

Very Good Film: Mary, full of Grace (BEWARE SPOILER INFO)

Another moving and thought-provoking South America social realism piece. Very neat three act structure. The first act turning point: 'Maria agrees to become a drug "mule"' is very powerful and easily provides the fuel for the rest of the film. Notice how, characteristically, this first act turning point is 'what the film is about', plot-wise. Remember, if you ask yourself what your film is 'about' in terms of plot, your answer will usually describe the action or decision that should be dramatised as the first act turning point. For example, plot-wise, the movie *Tootsie* is "about" a male actor who dresses up as a woman to get a job, and it's depicted on screen with a sit-up-in-your-seat image of Dustin Hoffman marching down the street dressed as a woman. Which is very handy to know if you're losing your way. It's very common not to have a good first act turning point, or to discover several drafts into the film that you haven't got a strong enough first act tp, so have to invent one. When you've got one you wonder how on earth you thought you had a proper story when all you really had was actors behaving in character. Good character writers do this all the time because they get distracted by the joy of characterisation, so if you know characterisation is a strong point, flag the likelihood that your first act tp may be weak. Just generally, if your film feels slow or you've stopped in your tracks, check you have a good first act turning point that depicts in action what the film is 'about' plot-wise. If you don't know what the film is 'about' plot-wise, beware, and find out quickly. Without a strong central story spine the script will almost invariably meander. (It's sometimes a bit different in parallel narrative, but I'm talking linear plots here). The disturbance in *Maria full of Grace* is Maria getting sacked AND the pregnancy (I think that double disturbance is right - you really need those two elements to motivate her dangerous decision to become a mule)

The relationship line in *Mary full of Grace* - Mary's relationship with her "mule" friends only really comes into play in the second act. This is typical of the second act, since many stories (and this is one) need the first act turning point to permit the crucial relationships to begin. The pregnancy is a very useful emotional and plot device. It permits two crucial plot swings - it's the reason she doesn't get picked up by Customs and it permits a satisfactory ending. You actually need that pregnancy-driven decision at the end because without it the story has nowhere to go after the death of the "mule friend". It's over. All that would be left would be for Maria to go home. That would have meant the film fizzled out at the end. Dangerous.