

EROS:

Three legendary directors worked on "Eros" and it almost seems that they were given carte blanche in developing their respective story in this anthology. One easily sees their earlier inclinations through these works.

Movie anthologies are simply short works by different directors with the intention of telling a unified and complete story in one movie. As a general rule, movie anthologies rarely work. They tend to be full of seams because of divergent structure, vision and composition of their directors.

One rare exception is the British "Dead of Night" from 1946. Even with only one small needless vignette, it is a masterpiece.

The basic premise of "Eros" is eroticism. But eroticism is viewed differently by individual persons and by a culture as a group. Therein lies the initial problem in creating a cohesive whole.

It appears that the directors were looking for a cultural depiction, and therefore, they are necessarily divergent. It is an artistic polemic on desire and passion, bounded by religious, cultural and personal restraints.

The Chinese Wong Kar-Wai has had an ability to create tension and passion among the most minimal of stories. Yet he knows how to create tension by not giving in to flash and slowly allows his magic to unfold.

Kar-Wai explores here the natural tension and cultural taboos of eroticism and unrequited love. It's all mysterious and complicated, he implies.

Steven Soderbergh, the American, flew into movie immortality with his remarkable 1989 film "sex, lies and videotape." It was an offbeat tale with discussions on sex.

Soderbergh's desire here is to demonstrate the vacuous and pointless need to analyze sexuality. It's all foolish, he implies.

The great Italian Michelangelo Antonioni was the darling of film discourse in the early 1960s with provocative films like "L'Avventura" and "Blow-Up." He was at ease creating mysterious situations and capturing the landscape. He knew how to place his characters in its midst. And, he loved displaying beautiful women on screen.

Antonioni's depiction here is the beauty of life, the earth and the human figure. Live and let live, he implies.

Who better then to represent three views of sexuality and eroticism around the world?

The first sequence, "The Hand," directed by Wong Kar-Wai represents frustrated passion. The time is probably the early 1960s. It is filmed with a turgid and murky look. Colors have been saturated with blue/green and with overpowering natural lighting. Sometimes the characters are shot from an angle, sometimes from behind as though they are guilty if they show emotions. The cinematography is by Christopher Doyle.

This tale is the most complete story and is the longest of the three. It stars the beautiful Miss Hua (Gong Li). She is the experienced prostitute that many men savor. One day a young tailor Zhang (Chang Chen) comes to visit her to design a dress for her. She introduces him to desire and passion with her hand that gently caresses him. They go no farther.

His infatuation with her only leads to frustrated love and self-deprivation, after all, no gentleman should fall in love with such a woman in China.

Over the years Miss Hua begins to lose her beauty and an unknown illness has caused her to lose her luster and desirability. She is thrown out into the streets because of poverty. But Zhang loves her won't let go of her.

The tone in this sequence is heavy and melodramatic.

The film in many ways is a shortened version of director Kar-Wai's masterpiece "In the Mood for Love" from 2000. Both movies create a near perfect setting, a mood, personal dilemmas and cultural roadblocks.

"Equilibrium" by Steven Soderbergh takes place in 1955. It portrays American culture that seeks psychoanalysis to explain dreams and desires. Beginning with a primary blue color scheme in a fantasy sequence, it then switches to a garish black & white in the psychoanalyst's office. The "real world" last act is filmed with a golden aura. It is filmed in an almost clinical fashion- Americans want explanations and justification for their acts. The cinematography is by Peter Andrews.

Nick Penrose (Robert Downey, Jr.) begins to tell Dr. Pearl (Alan Arkin) about his fantasies. Sitting behind Penrose, Dr. Pearl asks questions but hardly seems interested. He is fidgety and is being distracted by someone outside his office.

It's all pointless. Penrose's clinical session and Dr. Pearl's obsession with someone outside have little value. Penrose's meandering and Dr. Pearl's outdoor interest lack communication between the two. I think it signifies the pointlessness of psychoanalyzing people for sexual (mis)behavior.

The tone in this sequence is both comedic and condescending.

"The Dangerous Thread of Things" by the legendary Michelangelo Antonioni takes place in a seaside resort. The colors are fresh and vibrant. It contains nudity and borders on soft-core porn. It is existential in its treatment but it also has a fantasy like premise. It exemplifies Italian (European) fewer hang-ups about nudity and sex. It is filmed with a certain vitality and air of freedom and earthiness. The cinematography is by Marco Pontecorvo.

Christopher (Christopher Buchholz) and his wife Cloe (Regina Nemmi) are a beautiful, young, vibrant, but unhappy couple. They walk and talk about their problems along a lovely seaside resort. And they ride in the countryside with a Maserati.

One day at a coffee shop, he sees a beautiful young woman (Luisa Ranieri) and goes to her medieval turret-like home and they make love. Cloe doesn't disapprove and the film ends in a "Antonionesque" like way.

The tone in this sequence has a "joy of vivre" attitude and is playful and free-spirited with some philosophical musings and bantering.

The use of color in the three segments is interesting.

The color blue permeates throughout all three. In the first, the garish blue/green color permeates the surroundings and creates claustrophobia and tension. In the second, the fantasy (the basis of the office call) sequence is in all vibrant blue. In the third, the ocean in the background is blue and the couple's Maserati is a deep blue.

There is a wonderful romantic and charming melody in Italian that "connects" each sequence by preceding it. Sung by Caetano Veloso, it is titled "Michelangelo Antonioni." One of the lyrics is "The words on the page are empty. I paint the lyrics on your face."

In essence, this movie should be taken as a jigsaw puzzle that doesn't quite fit as a whole. The pieces are lovely to look at but don't quite fit together. But, I don't think they are supposed to.

This is definitely not a major film. But it has ideas for us to explore and savor. What may seem like reality, is but an illusion, and what seems like an illusion, may be the melding of all of us, i.e., the desire to find connection.

"The Hand" offers the power of suggestion, "Equilibrium" offers fantasy and "The Dangerous Thread of Things" offers the natural.

"The Hand" in Mandarin with English Subtitles

"Equilibrium" in English

"The Dangerous Thread of Things" in Wonderful Italian with English Subtitles

104 Minutes

MPAA Rating: R (for strong sexual content including graphic nudity and language)

RATING: B

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