
“Tony Blair Assassinated!”

ROMAN POLANSKI'S latest film, *The Ghost Writer*, is about a fictional former Prime Minister holed up in a billionaire's holiday home on Martha's Vineyard, which is deserted and out of season. Adam Lang, the former Premier and his wife Ruth, are the centre of a little court in exile composed of two typists, a personal assistant, and an anxious six-man protection squad, all on loan from the Cabinet Office in London. A gardener and a cook, complete the forlorn ménage.

The action centres upon the brutally modern house where they all live. It is built entirely of cement blocks with very big, very thick, windows that are needed to keep out ferocious winds and any stray bullets that might come their way. Set amongst sand dunes tufted with marram grass, edged by the perpetual swell of an ice-cold ocean, this is luxury at its bleakest. No pleasure is derived from the private jets, the armoured limousines, and the limitless supplies of cash. It is a kind of purgatory in which the ex-Prime Minister awaits the determination of his fate by the International Criminal Court at The Hague.

Adam Lang is accused by a former colleague of ordering the arrest, rendition, and torture of a group of British terrorist suspects, one of whom died while being water-boarded. We have little reason to doubt his guilt or that of Ruth, his Lady Macbeth, played brilliantly by Olivia Williams. This pair, Adam and Ruth Lang, are as guilty as sin, but it takes some time for the hapless ghostwriter, played flawlessly by Ewan McGregor, to unravel the awful truth concealed within the dense, unpromising manuscript, bequeathed to him by his predecessor, who we guess has been silenced forever by the CIA.

Roman Polanski wrote the screenplay in collaboration with Robert Harris, the author of *The*

Ghost, a novel published by Hutchinson in 2007. The landscape, mood, characterisation, and much of the dialogue are lifted directly from this book; the plot, likewise, stays close, very close, to the text of Harris' story. Polanski has done his best with this sorry tale, but the movie lacks pace and tension. Moreover, rendition, torture, terror, war, and invasion, are reduced to ciphers for personal guilt and the abuse of power, which in all essentials, remain unexamined by the novel and the film.

We know, of course, that the CIA conspires because that is what the CIA does, and we know that Adam Lang, as the supine poodle of American imperialism, deserves everything he gets. Beyond these clichés we learn nothing at all.

We are transported to an imaginary world in which Tony and Cheri Blair, deserted by New Labour and by most of their friends, linger in upholstered seclusion bemoaning their loss of power. It is a world where Tony gets his comeuppance at the hands of a 'lone nut' assassin, who succeeds no doubt with the connivance of the Agency. We learn also that it is Cheri who was the *éminence grise* for her naïve but photogenic husband. It is she that ensured that Blair followed the Americans into the War on Terror and it is she that ensured that Tony slavishly followed every twist and turn of the criminal schemes issuing from the White House.

This *femme fatale* who was recruited by the CIA, while still a student, went on to bed and then wed the future Prime Minister and succeeds over many years in manipulating his every move in accordance with the wishes of her American masters. This is conspiracy 'theory', at its dullest and most assuredly at its most barmy. Neither Roman Polanski nor Robert Harris offer any explanation for why Tony Blair has been so obtuse, or why Cheri so cravenly subordinates both her husband's administration and her country to the evil designs of the Evil Empire.

In this respect the movie and the novel follow closely popular assumptions concerning both the

conduct of Tony Blair's government and those concerning the conspiratorial exercise of American power. There is an underlying assumption here that while the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq might have been in the interests of Halliburton, Blackwater, and a host of other American companies, the British state, British petroleum interests, and the British people, could have had no genuine interest in the overthrow of the Taliban or Saddam Hussein, and consequently, have derived no benefit at all from The War on Terror.

The War is thought to be merely a smokescreen got up by the Evil Empire on the Potomac to justify and secure its world dominion while Cheri Blair and her gullible spouse were, for some reason known only to Robert Harris, committed exclusively to pursuing the interests of the United States of America. Along with this assumption goes the suspicion that all those captured by American forces, all those incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay, Bagram Airfield, and a host of other places, are entirely innocent of any connection with Islamist terrorists or insurgents. More or less all of them are, like all of those killed in drone attacks and airstrikes, the blameless victims of the American aggression.

This singular view of American policy in the Middle East, in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and of the armed struggle between Islamism and the West more generally, has many different elements but surely none of them can be illuminated by the concoction of conspiracies authored by the spouse of a Prime Minister. I have no doubt at all that British and American security agencies have conspired to cover up rendition flights and the torture and ill treatment of prisoners – there is, at the very least, *prima facie* evidence for this – but none at all for the government of this country, or the direction of its foreign policy, by secret service agents at Langley Virginia.

The Ghost and *The Ghost Writer* are, like the conspiratorial worldview they perpetuate, works of fiction. These fictions, whether they concern the subversion of the government of the United Kingdom

or the destruction of the World Trade Center, cannot be said to be “theories” because there is no rebuttal and no evidence to the contrary which would conceivably satisfy those who assert their truth.

All denials, close arguments, and even the production of evidence are, like Barack Obama’s birth certificate, assimilated into the conspiracy as devilishly clever counterfeits and frauds, perpetrated by the conspirators themselves. The proponents of these plots and intrigues – the conspiracy ‘theorists’ – are equipped only with suspicions and prejudices; they provide no evidence, but repeatedly ask questions for which they know, in advance, there can be no untainted answer or explanation. Indeed, the ‘theorists’ contrive their allegations of skulduggery wholly by the accumulation of questions for which no answers or acceptable accounts are known to exist.

No doubt Robert Harris and Roman Polanski will insist that *Ghost Writer* is merely a thriller, they will insist that any similarity between the fictional Adam and Ruth Lang and the real life Tony and Cheri Blair, is entirely coincidental. But you would have to be a complete fool to believe that. What this book and its film treatment does is perpetuate the idea that Tony Blair is a criminal who waged an illegal war by illegal means; he is a man who at best deserves to be hauled before the International Criminal Court, and at worst, to be assassinated by one of his victims, a grieving man deranged by the death of his only son in an ‘illegal war’.

Ghost Writer is a story wrought within the matrix of myths and illusions about the overthrow of the Taliban, of regime change, and the armed struggle against Islamism. It is contrived from the detritus of Anti-Americanism and from a form of *knowing* and rather cute cynicism about wielding power. It has a couple of good actors, is beautifully filmed, badly edited, and lacks both political insight and dramatic tension. In the final analysis *The Ghost Writer* – demonising Cheri and assassinating Tony – is not nearly as much fun as *Kick-Ass*, and it is certainly much more far-fetched.