Nightcrawler. Dir. Dan Gilroy. Perf. Jake Gyllenhaal, Rene Russo, Bill Paxton, and Riz Ahmed. Open Road Films, 2014. DVD.

The pitch-black comedy of *Nightcrawler* is enjoyable less for skewering ratings-driven TV news, an old story, than for the film's protagonist and the woman who comes to fully appreciate his uncompromising depravity. Louis Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal) provides gory footage, by any means necessary, to producer Nina Romina (Rene Russo), who tells him, "Think of our newscast as a screaming woman running down the street with her throat cut." Nina must explain this to Lou because he lacks the empathy needed to respond either to this form of sensational melodrama or to other human beings.

When the film opens, Lou is a petty thief and a loner who, as he tells Nina, spends all his time on the Internet. He has taken an online business course, and self-help jargon of how to succeed completely informs his speech and his interactions with others. We learn nothing more of Lou's past, and the story really begins when he pulls off a highway to watch emergency medical workers extract a torn body from a wreck. Pushing past him to capture the scene on video is a freelance "stringer" (Bill Paxton) who tracks calls on a police scanner. This is Lou's road to Damascus moment, and soon he has acquired a cheap camera and sold his first footage to Nina at WKLA. "I'm thinking that television news just might be something I love," he says, applying one of his maxims for success in business, "as well as something I happen to be good at."

Lou is good at what he does largely because he fears neither authority nor embarrassment. He pushes his way into crime scenes oblivious to anxieties and human consequences, and his attraction to TV news is for its power to replace a flesh-and-blood world with images for mass consumption. His absence of affect and his love for television are two sides of the same coin, for he is a product of the media rather than of human society and for him TV images are more real than the material world. Fear, he says, in a refrain commonly heard at AA meetings, is merely False Evidence Appearing Real, yet Lou's modus operandi is to take what he knows to be false, and through the medium of TV embrace it as reality.

Lou's rise is marked by ever greater transgressions, and one threshold moment occurs when he arrives before the police at the scene of a fatal

accident and instead of filming what he finds, grabs the legs of the victim's body and drags it around the wrecked car into a pool of light to create a better shot. Eventually he is orchestrating the crimes he pretends to be documenting, and slightly more than halfway into the film a situation begins to unfold which gives full scope to his audacity. The narrative is paced by Lou's escalating actions, and suspense builds around the question of when or whether he will be caught.

As either a thriller or a satire of ratings-driven news, however, the film would be empty without the more intimate drama of its three main characters, Lou, Nina, and Rick (Riz Ahmed), a homeless and unemployed street kid hired by Lou to navigate as they race to accidents and crime scenes. Ahmed's performance makes Rick's naïve ambition and bewilderment a perfect foil for Lou's parody of mentorship, and Rene Russo as the rapacious producer who becomes our lens on Lou is an ideal complement to Gyllenhaal. Nina, jaded and "twice" Lou's age, sees him clearly, resisting his manipulations and pressure for unwanted sex until, hardened and cynical as she is, even she is seduced by his audacity. Our pleasure and response to the film as comic derives from a perfect performance of these excessive characters by Russo and Gyllenhaal, while the darkness underlying the comedy is its message about media as an extension of America's culture of consumer capitalism, relentlessly colonizing our minds.

The Los Angeles nightscape of *Nightcrawler* is beautiful in the glittering yet hazy wash of Robert Elswit's cinematography, which sometimes conveys more than a hint of video-game auto racing and TV news videography, while the music by James Howard Newton artfully supports crucial moments in the narrative. It is hardly surprising that this team should work in harmony: Dan Gilroy is a first-time director, but he surrounded himself with an extended family of veterans. *Nightcrawler* was edited by Dan's brother John Gilroy, who along with Elswit and Newton had all also worked on *Michael Clayton* (2007) and *The Bourne Legacy* (2012), films directed by another brother, Tony Gilroy (with whom Dan had co-written *The Bourne Legacy*). Rene Russo is Dan Gilroy's wife. The Gilroys' father was a successful playwright, screenwriter, producer, and director, Frank Gilroy, and Jake Gyllenhaal's father Stephen was also a successful movie director, two of whose films, *Paris Trout* (1991) and A *Dangerous Woman* (1993), were shot by Robert Elswit.

Works Cited

The Bourne Legacy. Dir. Tony Gilroy. Perf. Jeremy Renner, Rachel Weisz, Edward Norton. Universal, 2012. Film.

A *Dangerous Woman*. Dir. Stephen Gyllenhaal. Perf. Debra Winger, Barbara Hershey, Gabriel Byrne. Gramercy Pictures, 1993. Film.

Michael Clayton. Dir. Tony Gilroy. Perf. George Clooney, Tilda Swinton, Tom Wilkinson. Castle Rock, 2007. Film.

Paris Trout. Dir. Stephen Gyllenhaal. Perf. Dennis Hopper, Barbara Hershey, Ed Harris. Palace Pictures, 1991. Film.

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