



DENIS VILLENEUVE: THE PATH TO DUNE

Enemy

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

‘Chaos is order yet undeciphered.’ Spoken in a conversation that is otherwise not included in Denis Villeneuve’s deeply beguiling adaptation of José Saramago’s novel *The Double*, the line used as *Enemy*’s epigraph summarises the challenge the film poses to its audience. That’s true whether the viewers in question already delight in deciphering puzzle films such as Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000) or *Inception* (2010) or come to *Enemy* hoping for a more clearly signposted mystery thriller along the lines of *Prisoners* (2013), the Canadian director’s other recent teaming with star Jake Gyllenhaal. In either case, they may react to *Enemy*’s aggressive disdain for storytelling conventions and cheeky refusal to cede its secrets with the same air of befuddlement that greeted the film’s premiere in Toronto in September 2013, when several moments of stunned silence followed the final spidery surprise.

First published in the original Portuguese in 2002, Saramago’s novel is similarly unforthcoming about the cosmic machinations that have resulted in two entirely identical men sharing the same pocket of the space-time continuum. Instead of pondering the reasons for this aberration or its potential impact on our commonly held but perhaps equally absurd delusions about our uniqueness as individuals, the novel’s unidentified narrator busies himself with an account of the tightly wound protagonist’s efforts to discover the identity and whereabouts of his double while concealing his own role in this unprecedented predicament. (The reasons behind the plague in Saramago’s *Blindness* – whose 2008 film adaptation was co-produced by some of the team behind *Enemy* – were similarly obscure.) The protagonist’s foundering results in a comedy of errors (and manners) whose seemingly light-hearted tone belies the existential horror at the story’s core, as well as the cruelly tragic nature of its finale, which leaves him essentially imprisoned in his double’s existence.

In their adaptation, Villeneuve and Spanish screenwriter Javier Gullón retain much of Saramago’s dry humour while amplifying the dread with elements of their own invention. As a result, the matter of *Enemy*’s own identity becomes nearly as slippery as that of its two identical protagonists. After an alluring intro set in a sex club that seems rather less classy than the iconic example in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), the film settles into a more wryly satirical mode, with teacher Adam’s classroom talk of Marx and history’s repetitions juxtaposed with glimpses of his personal hamster wheel of glum streetcar commutes and joyless couplings with girlfriend Mary. When he comes across the existence of his double, actor Anthony, his actions push the proceedings into the shape of a mystery story, albeit one with a rather hapless sleuth who is soon hopelessly trapped inside ‘the plot of a detective novel with no known criminal’, as Saramago’s narrator puts it.

Like the source material, Villeneuve’s film contains more than a few traces of sex farce, too. After all, our store of ribald tales would surely be drastically reduced if not for the abundance of incidents involving mistaken, concealed or switched identities. Anthony – whose history of philandering is suggested in a

fraught exchange with his wife Helen – certainly recognises the potential advantages of his situation. Following Mary on to a streetcar, he sizes her up with the air of a predator who is absolutely certain of his hunting prowess. He understands that he already possesses the most perfect of all disguises. (In one of the film's smarter reversals, it is Helen who proves to be the bolder lover, when she plays along with Adam's far from persuasive impersonation of her husband.)

Enemy displays a similarly playful attitude towards its place in a lineage of films with twin or otherwise identical characters, a tradition that seems especially rich in Toronto (where this film is set) thanks to Jeremy Irons's double act in David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1988) and Tatiana Maslany's astounding performance as a multiplicity of clones in the BBC America hit *Orphan Black* (2013-). It was thanks to another piece of synchronicity that *Enemy* arrived on the festival circuit at the same time as Richard Ayoade's adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Double*, with Jesse Eisenberg facing off against himself. But compared with the performers in these examples, Gyllenhaal has relatively few encounters with himself, and Villeneuve is largely uninterested in wowing viewers with the sight of two Jakes sharing the frame. In fact, he goes so far as to skip the opportunity for a fight scene – Saramago's actor is far rougher than the timid teacher, immobilising him with an armlock during their confrontation over his nefarious plans.

And whereas Eisenberg's pair of rivals in *The Double* are locked in the ego-versus-id dynamic typical of twin tales, the personalities of Adam and Anthony do not boast so many easily discernible differences. Hesitant and nervous in his manner, Adam may display little of the actorly swagger we see in Anthony, but the two men share a certain aloofness and a cool determination to see their decisions through, even when their later ones prompt a growing degree of identity confusion. This is most startling when Adam visits his mother, played with a marvellous hauteur by Isabella Rossellini. When she makes a disdainful reference to his acting career, both Adam (if it is actually Adam) and the viewer rightly wonder who he's supposed to be. There's the possibility that she's been Anthony's mother all along.

Appropriating the self-dividing protagonists of *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Dr.* (2003) would hardly count as the only move that *Enemy* borrows from David Lynch's playbook. His influence is just as palpable in the oddly languorous pacing of many scenes and the hard, washed-out look of Toronto, whose curvy cylinders of glass and concrete reaching up into smoggy skies of yellow could almost pass for Lynch's Los Angeles. The Silencio-like club and the arachnid motif are Villeneuve and Gullón's most conspicuous additions to Saramago's story. Whatever the spider's symbolic significance may be (perhaps we're meant to think of a Jorogumo, a creature that transforms into a human seductress in Japanese folklore), the motif prompts some of *Enemy*'s most striking images. The shiny face of a spider-woman glimpsed in one of Adam's dreams is cleverly evoked by the sheen of the motorcycle helmet that Anthony wears to conceal himself while stalking Mary. Likewise, the web-like appearance of a cracked window in a car wreck forecasts Adam's final surprise.

All this is highly indicative of a filmmaker who's having a grand old time. That might come sometimes at the viewer's expense, but it's hard to begrudge Villeneuve his indulgences when they yield this much pleasure. The director seems consistently delighted at this opportunity to shift away from the high-minded seriousness of *Prisoners and Incendies* (2010) and demonstrate the

same fair for the absurd he showed in *Maelstrom* (2000), a similarly audacious, arresting and confounding drama that may not have had any spiders but did have a dead fish for a narrator.

Playing a character who’s a far cry from his saucer-eyed sociopath in Tony Gilroy’s *Nightcrawler* (2014), Gyllenhaal faces the tricky task of conveying the subtle differences of two men whose identities are thrown into flux. The result is his most nuanced performance since playing another sleuth caught out of his depth in *Zodiac* (2007). Like David Fincher’s masterful descent into the irrational and the unknowable, *Enemy* offers no tidy solutions, only a very sticky web and a hungry creature that’s ready to swallow you whole.

Jason Anderson, *Sight & Sound*, January 2015

ENEMY
Directed by: Denis Villeneuve
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Production Companies: Rhombus Media, Roxbury Pictures
With: micro_scope, Mecanismo Films
Produced with the participation of: Téléfilm Canada, Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales, Corus Entertainment, Televisión Española, Ontario Media Development Corporation, Société de développement des entreprises culturelles - Québec, Gobierno de España, Movie Central, The Movie Network
Produced with the assistance of: Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit, Quebec Film and Television Tax Credit
Presented by: Pathé, Entertainment One
International Sales: Pathé International
Executive Producers: François Ivernel, Cameron McCracken, Mark Slone, Victor Loewy
Produced by: Niv Fichman, Miguel A. Faura
Co-producers: Sari Friedland, Luc Déry, Kim McCraw
Location Manager: Anne Richardson
Creative Supervisor (Post-production): Matthew Hannam
Post-production Supervisor: Mariano Liwski
1st Assistant Director: Reid Dunlop
Script Supervisor: Jill Carter
Casting: Deirdre Bowen
Written by: Javier Gullón
Based on the novel The Double *by:* José Saramago
Photographed by: Nicolas Bolduc
Steadicam Operator: Sean Sealey

Visual Effects: Rodeo FX
Edited by: Matthew Hannam
Designed by: Patrice Vermette
Art Director: Sean Breough
Set Designer: Martha Sparrow
Costumes: Renée April
Key Make-up Artist: Catherine Viot
Key Hair: Debra Johnson
Original Music: Danny Bensì, Saunder Jurriaans
Sound Design: Oriol Tarragó
Production Sound Mixer: Herwig Gayer
Re-recording Mixer: Marc Bech
Re-recording Mixing: Marc Orts
Sound Editor: Albert Ribas
Stunt Co-ordinator: Alison Reid

Cast
Jake Gyllenhaal (*Adam/Anthony*)
Mélanie Laurent (*Mary*)
Sarah Gadon (*Helen*)
Isabella Rossellini (*mother*)
Josh Peace (*teacher at school*)
Tim Post (*Anthony’s concierge*)
Kedar Brown (*security guard*)
Darryl Dinn (*video store clerk*)
Misha Highstead, Megan Mane, Alexis Uiga (*ladies in dark room*)

Canada/Spain/France 2013
91 mins

DENIS VILLENEUVE: THE PATH TO DUNE

Enemy
Wed 1 Sep 14:30; Sun 12 Sep 12:20; Tue 21 Sep 20:55
Prisoners
Wed 1 Sep 20:00; Tue 14 Sep 14:15; Sat 25 Sep 17:00
August 32nd on Earth (Un 32 août sur terre)
Thu 2 Sep 20:50; Thu 16 Sep 18:20
Blade Runner 2049
Sat 4 Sep 20:00; Sat 18 Sep 17:15; Fri 24 Sep 14:15; Sun 3 Oct 17:30

Maelström
Mon 6 Sep 18:15; Fri 17 Sep 20:55
Polytechnique
Fri 10 Sep 21:20; Sun 19 Sep 12:15; Thu 30 Sep 20:50
Incendies
Sat 11 Sep 20:30; Fri 17 Sep 17:50; Sun 19 Sep 14:45
Sicario
Sun 12 Sep 18:10; Wed 22 Sep 20:40; Sat 25 Sep 20:40
Arrival
Thu 16 Sep 20:45; Tue 28 Sep 14:15; Sat 2 Oct 17:30

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