THE OUTFIT
(Language: English)

Director: Graham Moore, 2022. Running time: 105 minutes.
Presented by Dorchester Film Society, 8th February, 2023.

"Who pulled the trigger on the return of the whodunit? The list of suspects is long and tantalising – as of course it should be. Could it have been Rian Johnson, the enigmatic writer and director of *Knives Out* and its forthcoming sequel? Was it the nefarious Quentin Tarantino, who passed off *The Hateful Eight* as a hard-bitten western, even though it was actually a classic drawing-room mystery, poisoned coffee pot and all? Or what about the dashing Kenneth Branagh, who started plotting his series of Agatha Christie adaptations in 2015?

Whoever the culprit may have been, what fun it is to see this long-defunct genre winkingly resurgent – and *The Outfit* is another fine addition to the canon. Co-written and directed by Graham Moore, whose script for the Alan Turing biopic *The Imitation Game* won an Oscar in 2015, it's a thing of mousy, understated elegance – and as cunningly constructed as the suits sewn by Leonard Burling (Mark Rylance), a one-time Savile Row artisan now plying his trade in snow-blown Chicago of the 1950s.

Just don't call him a tailor. Leonard's pedigree makes him a cutter – and his flair with chalk, tape and shears is highly sought after by the city's best-dressed crooks. So popular is he with the Boyle family in particular – a local Irish mob on the rise, led by Simon Russell Beale's Roy Boyle – that his backroom is home to the gang's dead letter box, from which payments and messages are regularly retrieved by Roy's son Richie, played by Dylan O'Brien, and his right-hand man Francis, played by Johnny Flynn.

But there's a problem: against this backdrop of stitching, a stitch-up. It's believed that someone is passing information on the Boyle family to the FBI, and the film's compact list of leads – Rylance, O'Brien and Flynn, plus Zoey Deutch as Leonard's young assistant and semi-protégée, Mable – means the guilty party is right under their and our noses.

The Outfit takes place entirely over the course of a single eventful night within Leonard's shop, ending with the mole's identity coming to light – its title refers

both to a local crime syndicate the Boyle family are trying to forge ties with and the suit Rylance's character spends the film trying to finish off, even as all hell breaks loose. It's testament to the artfulness of Moore and Johnathan McClain's screenplay that your suspicions flit constantly between all four parties, and the denouement – which takes a surprising yet just about merited turn for the macabre – still manages to surprise.

Moore's screenplay for *The Imitation Game* stuck pretty cravenly to the prestige-biopic recipe, not that it seemed to hamper its awards prospects – and *The Outfit* is, in its own way, every bit as formulaic. But with whodunits, the manoeuvring is all the more pleasurable when it plays by the rules; the film cheerfully bluffs and misdirects, but crucially it never cheats. It's also anchored by two richly enjoyable performances.

Predictably, one comes from Rylance, whose attention to the quietest details of Leonard's craft are hugely rewarding to watch by themselves, even without his regular, almost hypnotically understated monologues layered on top. (It's a role you can imagine having been played beautifully a decade or two ago by Michael Caine.) The other standout is Flynn, who turns out to be a natural fit for this period setting – his bright eyes and sly, insinuating lips give him an almost Cagney-esque presence that keeps the picture flickering with threat. Though the story unfolds over no more than 12 hours, the broader historical context is diligently mined for significance.

"I was in the war," Rylance tells Flynn. "At your age?" the younger man replies, raising an eyebrow. "The other war," Rylance fires back. Exactly what he endured, and his motives for emigrating, are one of the film's secondary mysteries. But in the end, like everything here, they're just another mechanism within the larger contraption, which whirs away grippingly until its final click."

Robbie Collin, *The Telegraph,* 7th April, 2022.

"If, like me, you're a fan of old-timey gangster flicks, this twisty, enjoyable new film starring Mark Rylance is probably going to scratch that itch. Graham Moore's *The Outfit* is set in 50s Chicago, featuring warring mobs, shoot-outs, rats, and double-crosses galore. But it restrains all its action to the inside of an unlikely locus for its events: a tailor's shop.

Rylance plays a devoted cutter/tailor known only to the Chicagoans as "English", a seemingly soft-spoken gentleman who has a fatherly affection for his secretary Mabel (Zoey Deutch). He has long provided suits for the local mob boss and his son Richie (a hotheaded Dylan O'Brien), as well as their silently glowering compatriot Francis (Johnny Flynn).

When a sudden betrayal occurs on the shop floor during the search of a suspected rat, English is drafted into enforced silence, caught in the middle of a gang war that has made his shop into temporary HQ. When Mabel waltzes into this dangerous situation, it's up to English to use his wits to save them both.

Told in the manner of a one-room stage, the plotting is superb, and the writing benefits from real polish. Sample dialogue: "You don't know how to say one thing when you mean another? You're English, I thought you were good at that."

With a script like this, you can see why it attracted an actor of Rylance's calibre and his performance is predictably excellent: a masterpiece of shifting allegiances and side-eyed appraisals. Unfortunately, not everyone is on that same plane, which is a real problem in such a self-contained, intense story.

Johnny Flynn falls disappointingly flat as a stone-cold killer; it's an ambitious attempt at channelling a Tom Hagen-esque quiet menace, but Flynn seems to lack conviction or gravitas. As a result, what should be threatening comes across as rather limp, and the role is too pivotal to overlook."

Christina Newland, *i*, 17th April, 2022.