People are no damn good

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Usually over simplification is fairly easy. All you have to do is point a finger and say in a stentorian and authoritative voice, “that is good,” or, more likely, “That is abominable.” Simple.

There arise, however, some exceptions to this iron-clad rule—and for the most part they are the bane of any self-respecting reviewer. It is comparatively easy to be brilliant in writing a black (or possibly white) review, but Geathless prose is hardly forthcoming in reviewing something, say, like “The Visit.”

‘Visit’ A Bomb

Ah, well, onward.

It has long been the contention that when a movie adopts the title of some play or book, it generally should be the same as that play or book. That is, it shouldn’t misrepresent itself to the public.

By the strictest use of the above mentioned rule, “The Visit” was a bomb. Horror of horrors, they changed the story; they even changed the ending (which by the way, I have no intention of revealing) and hence technically changed the meaning of the whole thing.

They Wouldn’t?

For those of you who read Friedrich Duerrenmatt’s spell-binding play, you may remember that the plot concerns itself with the return of a multi-billionnaireess to the town where she was born. The town has hit on hard times, and everybody sees in their beloved Claire the hope of a brighter future (i.e. money).

The billionaireess lives up to all expectations by offering a million pounds to the inhabitants for the murder of the man who made her pregnant when she was seventeen, bribed two men to swear they’d slept with her, and had her driven from the town, branded as a prostitute.

The rest of the play concerns itself with the gradual buildup to the murder, while the viewer sits horrified saying, “they wouldn’t dare.” They do dare.

Bergman Brilliant

The movie changes much of the stage techniques evident in the play. Gone is the Greek chorus type of postscript added at the end, also gone are many of the lesser characters and some of the superfluous plot elements (such as Claire’s multiple weddings).

Of course, there is a new love interest, with the invariable innocent bedroom scene, which is totally irrelevant, but makes for pretty hot publicity pictures.

But even these heinous Hollywoodisms can be overlooked by the brilliant portrayal of Claire Zachanassian by Ingrid Bergman. In the play, Duerrenmatt specifies false ivory limbs for his hard-hearted billionnaireess, but Bergman doesn’t need such props to signify her cruelty.

Message Clear

Moreover, in the play, Claire Zachanassian is almost completely inhuman. Ingrid Bergman is most definitely a woman—but she still retains that icy smile of a she-wolf about to lunge.

Anthony Quinn does his part as the hunted lover, but the role is hardly a match for Zachanassian, and it would take a weird sort of brilliance to overpower Bergman from that standpoint.

So the movie is technically a bomb. But in the spirit of our basic tenet, the movie is brilliant. For, while it does not adhere strictly to the Duerrenmatt design, it brings out the Duerrenmatt message.

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