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Soldate Jeanette

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Soldate Jeanette

Abstract

This is a film review of *Soldate Jeanette* (2013) directed by Daniel Hoesl.

Keywords

Joan of Arc, Materialism

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Routledge, 2009). He is currently editing (along with Eric Mazur) the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.

Soldate Jeanette

directed by Daniel Hoesl

(World Cinema Dramatic Competition)

In his feature directorial debut, Hoesl contrasts the world of Fanni as one of urban wealth and privilege with that of rural Anna, who lives and works on a simple farm. Few



words are used, as he relies more on facial expressions and space to tell his story, in the filmmaking tradition of Carl Dreyer or Robert Bresson. The details of the tale emerge slowly and are never completely clear, but these are not essential to the overall art and point of the film.

What does emerge gradually is that Fanni has lost all her money. She has lived a lavish life style for years, but now her partner is in jail and she is bankrupt. When she loses her apartment and her bank account is closed, she realizes her former life is over. Thrown off a train when she cannot pay the fare, she takes a car for a test drive from which she never returns, parking the car in the woods and hiking with a backpack of supplies into the mountains. She does not seem to be afraid, but also seems to be without any real direction or purpose. In fact, she was just as without purpose earlier in the film as she went through the motions of wealthy life; it simply creates a change of setting.

It is a dramatic change of setting, however, as it is now forces of nature rather than human-fashioned objects that fill the screen. When we see a cow slaughtered on screen, we enter the world of Anna, who seems just as bereft of hope or purpose, working the tedious life of a farm worker without any meaningful relationships. Both seem to be sleep walking through life; and yet after meeting, each finds something to admire in the other's life. They become friends, and experience real joy and companionship with each other, maybe for the first time. Just as Fanni has broken away from her past and found some meaning on the farm, she helps Anna to break out of her own self-imposed prison. Fanni proves to be Anna's liberator, as well as her own.

The film seems to be Hoesl's own version of the Joan of Arc story, as the title of the film, "Soldier Jane" alludes to Joan as the warrior clad in armor, and Fanni seems to have something of the strong soldier about her in her ability to survive. Early in the film, we see Fanni sleeping through a showing of Dreyer's 1928 film *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc*, with a scene in which Joan at her trial speaks of suffering, and her redemption through death. But Anna and Fanni do not have to die to be redeemed; they only need to give up attachment to their former lives. Fanni is no saint as she engages in theft and fraud to survive, but her liberation from social and financial conventions allows her a freedom she never had in her protected life of privilege, a freedom she teaches to Anna and shares

with her. In this way, the film provides a challenge to materialistic culture and a suggestion of how we might be redeemed from it.

— John Lyden