

## The Eclipse

The new Irish film “The Eclipse” written and directed by noted dramatist Conor McPherson (from a story by Billy Roche), had the potential to be an intelligent, thoughtful entertainment with a touch of the mysterious, but, in this case, that potential was not fully realized.

The story follows a phlegmatic Irishman Michael Farr (Ciaran Hinds), a widower with two young kids and a job as a shop teacher in Cobh, a small, picturesque Irish town. Every year in town he volunteers to help with a modest local literary festival. In that role, he runs across a famous popular US novelist Nicholas Holden (Aidan Quinn) and an attractive writer of horror novels, Lena Morelle (Iben Hjejle), for whom he begins to fall. It’s a temporary thing, of course, since she must leave, but not before Michael has a run-in with the coarse and jealous Holden. Running through the mundane of Farr’s life, however, are ghostly apparitions he begins to see in his home, spirits seeming to call back his past life and perhaps related to his late wife’s death.

Hinds is a favorite actor of mine (“Munich,” “There Will Be Blood,” and Caesar in HBO’s “Rome” mini-series), and I found most of his performance as a decent, phlegmatic Irishman convincing and true. Iben Hjejle is also winning and believable. Further, I rather like the premise/setting of an annual literary festival in a small town and how its locals and visitors might interact, a context very rare in the movies. Finally, Conor McPherson can definitely write dialogue (among his honored plays are “The Weir,” “The Shining City,” and “The Seafarer”) and much of the exchanges here seem true and believable.

Still, I found fault with elements of the film, which, I note, did win an Irish Film and Television award in 2009. Foremost, the interspersed “horror/nightmare” sequences may have been in Roche’s original story, but they did not work for me in the film. They seemed like abrupt, false interruptions which marred and interrupted the tone of the film. They were so out of place that they seemed to belong to another—weaker—movie.

Also, Aidan Quinn’s character appeared from the first completely out of whack, a stereotypically crude American full of bluster and bombast. I could not believe he was a novelist of any stripe, even a crass commercial one. He just clashed blatantly with the other, more gently observed quality of the film. (I have to admit, however, that I loved the staging of his fight with Hinds late in the film; the two actors looked oh so real in their clumsy, halting choreography.)

Oh, and finally... Sorry, but I just didn’t feel enough romantic vibe between Hinds and Hjejle, attractive as both are. I wanted to, but it just wasn’t there.

Overall, perhaps, I felt the film was, if anything, too laid back, lacking bite or emotional range (and, no, the ghost scenes didn’t provide them!).

*(Rated “R” for language and some violence, the film runs 88 minutes.)*

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