

Skin Flick at the Krim

Karen Knorp

“The Female,” current attraction at the Trans-Lux Krim in Highland Park, comes as close to being an obscene movie is anything I’ve seen.

The principal action is set in a Mexican whorehouse, and includes graphic scenes of two or more people in bed engaging in various acts of sadism, fellatio, foot fetishism, and plain old sexual intercourse. This is not, in my opinion, what makes “The Female” an obscene movie.

Unfortunately, the producers were not content to create a rather imaginative smoker, but felt the apparent need to “justify” the foregoing by mixing in a little artistic merit. This is the dirty part.

The heroine, played submissively by Isabel Sarli, is reminded of her past when she notices a hole in the ceiling of her room in the brothel. This past is then revealed to us in a series of flashbacks, which are spliced in with the finesse of the Hell’s Angels at a White House reception.

There follows a lot of footage of Miss Sarli wandering provocatively around dusty Mexican deserts, pouring wine and coffee and behaving in general like the beast of burden she is supposed to represent. She takes up with an American sheepherder, the only man around, and goes to live with him in a place more remote than that from which she came.

Eventually, another man is introduced: some kind of outlaw whom she nurses secretly after he has been wounded by a gang of Mexican bullies. When discovered, she talks her first master into keeping him around to help with the chores. The principal activity of the three around the farm is digging this forty foot hole in the ground which is supposed to be a well, if they ever hit water.

After a lot of digging, she is faced with a decision. Each of the men (whose will she has done equally up to now) wants her to leave the other down at the bottom of the hole. The farmer wants the outlaw’s money. The outlaw wants the farmer’s girl. She can’t make up her-mind and so leaves them both down there and wordlessly splits to the whorehouse.

Unfortunately for our heroine, the rat hole in the ceiling gets on her nerves and so in the end she returns to the farm in order to collapse in despair at the edge of the well, which contains by now a couple of stinking corpses. All this is told with frequent cuts back to the brothel for those of us who are interested.

It is ironically clear that the movie could not pass muster under the Supreme Court’s definition of obscenity without the inclusion of this story line with all its crude symbolism and perverted point of view. However, I am somewhat saddened at seeing, in our enlightened age, “the female” depicted as an ego-less, masochistic being, unable to function without some hairy male around to dictate to it.

The film’s subtitle, “Seventy Times Seven” is a reference to the biblical exhortation to forgive wrongs against oneself “until seventy times seven” (Matthew, 18). Clearly this obligation applies only to the female lead, who is incidentally, the only character to keep a portrait of the madonna in her room.

I would personally have liked to see this movie divided into two films (which could be done with a pair of rusty scissors with no damage to the film as it was produced), one for people who want to see a plain old dirty movie, and the other for those chauvinistic, insecure males who might dig the “story.”

As an example of the weird and confused offspring of our current attitude toward censorship in this country (or of the Italian film-maker's interpretation of that attitude), you might find "The Female" interesting. But probably you won't.

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