

## Deadly Dull ‘The Words’ Has Nothing to Say

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 7, 2012 - 12:50pm

- [Bradley Cooper](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Dennis Quaid](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Jeremy Irons](#) [6]
- [Movie Review](#) [7]
- [Olivia Wilde](#) [8]
- [The Words](#) [9]
- [Zoe Saldana](#) [10]



Rating: **1.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It may seem like easy bait for a critic but the quote whores supplied a dozen or so words for the mysterious ads for the new drama “The Words” and so I’d like to play their little game. I have a few words of my own – “Dull.” “Inert.” “Pretentious.” “Uninteresting.” “Inconsistent.” “Craptastic.” Put those on your ad.

“The Words” is fifteen minutes of movie stretched out to a 96-minute running time that feels twice as long. It is cinematic Ambien, the kind of limp affair that mistakes overheated dialogue for character or action. I was relatively with this drama for a good hour, critically peeved by a few elements that I’ll get to later but forgiving because of where it might have been going. It goes nowhere other than to take a left turn from disappointment into total mess in the final thirty minutes which are so pretentiously weighed down with false drama and ambiguous character motivations that I just wanted someone to get hit by a truck.



The Words

Photo credit: CBS Films

Brian Klugman & Lee Sternthal (who co-wrote and co-directed) tell a story within a story (that even goes a deeper level to another story at one point...it’s like “Inception” for literary dullards.) Clay Hammond (Dennis Quaid) is a successful author who is reading passages from his latest novel to a rapt audience that includes the flirtatious Daniella (Olivia Wilde). The story he tells is that of Rory Jansen (Bradley Cooper) and his lovely wife Dora (Zoe Saldana). Rory wants to be a writer. In typical Hollywood fashion, this means a lot of emotional outbursts about what he’s supposed to do with his life and little actual writing.

Rory faces rejection from publishers, dismissal by his father (J.K. Simmons), and begins to think that he may have to give up on his dream (after *two whole years* of really working it, which produced the only laugh in the entire film from this writer...anyone who thinks they can have



their dreams come true after two years is a petulant child). As Rory whines, walks out of dinners, and generally bemoans the fact that he may not watch his dreams come true, he stumbles upon a manuscript in a French briefcase and his life is forever changed. The stories within that case are mesmerizing. And Rory decides to take them as his own. Then their original author (Jeremy Irons) shows up.

Plagiarism is a hot topic today with the Wild West of the internet making it easier to take things without being noticed. With the recent suspension of Fareed Zakaria from Time and CNN under a cloud of plagiarism, it's clear that it's a trap that more and more people can fall into every day. It might make for an interesting drama. However, "The Words" is not really about plagiarism. Without spoiling anything, its creators attempt both something deeper than the cost of stealing someone else's work and something much more muddled. The fact that Rory has taken the story of someone else's life means he must also take their personal pain. And how does Clay relate to the story he's telling? When we take someone else's story, are we taking their fiction or the reality that created it?



The Words

Photo credit: CBS Films

These are interesting questions that might have worked on the printed page where these kind of tricky narratives are easier to pull off. It seems likely that "The Words" started life as a short story or an actual novel as it would have allowed us to get into Rory & Dora's heads, to understand their predicament without long awkward pauses and poorly directed melodrama. Cooper is stuck with a non-character, a person who spends much of the film reading, writing, or listening to someone else's story. Quaid is effective but almost a non-character, particularly in a series of awful scenes near the end with a miscast Wilde. And Saldana disappears for about 40 minutes until she's needed for an emotional climax. None of these characters feel like anything more than literary devices. They're not real. They're not genuine.

With his debut novel called "The Window Tears," Rory Jensen is proclaimed as having made an important work of fiction. Every frame of "The Words" reeks of a production that thinks it's equally important. The ambiguity and pretension masquerades as important filmmaking when it's really just ego stroking. Walking out of "The Words" and trying to wrap my head around its artistic intentions and what it was trying to say, I could only really think of one descriptor – nothing.

*"The Words" stars Bradley Cooper, Zoe Saldana, Dennis Quaid, Olivia Wilde, and Jeremy Irons. It was written and directed by Brian Klugman & Lee Sternthal. It is rated PG-13 and opens on September 7, 2012.*



[11]

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