review - *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and *Date Night*

John J McGowan

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I recently saw two movies with such vastly contrasting themes that I came to the conclusion that, sometimes, there may be good reasons for bringing back the old-style screening scheduling of the Double Feature programme. One of the movies I saw took us on a journey into the depths of human depravity – unsettling and depressing - while the other movie was a delightful piece of froth and bubble.

If they had been on a Double Feature together, the second movie would have been a perfect antidote to the first one. However, they are *not* on together and the benefit of this is that I can happily recommend that you can toddle off to see one of them – while if you are a sensitive kind of person – you may choose to avoid the other.

The two movies are: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* – a gruesome Swedish variant on *The Silence of the Lambs* – and a delightful, fun-and-games comedy called *Date Night*.

The story behind *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is probably well-known to many listeners given that it is based on a novel which is said to have sold 30 million copies world wide. However, just in case you – like me – were one of the few people not to have read the book – I'll scoot through a brief description of the movie.

It's a thriller in which an investigative journalist is hired by a wealthy industrialist to probe into the disappearance of the man's niece – a mystery which began some thirty years earlier. The journalist is eventually assisted by a computer-savvy Goth: a girl with the demeanour of a guard dog, whose own past is pitted with incidents of terrifying violence.

Disturbingly, the girl's back is covered by a tattoo of a dragon. Together, the journalist and the girl move into a remote cottage on the industrialist's vast country estate and gradually become acquainted with other members of the missing girl's highly dysfunctional extended family. The investigating duo begin turning over metaphorical rocks in the family's garden with some very nasty results.

The plot begins to thicken-up nicely as the pair of investigators begin to assemble what turns out to be a satisfyingly-complex jigsaw puzzle, and some pretty well developed dramatic tension spices up the action.

So far so good, you might say. So what's the problem?

Well it's really just the unpleasantness associated with delving into the awful, unfathomable depths of the mind of a bestial, predatory criminal. If you have the stomach for it well and good, but I find this sort of material the stuff of nightmares. I gave *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* three stars because it's a well-constructed thriller which is sustained right to the last frame – but I can't say that I enjoyed it.

On the other hand, I did thoroughly enjoy *Date Night* and would recommend it without reservation as a delightfully chuckly soufflé. Don't be put off by the rather unfortunate title which perhaps raises the expectation that this movie is one of those vacuous teen flicks designed to exploit audiences of popcorn munching juveniles.

It's not like that at all. The "date night" of the title refers to an evening out in which a married couple leave their two children in the care of a babysitter and head off into the city for dinner at an up-market restaurant in an effort to put some romance back into their busy lives.

However, they have neglected to make a reservation at the popular restaurant and, in a desperate gamble to secure a table, they pretend that they are a couple who have not yet claimed their reservation. This subterfuge leads to a case of mistaken identity when some standover men turn up and demand that the couple give them "the stolen flashdrive".

This leads to a helter-skelter pursuit through the back streets of Manhattan during which the couple get themselves deeper and deeper into hot water in bizarre situations peopled with many strange characters.

Date Night is the kind of movie that once used to be called screwball comedy: people – usually a couple – find themselves in a situation in which they are way out of their depth, and the more they struggle to escape their predicament, the worse it gets. It's a tried and tested formula and it works just a treat in *Date Night*.

The harassed couple in this case are played with brilliant deadpan by experienced comedy performers Tina Fey and Steve Carell. There's a lot of slapstick and a whacky car chase but the dialogue is where this movie really shines. And it's not all just to do with the nonsense of the plot.

Although every line sparkles with embedded quips there is an underpinning element of thoughtful analysis of the relationship of a couple whose marital verve has been dulled by the hum-drum pressures of daily life. It's this underlying truth which gives *Date Night* its firm foundation and provides a good counterpoint to all of the zany silliness. *Date Night* is a feel-good movie and it certainly brightened up my day.

I gave it four stars.

Oh, and by the way, if you go to see it, be sure to stay in your seat until the closing credits have ended. The producers have thrown in a flurry of out-takes which are a sheer delight.

Furthermore, there's a South Australian connection with *Date Night*. The Director of Photography was our own Dean Semler. Born in the Riverland, Dean Semler began his career as a cinematographer with Channel Nine in North Adelaide in 1961.

Dean went on to become one of the most sought after cinematographers in Hollywood and is one of only two South Australian-born people to have made significant careers in the American motion picture industry.

The other one passed away more than fifty years ago. His name, coincidentally, is the same as mine.

Well, good-bye for now.
I'll see you in the back stalls.