

THE END OF THE TOUR

Monday, October 5, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by A. O. Scott— New York Times *Rated R* *106 Mins.*

“There’s an unhappy paradox about literary biographies,” David Foster Wallace observed in *The New York Times Book Review* in 2004, in reference to “Borges: A Life.” Readers who pick up such books, drawn by their admiration for a writer’s work, are likely to find themselves distracted and disappointed by a welter of iffy theories and picayune data. In the case of Borges, Wallace argued, “the stories so completely transcend their motive cause that the biographical facts become, in the deepest and most literal way, irrelevant.”

The same can be said of Wallace himself, and, for that matter, of just about any author worth reading. The work is everything; the life is trivia. And since I’m about to praise a movie about David Foster Wallace that claims fidelity to at least some of the facts of his life, I should perhaps identify myself as a devoted nonconsumer of literary biographies, an avowed biopic skeptic and, unless someone offers me a lot of money to write one, a habitual avoider of celebrity profiles. So by all rights I should hate “*The End of the Tour*,” James Ponsoldt’s new film, a portrait of the writer that has its origins in a (never-published) magazine profile. In fact, I love it.

Some of the people closest to Wallace, who committed suicide in 2008, have condemned the movie sight unseen, and friends of his who did see it have found fault with both its details and its overall design. As an ardent, ambivalent reader of Wallace’s prose and a complete stranger to him personally, I can only respect such objections. But the movie, in my view, disarms them — not because it offers an especially loving or lifelike picture of its subject but rather because David Foster Wallace is not really its subject at all. “*The End of the Tour*” is at once an exercise in post-postmodern literary mythmaking and an unsparing demolition of the contemporary mythology of the writer. It’s ultimately a movie — one of the most rigorous and thoughtful I’ve seen — about the ethical and existential traps our fame-crazed culture sets for the talented and the mediocre alike.

There are two Davids in the movie, which takes place in 1996. Both of them are writers. One is Wallace (Jason Segel), whose third book of fiction, the 1,079-page dystopian tennis-rehab epic “*Infinite Jest*,” has just been published to hyperbolic acclaim. The other is David Lipsky (Jesse Eisenberg), whose own recently released novel, “*The Art Fair*,” has met with polite indifference. An early scene finds him on his couch reading “*Infinite Jest*” while his girlfriend, Sarah (Anna Chlumsky), is curled up with the season’s other fictional blockbuster, the anonymously published political roman à clef “*Primary Colors*.” (Oh, the ‘90s. Sorry you missed all the fun, kids. Kind of sorry I didn’t.)

David L., a new, probationary hire at *Rolling Stone* magazine, convinces his skeptical editor (Ron Livingston) that David F.W. is worthy of a feature article, and so finds himself in Bloomington, Ill., in the middle of winter. (Wallace taught for many years at Illinois State University.) The plan is that the reporter will accompany the novelist to Minneapolis, the last stop on his book tour. He does, and that’s pretty much the plot of the movie.

Mr. Ponsoldt, whose earlier features include “*The Spectacular Now*” and “*Smashed*,” would much rather observe two people in aimless conversation than usher them through the tollbooths of narrative convention. And conversation, including the uncomfortable silences that

punctuate it, is pretty much the entire substance of “*The End of the Tour*.” Yes, there’s a fair amount of smoking and junk-food eating, an excursion to the Mall of America and a multiplex showing of “*Broken Arrow*” (with John Travolta taking a missile to the gut), but Mr. Ponsoldt and the screenwriter, the playwright Donald Margulies, allow words to speak louder than actions.

Many of the words are Wallace’s own, uttered into Mr. Lipsky’s tape recorder in 1996 and transcribed, 14 years later, for publication in a book called “*Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*.” Funny, intriguing and revealing as this talk may be, it does not have anything like the status of Wallace’s writing. The film not only acknowledges this distinction, but it also insists on it. In his would-be profiler’s company, occasionally glancing at the menacing red light of the predigital tape recorder, Wallace is by turns cagey and candid, witty and earnest, but he is always aware, at times painfully, that he is playing the role of a writer in someone else’s fantasy. Actually writing is something he does when no one else is around.

Mr. Segel’s performance, whether it captures the true Wallace or not, is sharp and sensitive, in no small part because it’s modest and appropriately evasive. The essential David Wallace is precisely what the film reminds us we can’t see, even as David Lipsky wants desperately to track him down and display him to the readers of *Rolling Stone*. Wallace is caught in a familiar set of contradictions. He wants attention but craves solitude. He’s willing to collaborate with the machinery of publicity even as he worries about the phoniness of it all. He’s ambitious and eager to protect himself from the consequences of his ambition. In short, he’s a famous writer.

As such he is, for his short-term companion, both alpha dog and prey, an object of envy as well as admiration, a meal ticket and an imaginary friend. The film poses the question “Who is the real David Foster Wallace?” as a feint. He is its premise, its axiom, its great white whale. The more relevant question, the moral problem on which the movie turns, is “who is David Lipsky?”

In real life, David Lipsky might be a great guy, but on screen he is played by Mr. Eisenberg, which means that his genetic material is at least 25 percent weasel. Wallace at one point playfully describes himself as “pleasantly unpleasant.” Lipsky is unpleasantly pleasant, which is much worse. Twitchy and ingratiating, he wants to be a tough journalist and a pal. He desperately wants Wallace to regard him as a peer and can hardly contain his jealousy. He berates Sarah after she chats with Wallace on the phone and falls into a defensive snit after Wallace accuses him of flirting with Betsy (Mickey Sumner), a poet who had known Wallace in graduate school.

His awfulness is, to some degree, structural. A profile writer, especially in the company of another writer, is a false friend who dreams of being a secret sharer. Lipsky’s assignment is to pry, distort and betray, to use Wallace’s words and the details of his existence as material for his own dubious project. Wallace knows this and acquiesces to it — “you agreed to the interview” is Lipsky’s fallback when his subject gets prickly — and generally handles himself with grace and forbearance.

You may find yourself wishing that he didn’t have to, which is to say wishing that “*The End of the Tour*” didn’t exist even as you hang on its every word and revel in its rough, vernacular beauty. In an ideal world, we would all sit at home reading “*Infinite Jest*” and then go out to eat hamburgers, argue about philosophy and watch cheesy action blockbusters. There would be no pseudo-authoritative biographies or prying, preening magazine profiles to complicate our pleasures, and ambitious actors would not dare to impersonate beloved novelists. But the world we live in is plagued by all of those things. There will always be films about writers and writing, and this one is just about as good as it gets.

In English, French, German, Swedish, Italian and Russian with English subtitles.

THE SECOND MOTHER

A FILM BY ANNA MUYLAERT

Monday, October 19, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Bill Goodykoontz - Arizona Republic Rated R 112 Mins.

For Val, the hard-working live-in housekeeper of a wealthy family in São Paulo, the lines of class are clearly drawn and immutable.

Never mind that she has raised the family's son as her own, so that he is more comfortable with — and clearly more loving toward — her than his own mother. (As it turns out, who wouldn't be?) Yet when Val's daughter, whom she hasn't seen in 10 years, shows up, she turns the family, and Val's life, upside down.



We've seen plenty of stories about the arrival of a mysterious stranger upsetting the order of things. But "The Second Mother," Brazilian writer and director Anna Muylaert's outstanding film, is different. In part, that's because both sides are changed by the end of the movie.

It's also because of the powerhouse performance by Regina Casé as Val. At once brash and subservient, she has learned over time exactly how to play the family. The father, Carlos (Lourenço Mutarelli), is an artist who put down the brush, and seemingly everything else except his daily dose of medicine. His wife, Barbara (Karine Teles), is a TV personality who cares about her career and little else. Thus their son, Fabinho (Michel Joelsas), turns to Val for comfort, support and anything remotely resembling maternal instinct.

But what of Val's real daughter, Jessica (Camila Maldila)? Val left her in the sticks years ago, and has ever since sent money for her upbringing. When it's time to take a college-entrance exam, Jessica wants to come to São Paulo. Barbara insists that she stay with the family, but she has no idea what she's getting herself into.

It's important to note that the family does not actively mistreat Val. She's well-paid and seemingly happy. (She and Fabinho cook up all sorts of little schemes under the oblivious eyes of his parents.) But Carlos and Barbara, in particular, treat her with casual disregard, or maybe even disrespect isn't too strong a word. Val simply knows her place, as far as they are concerned, and they like it that way.

Jessica will have none of this. She bops in and announces that she won't share her mother's modest living quarters. Instead, she will stay in the much more elegant (and large) guest room. Val is horrified at this breach of the unspoken social contract (there's never been a need to speak of it), but Jessica is just getting started. It's

lost on no one that the rather pathetic Carlos has finally found something worth pursuing again — the teenage daughter of his housekeeper.

At first, Jessica is a jolt that serves to wake up the family. Yet soon her presence, and more particularly her attitude, begin to grate on Barbara. But it's more complicated than that. Is Barbara jealous of where her husband's attention has wandered, or simply jealous that someone else is getting attention of any kind?

Meanwhile, Val must deal with conflicting feelings: She left her daughter behind in part to give her a better chance at a good life. Now she's back and a stranger, while the boy for whose parents she works thinks Val hangs the moon.

The performances are all good, but Casé's is outstanding. Her Val is a woman who has worked hard for what she has attained, but in the end, what is that, really? Muylaert goes for answers and, at times, they may come a little easily for all of the turmoil that leads to them. (Her framing of scenes is terrific, using doorways and windows to give us Val's limited view of the house and family — again reminding us of lines that aren't to be crossed.) But Casé's performance overwhelms any such quibbles. She is a delight, and thanks in large part to her performance, so is "The Second Mother."

In Portuguese, with subtitles.

SAY IT IN 8 STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL



Monday, October 19, 5:00 pm

Please join us as we feature the winning entries of the Thirteenth Annual Student Film Festival. Participants were given an additional challenge this year when asked to submit a completed film with a running time of 8 minutes or less. Over 70 submissions from around the world were received and evaluated our panel of accomplished judges, Bob Fritz, John Mostacci and Tony Venezia. These individuals were selected based on their solid background in the world of film. Between them, they possess over 100 years of experience working in film production and education.

The festival's top selections will be screened and awards will be distributed at this special program.

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THEY WERE GIVEN 2 WEEKS. IT LASTED 6 DAYS.

THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT

based on true events

Monday, November 2, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by *Richard Roeper* Rated *R* 122 Mins.

A decade and a half after "Almost Famous," I'm still not sure why Billy Crudup didn't become an A-list Movie Star. It's definitely not for lack of chops.

In the chilling and conversation-provoking "The Stanford Prison Experiment," Crudup delivers his usual excellent work, this time dramatizing the real-life Dr. Philip Zimbardo, who conducted one of the most famous behavioral experiments of the 20th century.



In the summer of 1971, Zimbardo and a small team of associates fashioned a mock prison in the basement of a Stanford academic building, with 12 students paid \$15 a day to play prisoners, and 12 others paid the same to take on the roles of prison guards.

The "guards" were given uniforms, nightsticks and sunglasses to convey an image of authority and control. The "prisoners" were assigned numbers, made to wear smocks and had a chain fastened around one leg.

Director Kyle Patrick Alvarez and screenwriter Tim Talbott have adhered closely to the published histories and archival footage of the experiment — and the result is one of the most effectively disturbing movies of the year. We watch how quickly the guards turn abusive, and how readily most of the prisoners succumb to treatment that far exceeds the written rules, and we wonder how WE would behave in the same situation.

Crudup's Zimbardo is a charismatic, ambitious academic who is thrilled when a guard who calls himself John Wayne (Michael

Angarano) actually starts emulating another actor: Strother Martin in "Cool Hand Luke." John Wayne tells his fellow guards he's just playing a character, but he's clearly enjoying himself as he taunts the prisoners, forces them to perform endless calisthenics as punishment for perceived disrespect, and tosses troublemakers into "The Hole," e.g., a tiny dark closet.

Within two days, things have deteriorated to the point where some inmates are talking about staging a coup, while the guards escalate their abuse of the prisoners — hogtying them, forcing them to defecate in buckets in their "cells," rousting them in the middle of the night to verbally abuse them, refusing their requests for personal items such as prescription glasses or pills.

Once the experiment starts, director Alvarez confines the story to the hallways and rooms of the "prison" and the offices where Zimbardo and his team monitor the proceedings. The result is a suitably claustrophobic, creepy vibe; even as we're stunned at how quickly the guards and prisoners disappear into their assigned roles, we can understand how the experiment becomes "real" to them. These young men can tell Dr. Zimbardo to take his \$15 a day and shove it at any time — but instead they tearfully plead their cases at "parole hearings," submit to counseling from a priest who asks them if they have lawyers and if they have a plan for getting out of prison, and start referring to themselves by the numbers on their uniforms.

The experiment isn't even a week old when the prisoners' parents visit them, under the watchful eyes of the guards. Even the parents seem to quickly buy into the scenario — asking their boys how they're getting along with their fellow inmates, how they're holding up, if they're being mistreated. Not a one of them says, "This is ridiculous, you're coming home right now."

Olivia Thirlby shines as Zimbardo's girlfriend Christina, who shows up a few days into the experiment and is stunned by what has transpired. (The real-life Christina and Philip are married to this day.) Nelsan Ellis gives a commanding performance as a friend of Zimbardo's who did hard time in San Quentin and takes on the role of a member of the parole board, berating an inmate who pleads for an early release.

For decades, psychologists have debated the merits of Zimbardo's experiment. Did he cross the line and allow his subjects to be abused? Did he recognize HE was becoming a part of his own study?

"The Stanford Prison Experiment" is the kind of movie that raises as many questions as it answers. It's also the kind of film where you want to budget some time for discussion afterward. You won't be able to shake this one off easily.

Please join us for our thought provoking post screening discussions!

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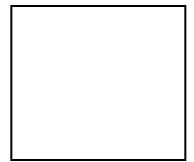
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STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL
Monday, October 19 5:00 pm

THE END OF THE TOUR

"An exquisitely subtle, funny, perceptive and emotional meeting of the minds — two very great minds."

Justin Chang, Variety

Monday, October 5 at 7:30 pm



SAY IT IN 8
STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL

A celebration of cinema's bright future

Monday, October 19 at 5:00 pm

"Immensely endearing. A savvy, socially conscious crowdpleaser."

Variety

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THE SECOND MOTHER
A FILM BY ANNA MUYLAERT

THEY WERE GIVEN 2 WEEKS. IT LASTED 6 DAYS.

**THE STANFORD
PRISON EXPERIMENT**
based on true events

"So disturbing, intense and believable, it is easy to forget we are watching a movie."

Justin Gerber, Consequences of Sound

Monday, November 2 at 7:30 pm