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Abe

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Abe

Abstract

This is a film review of *Abe* (2019) directed by Fernando Grostein Andrade.

Keywords

Interfaith Marriage, Judaism, Islam, Cooking

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & 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* (NYU Press), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of 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.



Abe (2019), dir. Fernando Grostein Andrade

The Sundance Film Festival now has a category of films labelled, “Kids,” but note that these are really films that can be enjoyed by all ages. *Abe* is a fine entry in this category which deals with interreligious identity thoughtfully and sensitively.

Fans of *Stranger Things* will recognize the eponymous star of the film, Noah Schnapp, as the boy who played Will Byers on that show. Schnapp brings the same effective combination of sweet innocence and anxiety to this role as the child of a Palestinian post-Muslim atheist father and a secular Jewish mother. When the whole family gathers, the grandparents (from Israel and Palestine) feud about politics and religion, and not good-naturedly. His Israeli grandfather and his Muslim grandparents each want to teach him their own religious and cultural traditions, and Abe is truly open to them as he loves each and is sincerely interested in both sides of his dual identity. He learns about the Jewish Sabbath and about Muslim fasting and fast-breaking (iftar) during

Ramadan, and he decides to observe the fast this year for the first time. Neither side understands why he wants to learn about the other, insisting he must choose one over the other, which to him feels like a betrayal of himself and his family. Complicating this is the fact that his father is so anti-religious that he does not want Abe to practice or appreciate either tradition.

Although Abe is a solitary and shy boy with few friends outside social media, he loves to cook. He decides to reconcile his diverse religious and cultural heritages through fusion cuisine, which he will learn during his summer vacation. He is aided in this by Brazilian chef Chico, who takes him on as an unpaid apprentice, although Abe's parents think that he is at a juvenile cooking camp.

Abe hatches a plan to create a "Semitic Thanksgiving" made up on foods from both of his religious cultures, and he concocts hybrid prayers that freely oscillate between Arabic and Hebrew, much to his grandparents' consternation. But this meal is no *Babette's Feast* which magically creates harmony; the film is realistic enough to show the meal devolve into fierce arguments which lead Abe to question his project as well as his own identity. As Chico points out to him, however, his relatives may never settle their differences; he still has the right to be who he is, even if they never understand. In the end, there is a level of acceptance if not understanding achieved from his family, so that while Abe's concoctions do not erase all their religious and political arguments, his identity and creations are acknowledged and appreciated. This is a sweet and touching film that deals with a subject that is increasingly real for many families that have dual religious heritages—including my own—and while not all of us may be able to cook as well or as creatively as Abe, we can embrace and love the sometimes awkward and sometimes beautiful combinations that arise from the fusion of religions and cultures in our pluralistic world.