

Loggerheads

In this film, real loggerheads are a species of large marine turtles off the coast of North Carolina, while the figurative phrase “at loggerheads”—meaning testy disagreement between parties—defines the relationships between and among a complex of characters. That web of relationships, smartly observed and cleverly intercut, mark a fine piece of work by writer/director Tim Kirkman.

Loggerheads tells the story of an adoption “triad”—birth mother, child, and adoptive parents—in three interwoven stories each set in one of the three specific geographical regions of North Carolina—mountains, Piedmont, and coastal plain. In Asheville, Grace (Bonnie Hunt), an airport car-rental agent living with her mother (Michael Learned), quits her job and sets off to find the son she gave up for adoption when she was a teenager. On the coast at Kure Beach, Mark (Kip Pardue), a young man obsessed with saving loggerhead turtles, meets George (Michael Kelly), an accommodating motel owner who offers him a place to stay—and more. In the center of the state in the town of Eden, a minister's wife Elizabeth (Tess Harper) struggles with her conservative husband Robert Austin (Chris Sarandon) over their estrangement from

The above synopsis does not describe how *Loggerheads* really unfurls. One of its assets is the way Kirkman plays with time and subtly contorts the chronologies of its protagonists to bring surprise and depth to his chronicle. Kirkman isn't radical using this mode. Unlike predecessors Quentin Tarantino (in *Pulp Fiction* and others) and Christopher Nolan (*Memento*), he offers the viewer date cues as titles before sequences. It is up to the audience to piece together the story he is telling. That story is, by the way, gracefully wrapped up in a final moving scene of two mothers comparing notes on their son.

The film is considerably enhanced by well-modulated, honest acting all around. It is one of those wonderful ensemble works of multiple viewpoints that can be so difficult to pull off. Both relative newcomers, like Pardue (*Imaginary Heroes*) as Kip, and acting veterans, like Michael Learned as Grace's mother, come off as convincing, genuine people, unspectacular perhaps, but decent. Michael Kelly plays a George of confidence and sensitivity, a man content in his own skin.

Chris Sarandon as the uptight Rev. Austin might be labeled as the “villain” of the piece, but he is, in fact, believably small-minded and vain rather than truly nasty. Tess Harper as Mrs. Austin is just about perfect as the matronly, soft-spoken pastor's wife who wistfully laments her family's break-up. A very nice surprise is Bonnie Hunt as Grace. Breaking way out of her spunky-sweet TV sitcom persona) as well as the silly comic meanderings of *Cheaper by the Dozen*), Hunt here is poignant and plaintive as a woman trying to find the missing piece of her life.

Kirkman's *Loggerheads* is his first fiction film (he has made two documentaries), and he has based it on a true adoptive story and placed it in his native state of North Carolina. He has written about his film that “*Loggerheads* is fundamentally a film about the ways in which shame can lead to destruction. The shame of relinquishing a child, the shame of being relinquished, the shame of infertility, the shame of being gay—all unnecessarily assigned by our culture in a variety of forms.” As grim as such a theme may sound, his tale is told with delicacy and tact and unfolds as naturally as garden growth.

(This film is rated "PG-13" for mature themes and mild cussing.)

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