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Dual

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Dual

Abstract

This is a film review of *Dual* (2021), directed by Riley Stearns.

Keywords

Cloning, Identity, Parody, Science Fiction, Dystopia

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Author Notes

John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska Omaha. He has been the Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



Dual (2021), dir. Riley Stearns

When Sarah (Karen Gillan) receives a terminal diagnosis, she is informed that she may consider paying for a clone of herself to take her place in her loved ones' lives. In this speculative future, even suicidal people make arrangements to be replaced by clones after they take their own lives, and this is also an option for those who know they are dying from natural causes. Sarah decides to commission a clone, for the sake of her mother and her boyfriend Peter. But matters go awry when Sarah makes a full recovery from her illness, and the clone does not want to leave.

Sarah leads a very isolated existence even prior to her cloning, as she has no relatives besides her mother, and apparently no friends. When Peter accidentally gets the news of her terminal diagnosis, he tells her on a video call rather than in person, and it barely affects either of them. Peter is clearly not very attached to Sarah, as he prefers her double to the point that he

breaks up with the original when she learns she is not dying. Her mother also seems to prefer the clone, or perhaps cannot really tell the difference. Gillan plays both Sarahs with a deadpan expression that makes the clone as well as the original appear almost robotic; in this futuristic world, all the characters go through their lives in a superficial manner with little engagement or compassion for others. They might as well be the pod people of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

The real problem, though, is that the law allows the clone to petition to live, but only one Sarah can be allowed to exist. This creates a court-mandated and televised duel to the death, for which the two Sarahs have a year to train, during which the original must continue to pay support to the clone that is now living with her boyfriend and taking her place. Sarah prepares for the duel with a personal trainer who in a way becomes her only friend, because he at least is interested in her survival.

The real irony and the source of this dark comedy's humor is the fact that this world is so impersonal and dehumanized that it does not really matter which Sarah wins, as no one will be able to tell the difference in any case. Both are dehumanized by their subjection to this violent scenario and a world where identity is so easily cast aside or replaced, and they cannot change that fact. In spite of the comic tone, this is a raw commentary on our modern world and our loss of empathy for others.