



Presents

## GlenVIEWINGS: Movies with a Motive

### *The Ghost Writer*

"There's something not quite right about this project." - *The Ghost*



**Director:**

Roman Polanski

**Producers:**

Roman Polanski  
Robert Benmussa  
Alain Sarde  
Patrick Wachsberger

**Writers:**

Roman Polanski  
Robert Harris

**Starring:**

Ewan McGregor  
Pierce Brosnan  
Olivia Williams  
Kim Cattrall  
Tom Wilkinson  
Timothy Hutton

**Music:**

Alexandre Desplat

**Cinematography:**

Pawel Edelmann

**Editing:**

Herve de Luze

**Distributor:**

Summit Entertainment

**Release date:**

19 March, 2010

**Running time:**

128 minutes

**Budget**

\$45,000,000

**Box Office gross**

\$55,165,319 (Worldwide)

For a film concerned with the troubling realities of recent politics, there is a great deal of haunting mystery in *The Ghost Writer*. Taking on the task of polishing the memoirs of a former British Prime Minister, the film's protagonist - whose real name is never revealed - is increasingly disturbed by his paranoia over what happened to the previous ghost writer, whose empty car we witness sitting like an apparition in the film's eerie opening scene. As he steps into the dead man's shoes, he is unwittingly drawn into a murky investigation in which his search for the 'heart' of the story leads only to darkness.

If things look bad for the ghost writer, they don't appear to be much better for those who may or may not be pulling the strings of this disturbing conspiracy. Prime Minister Lang - a thinly veiled portrait of Tony Blair - is himself haunted by the deeds of his past, now coming back to imprison him, and his elusive wife and provocative assistant, inside an ultra modern house. Resembling a bunker on a remote Martha's Vineyard island, the home seems to be constantly enveloped within a malignant wind. Cut adrift and yet always aware of being watched, the unhappy inhabitants suffer through isolation without privacy, echoing the life of those under the scrutiny of the public eye.

Given his own controversial personal life, it's no surprise that *The Ghost Writer* director Roman Polanski was able to so expertly create this oppressive tension. But it is when the film subtly injects some choice moments of wry, jet black humor amid all the chilling suspense that the director really shows the flair that had many critics comparing this film to a Hitchcock great.

Whether or not you agree with the film's pessimistic view of modern politics, or are satisfied by how the twisting, intricate plot finally unravels, you are certain to be enraptured by the moody atmosphere enveloping the film and its main character, as well as an ending that will keep you wondering about the motives for days to come.

**Did you know?**

- Before collaborating on *The Ghost Writer*, Roman Polanski and Robert Harris worked together on an adaptation of another Harris novel, *Pompeii*, which was set to be the most expensive European film ever made before being cancelled due to the 2007 actors' strike.
- German locations, including the remote North Sea island of Sylt, stood in for both Martha's Vineyard and London.
- Roman Polanski finished editing the film inside a Swiss prison in the winter of 2009 after being arrested on charges related to his fleeing the United States in 1977. He was released on bail and put on house arrest.



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### **The Ghost Writer**

**"That's none of my business." - The Ghost**

**"You can't just ignore it." - Ruth Lang**

**"Look, I'm a ghost writer, not an investigative reporter." - The Ghost**

#### **Things to Explore**

- What, if any, is the significance of the man sweeping the leaves outside Lang's home?
- Why don't we ever learn the name of Ewan McGregor's character?
- Who is the most powerful figure in the Lang's marriage?
- Why and when does the ghost writer begin to suspect something unusual is happening with his current assignment?
- What factors drive relations between Ruth Lang and the ghost writer? How and why do these change?
- What do you think were the motivations of Robert Harris when writing the book and the screenplay?
- A number of elements in the film deliberately echo recent real world politics. What do these elements add to the film? Or do they detract from the mystery?
- What do you make of the film's ending? Did you see it coming?

#### **Themes**

- Power and politics
- Identity
- Corruption and conspiracy
- Paranoia
- Isolation
- (Mis)Information
- Duplicity and deception
- Justice
- Guilt



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"You realize I know nothing about politics." - The Ghost

"You voted for him, didn't you?" - Rick Racardelli

"Adam Lang? Of course I did, everyone voted for him. He wasn't a politician, he was a craze."  
- The Ghost

## Library Resources

### 1) *The Ghost*, Robert Harris

Harris' novel is very close to the film's style, but is perhaps even more blatant in its thinly-veiled skewering of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair - to whom Harris had at first been a major supporter.

Copy	Material	Location
FICTION HARRIS,R.	Book	Fiction

### 2) *Polanski: A Biography*, Christopher Sandford

Surely due for an update after the tumultuous last couple of years endured by the controversial filmmaker, this 2008 biography at least charts the rest of his remarkable life, from surviving the Krakow ghetto, living through personal tragedy and scandal, and to his crowning as an Oscar-winning legend.

Copy	Material	Location
791.430233 POLANSKI	Book	Nonfiction

### 3) *The Ghost Writer* [videorecording (DVD)]

The DVD includes special features on the adapting the book into a film, an interview with director Roman Polanski, and a featurette titled "The Ghost Writer: Fiction or Reality?"

Copy	Material	Location
NEW DVD GHO	DVD Fiction	Audiovisual Room

## Online Resources

<http://www.theghostwriter-movie.com/>

The official website for the film features additional video and photos.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1139328/>

The film's IMDB page contains a wealth of information, including trivia, reviews, videos, photos and user comments. It is currently rated 7.5/10 by 24,097 users.

<http://www.movieweb.com/movie/the-ghost-writer/robert-harris-interview>

Sat outside 10 Downing Street – the home of the British Prime Minister - Author Robert Harris discusses the process of adapting his own novel into the *The Ghost Writer*, his relationship with Roman Polanski, and the film's motives in portraying recent politics.



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"I suppose even ghosts have feelings." - Ruth Lang

**IF YOU LIKED *THE GHOST WRITER*...**

#### ***Constant Gardner* (Fernando Meirelles/128 mins/R/2005)**

--Based on the John LeCarre novel, Justin Quale (Ralph Fiennes) is a low-level British diplomat on a new assignment in Kenya. When his activist wife (Rachel Weisz) is found brutally killed, Quale tries to unravel who is behind the murder.

#### ***State of Play* (Kevin McDonald/128 mins/PG-13/2009)**

--An American political thriller based on the successful British miniseries. An ensemble cast that includes Helen Mirren, Russell Crowe and Ben Affleck as U.S. Congressman Stephen Collins. As Collins ascends the political ladder rapidly, doubts of his presidential candidacy intercede when his research assistant/mistress is viciously murdered and some unfortunate truths begin to emerge.

#### ***Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman/119 min/PG-13/2004)**

--The first film in the Bourne enterprise, Matt Damon stars as the Jason Bourne character based on the novels of Robert Ludlum. Bourne is pulled barely alive and amnesiac—with two bullet wounds in his back—from the Mediterranean Sea by Italian fisherman. Bourne's mission to discover his past identity includes being pursued by security at the American consulate and being chased by professional killers determined to destroy him.

#### ***The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola/113 min/PG/1974)**

--Creating an atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion, Coppola's *The Conversation* is a small scale film that has grown in reputation since the 1970s. Gene Hackman stars as surveillance expert Harry Caul, hired to track a young couple and record their private conversations in San Francisco's busy Union Square. As Caul begins to piece together the couple's conversation he becomes increasingly convinced they are involved in a murder plot.

#### ***Manchurian Candidate* (127 min/PG-13/1962)**

--Classic 1962 film starring Frank Sinatra, Laurence Harvey, Angela Lansbury, and James Gregory that set the template for future political thrillers. Sinatra Capt. Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra) is among a group captured by Communists and brainwashed. Based on the novel by Richard Condon.

**Also directed by Roman Polanski:**

#### ***Rosemary's Baby* (136 min/R/1968)**

#### ***Frantic* (120 min/R/1988)**

#### ***Chinatown* (130 min/R/1974)**

#### ***The Pianist* (148 min/R/2002)**