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Islands

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Islands

Abstract

This is a film review of *Islands* (2021), directed by Martin Edralin.

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Author Notes

John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska-Omaha. He was been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. 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 also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



Islands (2021), dir. Martin Edralin

Joshua (Rogelio Balagtas) is almost fifty years old, has never had a girlfriend, and lives with his aging parents in Canada, helping to care for them. He works as a janitor at a local university, although he was a dentist in the Philippines. Painfully shy, he prays at night before a statue of Jesus, asking God to help him overcome his shyness, get married, and have children. His brother is married with a family, and Joshua realizes that he will be alone if he cannot find a way to connect better to the outside world. At this point, however, he cannot even say yes to having lunch with his co-workers.

When his mother dies suddenly, he is left to care for his father; he can afford to quit his job and stay home with him, but this is even more isolating. He doesn't even know how to cook. His cousin Marisol (Sheila Lotuaco) moves in to help care for his father, and Joshua begins to discover the joy of companionship with her. She teaches him to cook, and encourages him to go to the salsa dance class that his parents attended. His father's health continues to decline, however, and he

worries that he will soon be totally alone. In his prayers, he asks God, “are you even listening?” as it seems that his religiosity will not rescue him. And indeed, it is finally Joshua’s responsibility to make some meaning in his own life, with or without Marisol.

There is a simplicity to the story and the way it is told that feels totally authentic to the experiences of so many people, perhaps immigrants in particular. Religion and family are central to their identity, but these alone do not connect them with a larger community. People are like islands, living solitary lives, but no one of them exists “entire in itself,” as John Donne put it: “every man is a piece of the continent, a piece of the main.” We long for companionship because we are in fact connected to others, and their loss diminishes us. Perhaps Joshua will learn that even in his solitude, he can reach out and find others with whom to share life. We do not know what form that may take, but the changes life brings to him do put before him that choice, and the challenge to find joy amidst loss.