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The Lobster

Abstract

This is a film review of *The Lobster* (2015) directed by Yorgos Lanthimos.

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



The Lobster
(2015)

Directed by Yorgos Lanthimos

In an alternate world, society finds itself divided into two groups: Couples and Loners. David (Colin Farrell) finds himself single after years of marriage. But being single goes against societal rules and so David is arrested, forced to leave The City and is taken to The Hotel; an institution where single people are urged to couple within 45 days. If the single person does not find a compatible mate within that timeframe, they are turned into an animal and forced to live in The Woods (a form of hell on earth). Also in The Woods are those who have escaped The Hotel and live solitary lives.

The dualistic nature of this world is highly dogmatic. The "couple" is the ideal because it's believed that "life is better with two instead of one." In order to prove this point, inhabitants of The Hotel have one hand cuffed behind them for a day so that they can truly understand the importance of being in a relationship. Occupants of The Hotel must follow rigid rules in order to enhance their desire for couple-hood: they are sexually stimulated daily with no release to encourage them to find a partner; they cannot masturbate; they must all wear the same clothing so that finding a match is not based on appearance. They attend daily seminars depicting scenarios where being alone is a horrid state in comparison to couple-hood. Instead of love, this world focuses on compatibilities. David is short-sighted, and his ex-wife was shortsighted. She leaves him for another short-sighted man. A man at the hotel has a limp, but since no other occupant of The Hotel has a limp, he fakes a compatible ailment with another person; she suffers from nosebleeds, so he finds ways to make himself have them too.

Upon arriving at The Hotel, each person is categorized (heterosexual or homosexual), and each must choose the animal they wish to become if they cannot find a suitable mate. David chooses to be a lobster as they live to a hundred years, have blue blood like aristocrats and he likes the ocean. When given his clothing, he learns that there are no variations allowed; he cannot have shoes in a half-size: he must fit into a smaller or larger size. This lack of variation becomes an underlying message through the movie; one cannot be different, one cannot be single, one cannot be pansexual. Compatibility is forced.

Eventually David meets a woman who he is attracted to but she's a sociopath, so David must pretend to also be one in order to prove his compatibility to her. He cannot sustain this fraudulent identity, and eventually escapes The Hotel and finds himself in The Woods. Instead of finding freedom and choice, David finds that the Loners who live there have their own dogmatic

rules within which one must live; there cannot be any flirting, romance or sexual intercourse. Each Loner is given a CD player that only plays electronic music as it allows a person to dance alone. Amidst the constraints of these two worlds, David finds love - with a short-sighted woman (Rachel Weisz) - perhaps the first love story in this world.

The Lobster portrays a world where life is rigid and ruthless. Both sides of this dystopian world are authoritarian - individual desires and needs have no place there. Love is irrelevant. In its own way, this film projects the fear that many of us have today of finding ourselves alone. We are raised to find our soulmates, our lifelong partners, and when we are single, our family members and friends try to console us, letting us know that "there's someone out there for you, you just have to keep searching." Although our society places a high value on finding love, the idea of being alone seems far worse than being in a compatible relationship. *The Lobster* also touches on the fact that music can lead to romance, as The Hotel holds regular dances where occupants can get to know each other better. Meanwhile, in *The Woods*, music is relegated to individualism (they can only listen to electronic music) for fear that other types of music can lead to romance. In fact it does in one scene, where David and the near-sighted woman are listening to the Loner Leader's parents play a beautiful song. Perhaps those religious institutions that condemn music listening and dancing understand the truth of music; it leads to flirting and romance, and coupling, by choice (or one could say, through free will).