

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "BREACH"

Robert Hanssen's character is so sated in contradictions that if he were a writer's creation, the writer would be criticized for unbelievable inconsistency. Yet Hanssen is the real deal, living out his days in a federal penitentiary without parole.

In what former FBI and CIA director William Webster called "possibly the worst intelligence disaster in U.S. history," Hanssen sold state secrets for over 20 years. Yet he was a fanatic about loyalty and considered himself a patriot. A proselytizing member of Opus Dei, he was a devout Catholic who attended daily mass yet he identified Soviet agents working on behalf of the U.S., agents who were consequently executed. He was a devoted father of six and a loving husband yet he vividly wrote about his sex life on the Internet and videotaped lovemaking with his wife for his friends' viewing pleasure, never letting her know she was being filmed. He openly opposed strip clubs, scorning others in the Bureau who attended them yet secretly sponsored a stripper, giving her cash and a Mercedes, all the while (supposedly) never touching her. He loved his father yet he hated his father. Twisted. Fascinating. What a movie this would have made.

Per writer/director Billy Ray (writer/director of "Shattered Glass"): "I tend to be attracted to stories that are about deception yet attracted to characters that have that split down the middle who are able to compartmentalize, to live one kind of life on the outside, and a very different interior life."

And there's the rub. The audience needs to see that interior life.

Instead, "Breach" examines the six weeks prior to Hanssen's 2001 capture, as told through the point of view of Hanssen's new 27-year-old assistant who is assigned to draw him out.

If we don't get enough of a psychological examination of Hanssen to understand the "why" of his deception, then perhaps we should be allowed to see the "how." But the initial tip-off to the FBI and ensuing day-to-day investigation has already happened by the time the film opens, with a casual aside from agent Kate Burroughs (Laura Linney) that 50 people are studying Hanssen's every move.

As for the audience getting a chance to study the characters' every move, Billy Ray often shoots his principals in extreme close-up, their faces so large that the screen can't contain the whole of them. Would that Mr. Ray might have considered their psyches, as opposed to their pores, in such close-ups.

This is not to say that the marvelous Chris Cooper didn't deliver. But similar to Hanssen vs. the U.S. government, in the instance of Billy Ray vs. Chris Cooper, Cooper was robbed. The real Hanssen was said to have given off a grave manner, nicknamed "The Mortician." But he was also a master manipulator and egotist. Then let us see Cooper's Hanssen enjoying the mind games he plays with his assistant Eric (Ryan Phillippe). If this is supposed to be spy against spy, lie against lie, where's the contest? The appetite to win? Where's the full-blooded man in this mano-a-mano?

Similarly, the real life Eric O'Neill is described as "confident bordering on cocky." Yet "cocky" must have landed on the editing room floor. Phillippe gives us a doe-eyed, fresh-faced young'un, scared but doing his best to load up his sling in a David v. Goliath rock throw. However, hats off to Laura Linney as O'Neill's no-nonsense superior. Though she conveys the necessary gravitas, she manages to humanize her portrayal, finding a few gleams of welcome humor.

Since most of the audience is already familiar with the general facts of the Robert Hanssen case, it's not the outcome that keeps us in our seats. Whether it's the story of John Nash, a mathematician battling schizophrenia in "A Beautiful Mind," Frank W. Abagnale giving chase in "Catch Me If You Can," or even Mr. Ray's own rendering of journalist Stephen Glass in "Shattered Glass," it's not the endingâ€”but the examination of the journey to that endingâ€”that matters.

Robert Hanssen, we hardly knew ye. Still.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: B

[Click here to view the movie trailer of â€œBreachâ€•.](#)

Kimberly Gadette can be reached at gadettek@yahoo.com Production Credits: "Breach" Directed by: Billy Ray Screenplay by: Adam Mazer & William Rotko and Billy Ray Story by: Adam Mazer & William Rotko Cast: Chris Cooper, Ryan Phillippe, Laura Linney, Gary Cole, Dennis Haysbert, Kathleen Quinlan, Bruce Davison Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 110 minutes Grade: B

Read more of Kimberly Gadette's 'Screen Savor' movie reviews:

Because I Said So The Good German Stomp The Yard

Dreamgirls The Pursuit Of Happyness Alpha Dog

See the full list of â€œScreen Savorâ€• reviews.

The Screen Savor: â€”A Spy for a Spyâ€™ by Kimberly_Gadette