

## **Film Facts: *Michael Clayton* (2007)**

Director: Tony Gilroy

Genre: Thriller

Main Cast: George Clooney, Tom Wilkinson, Tilda Swinton, Sydney Pollack, Michael O'Keefe

Release Year: 2007

Country: US

Run Time: 120 minutes

MPAA Rating: R

### **Plot**

Michael Clayton (George Clooney) handles all of the dirty work for a major New York law firm, arranging top-flight legal services and skirting through loopholes for ethically questionable clients. But when a fellow "fixer" decides to turn on the very firm they were hired to clean up for, Clayton finds himself at the center of a conspiratorial maelstrom. Once an ambitious D.A., Clayton is now a shell of his former dynamic self, thanks to a divorce, an unfortunate business venture, and astronomical debt. Though he longs to leave the cutthroat, ethically dubious world of corporate law behind, Clayton's poor financial situation and devotion to firm head Marty Bach (Sydney Pollack) leave him little choice but to remain on the job and tough it out. Meanwhile, litigator Karen Crowder (Tilda Swinton) finds her entire company's future hinging on the outcome of a multi-billion-dollar settlement overseen by Clayton's friend, star lawyer Arthur Edens (Tom Wilkinson). When Edens snaps and decides to blow the whistle on the questionable case, sabotaging the defense, Clayton must decide between his loyalty and his conscience. ~ Jason Buchanan, All Movie Guide

### **Review**

Tony Gilroy's elegantly structured script for *Michael Clayton* offers a series of plot developments and character details that don't build so much as accumulate in the viewer's mind, until a thunderously entertaining final scene -- the kind of confrontation an old-time Hollywood mogul might call a "corker" -- pays them all off in a thrilling verbal face-off. As a first-time director, Gilroy maintains a steady, measured pace. His style serves his low-key but involving script, quietly adding layers to the characters while moving the plot along. The first-rate editing juggles timelines in the best possible way, allowing events to have a much different meaning when you see them a second time.

George Clooney gives another first-rate performance as Clayton, a man who can keep his clients' lives in order, but not his own. We know, because he is so good at his job, that he will figure out how to get himself out of the seemingly impossible position he gets himself into when his closest friend, an older attorney at the firm, has a mental breakdown while defending a chemical company facing a multi-million-dollar class-action suit. As the friend, Tom Wilkinson gets to deliver all of the film's colorful monologues. Unafraid to recall Peter Finch's performance in *Network*, Wilkinson offers a realistic portrait of manic depression while also reveling in the florid theatricality of his character's expansive orations. He manages to be simultaneously over-the-top and realistic -- as well as sympathetic. Tilda Swinton, shot in a way that lets the audience know how Gilroy feels about corporate functionaries, makes for an original adversary --

her obsessively detail-oriented character is the one most in over her head. Sydney Pollack, a woefully underappreciated actor, not only hits every note he is asked to play, but gives the film even more credibility as an updated '70s paranoid thriller simply because of his presence.

Midway into the film, Gilroy stages a murder that offers a grueling commentary on the cold-blooded efficiency of modern corporate life. The murder happens close-up. It is hands-on, bloodless, and mechanical, leaving the viewer with an unshakeable sense of unease. The act happens as simply and with as much understatement as everything else in the movie; Gilroy feels no need to punctuate his material with either ominous music or lingering shots of outraged faces. The director never indicates to his audience how horrible what we are seeing is, he takes it for granted that we have the humanity to be appropriately shocked. This is what Gilroy gets very right throughout the film -- he trusts his audience. He repays that trust with that grandly entertaining final scene, where he finally lets the audience release all of the emotions he has kept efficiently bottled up for two hours. ~ Perry Seibert, All Movie Guide

### **Cast**

George Clooney - Michael Clayton

Tom Wilkinson - Arthur Edens

Tilda Swinton - Karen Crowder

Sydney Pollack - Marty Bach

Michael O'Keefe - Barry Grissom

Robert Prescott - Mr. Verne; Terry Serpico - Mr. Iker; Merritt Wever - Anna; Kevin Hagan - Raymond Clayton; Austin Williams - Henry Clayton; David Lansbury - Timmy Clayton; Tom McCarthy - Walter; Heidi Armbruster - Anna's Sister; Jennifer Van Dyck - Ivy; Frank Wood - Gerald; Denis O'Hare - Mr. Greer; Julie White - Mrs. Greer; Jonathan Walker - Del; Sharon Washington - Pam; Cynthia Mace - Wendy; Michael Countryman - Evan; Ken Howard - Don Jeffries.

### **Credits**

Clay Brown - Art Director, Daniel Rosenblum - Boom Operator, Ellen Chenoweth - Casting, Blake Neely - Conductor, Christopher Goode - Co-producer, Sarah Edwards - Costume Designer, Steve Apicella - First Assistant Director, Tony Gilroy - Director, John Gilroy - Editor, George Clooney - Executive Producer, Jim Holt - Executive Producer, Anthony Minghella - Executive Producer, Steven Soderbergh - Executive Producer, James Holt - Executive Producer, Eddy Collins - Location Manager, James Newton Howard - Composer (Music Score), Brian Ross - Musical Direction/Supervision, P. Scott Sakamoto - Camera Operator, Kevin Thompson - Production Designer, Robert Elswit - Cinematographer, Jennifer Fox - Producer, Kerry Orent - Producer, Sydney Pollack - Producer, Steven Samuels - Producer, Alan Meyerson - Recording, Alan Meyerson - Sound Mixer, Michael Barosky - Sound/Sound Designer, Clay Duncan - Sound/Sound Designer, Mel Wesson - Sound/Sound Designer, Michael Brooks - Sound/Sound Designer, Alex Kharlamov - Sound/Sound Designer, Norman Douglass - Stunts, Joanne Lamstein - Stunts, Don J. Hewitt - Stunts, Chris Barnes - Stunts, Gene Harrison - Stunts, John E. Mack - Stunts, Jery Hewitt - Stunts Coordinator, Christopher Goode