PRODUCTION
Film Discussion Group
CAST Bay Area Film Enthusiasts
LOCATION
Email:
adedic@pacbell.net
DATE Meet Monthly
Sunday evenings
TIME 6:30 pm

FILM: **MONSTER**

FDG RATING: 3.3 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Hirokazu Kore-eda: *director*
Kurokawa Souya: *actor, Mugino Minato*
Hiiragi Hinata: *actor, Hoshikawa Yori*

DATE: August 18, 2024

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **MONSTER**

The 2023 Japanese film, Monster, is a psychological drama exploring assumptions and misperceptions. Who is the monster? We could call the bullies in Minato's fifth grade class, little monsters, or is it his teacher, Mr. Hori? Minato's mother, Saori, is very concerned when her son starts behaving strangely, and has a bloody ear. After much pestering to get him to explain what happened, Minato says Mr. Hori hit him on the side of his head and said he had a pig's brain. She storms into the school demanding to know what's going on. As the story unfolds through the eyes of the mother, then the teacher, and lastly through Minato, the truth gradually emerges and is very different from what was first assumed.

In the opening scene, we see a high rise on fire and learn that there is a hostess bar on the 3rd floor. In another scene, we see Minato's classmate and close friend, Yori, a boy who is much smaller than any of his classmates and is a constant target of the bullies. He's holding a wand fire lighter. We also learn that his father often goes to the hostess bar and when Minato stops by to see Yori, the drunken father calls his own son a pig brain. Are the fathers the monsters? Minato's father evidently left his mother for a woman "with a tacky knit skirt". And then there is Fushimi, the school principal, who didn't discipline Mr. Hori, nor did they admit any wrong doing, but in typical Japanese style, they offered profuse apologies. Fushimi's daughter died in a car accident and she blamed her husband who is now in prison, but there are questions about what really happened.

Minato and Yori have a special bond, but Minato, trying to stay unnoticed by the bullies, doesn't help Yori when the other boys lock him in the bathroom stall. Away from the restrictions of school and home, we see the two boys running in a sunny field, playing, expressing youthful joy, a shared sense of fun and freedom. They like escaping to an abandoned rail way car, hidden in the bushes, in the woods. This is where they are when a typhoon hits and the rail car they had escaped to is covered, buried in the mud slide. When they boys first approached the rail car, they wiped the dirty windows with their hands to peek inside. Now we see Minato's mother with Mr. Hori frantically wiping away the mud from the windows to see if the boys are inside in the midst of the darkness and torrential storm.

As viewers, we are never quite sure where the truth is. Rumors, assumptions, misperceptions, weave the story together. What we see is not chronological causing some discussion participants to be confused. Others appreciated the non-linear approach that gradually enlightens you. Another comment referenced the 1950 Japanese film, Rashomon, by the esteemed director, Akio Kurosawa, which examines the nature of truth. In the opinion of one published film critic, "Rashomon is perhaps the finest film ever to investigate the philosophy of justice. Through an ingenious use of camera and flashbacks, Kurosawa reveals the complexities of human nature as four people recount different versions of the story of a man's murder and the rape of his wife."

One discussion participant described the film, Monster, as a puzzle, with pieces slowly fitting together. It's all about different perspectives was another comment. We get nearer to the truth with each perspective. The film makes the point that it is always difficult to access all the information.

The relationship of the two boys is central to the film. We had different opinions about what happened to the boys at the end of the story. But it's clear that prejudice can drive extreme behaviors and have devastating repercussions.

Although receiving awards for screenplay and cinematography, the non-linear story, bully scenes, and other confusing elements caused some low scores that took away from several high scores resulting in a cloudy 3.3 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

See you at the movies!
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