

MOVIE REVIEW: *LOST IN TRANSLATION*

Agathi Glezakos, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

In *Lost in Translation*, writer and director Sophia Coppola presents us with the multifaceted experiences of two Americans, an older man and a younger woman, who briefly connect while staying in an upscale hotel in fast-paced Tokyo, Japan. The relationship they develop as two people with a sense of emotional disconnect from their spouses, and their individual reactions to the challenges of living in an alien cultural context trigger sadness, empathy, an element of humor, and much thought about life's rhythms and the human condition at different developmental and relational stages. The film blends human drama with glimpses of the Tokyo landscape and generates a wide range of reactions from the audience.

Bob Harris (Bill Murray), an American actor, has been brought to Tokyo to shoot a liquor advertisement. The pay is good and the stay will be short. Bob arrives in Tokyo with no knowledge of the Japanese language and of the Japanese culture and way of life. He seems bewildered as his translator transforms lengthy instructions in Japanese into terse, short sentences in English. Though Bob at times displays impatience with Japanese television programs and Japanese food, the Japanese with whom Bob interacts welcome and admire him. They want to have their picture taken with him; Japan's "Johnny Carson" invites him to be a guest on his popular television program. One wonders to what extent their adulation is a reflection of a national tendency to seek out Americans and all that is American.

Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), a recent philosophy graduate from Yale, is in Tokyo with her photographer husband (Giovanni Ribisi) of two years, who is visiting on as-

signment. Charlotte is young, introspective, in search of a life goal, and unclear about the specifics of married life. What we see of her interactions with her husband raises questions about compatibility in their relationship. They do not communicate at the same level and they do not enjoy the same group of friends. From the window of her room at the top of the hotel she looks at the expansive, lively city below and feels alone. She walks the streets of Tokyo, pushed by hurried crowds, seeking human connection and understanding.

Things change for both Bob and Charlotte when they notice each other and begin spending time together. Their acquaintance is brief, but the time they spend together becomes their opportunity to acknowledge their disenchantment with their respective relationships, to express concern about each other, and to have fun with Charlotte's Japanese contemporaries, when they discover that music is the "language" that every one can understand. In Bob, Charlotte finds a father figure; a wiser man who eagerly shares with her his knowledge and insights about life and relationships. Charlotte's need to search, discover and understand what her life course might be like, leads Bob to the direction to question and explore where he is at in his own life course. Their feelings and attraction for each other are expressed and managed within the context of this father-daughter, older man-younger woman, December-May, relationship.

The movie's plot evolves in good sequence and the cinematography is impressive. The story of the two main characters might be anyone's story in a strange land and among people whose language and ways of thinking

and living one cannot understand. The respect and mutual concern reflected in the relationship that develops between two persons from different generations are qualities that enhance one's appreciation of human kind. The American's responses to the Japanese ways can be lessons in the importance of cultural sensitivity and appreciation of difference. The film gives us a glimpse of Tokyo's cosmopolitan flavor and of the serenity one can discover in less populated, immaculately kept sacred places.

At the same time, part of the dialogue evolves slowly and creates moments of boredom. Some of the content is void of meaningful messages. Bob's facial expression mirrors a perpetual state of dreariness and one wishes to see more emotive fluctuations to what he experiences. Young Charlotte can be more vibrant with emotion and more eloquent in her brief interactions with her self-absorbed husband.

At the end, the movie is a good blend of East/West customs, human idiosyncrasies, and colorful landscapes that make it inspirational, entertaining, and somewhat ethnocentric. It is worth seeing.



Copyright of Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping is the property of Cleveland State University and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.