Hit Man

Christopher R. Deacy
University of Kent at Canterbury - U.K., c.deacy@kent.ac.uk

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Abstract
This is a film review of *Hit Man* (2024), directed by Richard Linklater.

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Author Notes
Chris Deacy is Reader in Theology and Religious Studies and former Head of Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK. His PhD (University of Wales, 1999) was in the area of redemption and film, and Chris has published monographs which include Christmas as Religion: Rethinking Santa, the Secular, and the Sacred (Oxford University Press, 2016); Screening the Afterlife: Theology, Eschatology and Film (Routledge, 2012); and Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film (University of Wales Press, 2001). Chris also writes regular film reviews, is writing a book about nostalgia and religion and has been hosting a podcast since 2018 called Nostalgia Interviews with Chris Deacy: https://audioboom.com/channels/4956567

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Hit Man (2023), dir. Richard Linklater

*Hit Man* is a “so improbable it must be true” comedy by Richard Linklater which deconstructs the very genre of acting while giving us a very dark slice of entertainment that crosses lines left, right, and center. A New Orleans college professor of Psychology and Philosophy by day, Gary (Glen Powell) earns extra money on the side by working as a faux hit man for the local police force, pretending to offer to whack anyone whom his ‘client’ is offering to pay, only then to turn them in having obtained the incriminating evidence.

As someone who is such an expert on the human condition, Gary is well suited to his undercover surveillance work as he knows exactly how to ‘read’ each of his clients, and changes costumes accordingly, leading to some hilarious scenes as he changes wardrobe, accent, and demeanor to lull his victims into a false sense of security. But then the unexpected happens and Gary falls in love with a woman who wants to pay Gary $25,000 to bump off her abusive husband. ‘Ron,’ Gary’s alter ego, is dashing, sexy, confident, and suave in a way that the steady
and dull birdwatching enthusiast Gary is not—Superman to his Clark Kent, no less—so this generates a complicated situation for him.

The scene between ‘Ron’ and Madison (Adria Arjona) is reminiscent of the authentic screen chemistry we see in *Out of Sight* between George Clooney (whose voice Powell sounds like he is channeling) and Jennifer Lopez, and we can see how he is immediately smitten by her and why he diverts from his mission in order to persuade Madison not to go ahead with her scheme. We suspect that Madison might be playing him all along in classic femme fatale style, but the movie keeps us guessing, and this is, in true noir style, impossible to predict.

It’s quite an intelligent comedy, referencing philosophers such as Kant and Nietzsche, and *Hit Man* works by posing the question as to whether we can really imagine ourselves as being capable of taking on another persona to the point of doing something—like assassinating for a living—which goes against our character.

This is a profoundly meta work, as Powell has to pretend to be Gary who has to pretend to be Ron, and we are always waiting for the moment to arise when one of his clients, or his students, should bump into him while he is *in cognito*. Based on an apparently true story, *Hit Man* is so effective because it is so disarming. It is full of noir tropes, but it is also so laugh out loud funny that we don’t see the genre tropes that are in any case so mischievously and deliciously subverted.