

The Grain, a Touching Piece of Rural Brazil

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The Grain, just showcased at the First Los Angeles Brazilian Film Festival (LABRFF). is an extraordinary film that shows the life of a simple family with five members and a dog living in the north of Brazil.

Their grandmother Perpétua is very sick and the love between her and her grandson is enormous. She decides to prepare her grandson Zeca for her death and she starts telling him the story of a king and queen who lost their only son.

The isolation yet beautiful simplicity of rural Brazilian life is remarkably presented. Opening with a dramatic sweep of a rundown highway that leads us to the home where a father is a shepherd, a mother spins wool for others, a daughter is getting married, a son is running errands and playing and a grandmother is dying.

The emotions of each of these characters become visceral, taking the viewer into a sacred place within himself. Each character, no matter how primitive, has real dignity. The family members are kind to each other.

The grandson steals an apple and takes it to his dying grandmother, the father (Damião) sacrifices for his daughter's (Fátima) wedding, the mother (Josefa) worries about the welfare of all. The grandmother is especially loving; she begins to tell a story. It is a religious story about a grain of mustard and has a strong final impact on the meaning of the film.

The film is breathtakingly beautiful. Water, light, and air are manifest. The river reflects light in myriad ways, light is shown in relief through doorways like paintings; curtains and mosquito netting are waving in the breeze.

Nature, from trees and plants to dirt and water as well as animals such as a pet dog, are subtly filmed. Within each scene some angle or some object brings sudden, artistic meaning, such as a man standing on a plank of a sunken boat as water trickles up to his toes and floods around them. Or, as in another scene, flocks of birds take off from a corner of a house behind a roof.

The grandmother is especially well photographed. She is old, ugly, and wears rags, but her expressions show her strength, her love, her stability and character. The daughter tries on a wedding dress she has borrowed for her wedding and she radiates happiness and hope. Also through a slightly opened door, a slice of this beautiful young girl is shown as she showers.

Other scenes show her on a motorbike with her fiancé who is a mechanic, the father gambling with a spinning roulette type wheel behind him, and a healer praying over the grandmother. Every single scene economically draws the viewer into the emotional reality of the moment.

A particularly touching scene is when Zeca is arriving home from school and sees his family standing in front of the house. An ambulance is leaving. He understands that his grandmother is suffering; he drops an egg that his teacher has given him.

Perhaps the genius of the photography lies in allowing the audience time to really look at each scene. Watching the film makes one realize how much of ordinary life passes us by. Taking an extra moment and looking more carefully at anything, makes it more realized and more important.

The photography is as special as the reality of the subject being photographed. The patient photography represents the slow pace of the lives of the characters. The daughter says to her mother at one point: "Do you remember that you said we are living at the end of the world?" The daughter is getting married and moving with her husband to Fortaleza to try to have a better life and to help her family.

The acting matches the superb directing and photography. The Grandmother, Perpétua, is particularly convincing, but so are the other members of the family. Each family member is well cast. The daughter brings a sexuality and hope for the future. The son lives the abandonment and innocence of youth, the mother worries and loves, the father is enduring and trying.

There is a forceful underpinning to the film. One feels that these simple people are living something very real and important and they are struggling with life itself. They are brave, honorable and yet impoverished and uneducated in a worldly sense. These people represent some families who now live in rural Brazil.

If you want to see an extraordinary film, individual in its directing, filming and story, don't miss this one. It's an example of the finest filmmaking.

Credits

Petrus Cariry (Director, Executive Producer and Writer)

Rosemberg Cariry, Firmino Holanda (Writers)

Teta Maia, Valéria Cordeiro (Producers)

Ivo Lopes Araújo (Director of Photography)

Leuda Bandeira, Verônica Cavalcanti, Nanego Lira, Kelvya Maia and Luís Felipe Ferreira (Cast)