"Michael Clayton"

Much as I would like to, I am not going to expound on this film in loving detail as one of the central pleasures of "Michael Clayton" is how it constantly keeps you off guard. It starts at the beginning. Attorney Michael Clayton (George Clooney) is driving back at night from a client conference on a lonely country road when he stops to admire three horses grazing on a hilltop. That bucolic scene turns out to be a momentous stop.

Clayton is an attorney with a mega-law firm in New York City. His job is to solve problems when the firm doesn't want to get its' legal hands dirty. They are currently defending a class action suit in an environmental case in which the plaintiffs are seeking $3 billion in damages. They are on the eve of an advantageous settlement when their superstar litigator, Arthur Edens (Tom Wilkinson) suffers a meltdown. With everything on the line, the firm's manager, Marty Bach (Sydney Pollock) tasks Clayton with the job of getting Arthur back into shape. Without Arthur to wrap up the case, they will fall from grace with Karen Crowder (Tilda Swinton) house counsel for their client. Everything depends on Clayton but, in the process of trying to salvage Arthur, Clayton finds himself in a house of mirrors. End of plot summary.

Some of the pleasures awaiting you in "Michael Clayton" are:

> Ensemble acting at its best. Clooney is at the top of his form; Pollock is the embodiment of distilled cynicism; Swinton (she received an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress) embodies a woman at the top of the corporate heap whose insecurities are only on view when she is alone; and Wilkinson leaps out at you from the screen.

> The dialogue is so good in places that you want to go back and savor it again. Witness Clayton's advice to a fat cat client who is involved in a hit-and-run accident and almost every conversation between Clayton, Marty and Arthur. This is a really smart script.

> The surprising twists and turns. In fairness, some of them do not always bear scrutiny when you look back at them at the end of the film. However, the

breakneck pace of the film leaves little time for reflection or nitpicking on that score.

"Michael Clayton" (with 6 Oscar nominations) is intelligent escapist fare at its' best

(Amazon Prime)

More Corporate Malfeasance - Attorney Robert Billott (Mark Ruffalo) takes on DuPont when he is convinced they knew their then version of Teflon was a carcinogen. Seven years into the case he is getting nowhere and his life is collapsing around him. Then a light appears at the end of the tunnel. Based on an actual case, "Dark Waters" is a compelling legal docudrama.

(Amazon Prime)