

When entering the McKinnon Theatre on Friday to view *The Anatomy of Hate* by Mike Ramsdell, I would have to admit I had very little expectations. An assignment for a class to publish in this print edition and some encouragement on the part of an instructor led me to believe that I could find conflict at this particular showing, since there was a tip off that the viewing would be protested by the Westboro Baptist Church and, looking for irony to appease my own sense of humor, I had arrived half an hour early.

Instead of protestors (only counter protestors had shown up), what I found was a compelling film that should be seen by all. Before the movie began, I had the privilege of speaking with Mr. Ramsdell. I had informed one of our faculty members that I was looking for the protestors and she introduced us, which left us in the awkward position of attempting dialogue on a movie one of us hadn't even seen yet. Despite this impasse, I was immediately struck by Mike's quiet, observational qualities; if I was disinterested in talking about a movie I hadn't seen, it was matched only by Mr. Ramsdell's disinterest in telling me about it. We chatted briefly about the protestors that weren't and then entered the viewing.

As to the movie itself, it was a brilliant juxtaposition of social groups in the world today; depicting stunning and startling imagery; from white supremacy groups to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict to the anti-homosexual protestors we were expecting to picket. There were, needless to say, many controversial representations in the film. As a conservative, I initially found it outright contentious to include President Bush and, specifically, the American nation alongside such themes; yet, without question that comparison must be included, if only for our unparalleled ability at acts of destruction. Yet, I'm concerned that this film will be labeled polarizing by the conservative ideologies and snuffed out of existence. This would be a grave error.

Certainly, there were parts of the movie I disagreed with. I found particular irony with the scenes of intellectuals giving a synopsis of the world's problems from a withdrawn (dare I even say Godly?) point of view, with utter disregard for the notion that such luxuries of thought had been paid for by many of the same acts they were attempting to dictate. This film mustn't be watched from a third person perspective. It needs to be seen with the full realization that we are all very much unmentioned participants in the acts we're viewing.

However, my fear that conservative groups will label *The Anatomy of Hate* taboo is underscored by a greater worry:

I'm concerned that the broader audience will fail to understand this movie.

Immediately following the show, I was inundated by the comments people were making to their neighbors, and the bits and pieces I caught were rather disheartening. I heard calls of injustice that no one had fixed all the problems that had been depicted. A woman nearby was gathering apologies from her son for playing the video game *Call of Duty*. Shortly after Mr. Ramsdell ascended the podium for discussion, a man asked him why he would give legitimacy to some of the hate groups he had depicted; providing a pulpit from whence they could spew their vitriol. Shortly after I had asked my own question, another woman from somewhere behind me phrased an assertion that much of the devastation on the screen had been caused by immoral corporate activity.

Yet, playing to the monotonous humdrum of laying the world's problems at the feet of violent media, irresponsible leadership, or corporate bodies is precisely the sort of behavior that runs counter to the very central theme of the movie itself. As those around me sought to unload all of their discontent on

their own nightmares, it was just such fears as these which were *The Anatomy of Hate's* key study. In fact, an entire section of the movie had actually been dedicated to the nature of vilifying an enemy as being the embodiment of evil and the consequences of that choice.

A section of the movie showing an anti-homosexual advocate, who has called for God to destroy America, as a loving mother looking after her children; another of a freedom fighter and known terrorist entertaining his son in the comfort of his living room; images of white supremacists laughing and talking with one another as they go about the business of preparing a wooden cross to be burned; a scene with teenage Palestinian boys who have vowed to kill the Israeli forces laughing amongst themselves as they walk down the road, exhibiting not acts of carnage one would typically associate with the area, but rather simple youthful exuberance.

All of these shots have been put together in an exceptional exhibition which highlights perhaps the hardest notion for us to acknowledge. Perhaps, evil is not a constant and well defined force? Maybe, the idea of evil is a far more obscure thing which takes on existence in momentary actions rather than permanent discourse?

Perhaps the most powerful scene, for myself, was one in which children at a Nazi gathering were set loose to chase a piglet. Moments later, the screen showed five or six juveniles gathered around the exhausted and hyperventilating animal, under the guidance and lockstep of an adult. As one of the boys (perhaps as young as eight) began to stomp on the animal's head, killing it, the audience erupted into muffled cries of protest at the perceived cruelty.

Yet, as the guardian of the children descended on the animal with a knife, and began to clean it, as a hunter, giving stark resemblance of a more primitive animal teaching the younger generation the means of survival, the noise around me was drowned out by the considerably louder musings of my own mind, which informed me that these several children on the screen were, perhaps, considerably better prepared to face an unforgiving natural world than any of the pampered youth that had been here coerced into the audience of a film festival.

It was this concept that is perhaps the most difficult for us to give credence to today. That these men and women whom we so frequently revile are, in their own right, concerned with many of the same things that frighten us; their rights to thrive and prosper; concern for their children's future; and, of course, that fools errant, the timeless search for some semblance of immortality.

While this alone is not enough to condone their behavior or pardon the hatred which they spread, the subtlety of this acceptance has a powerful implication. If these individuals are capable of love, then perhaps someday a world can exist where they no longer fear the subjects of their divisiveness. It is in this distinction that the message of *The Anatomy of Hate* becomes a powerful lesson of hope.

I was rather pleased, then, when Mr. Ramsdell alleviated my own insinuation on the politicizing nature of his film; another potential weapon in an irrational day where phrases such as "comprehensive reform solutions" or "bi-partisan negotiations" are treated as legitimate subjects of discussion as opposed to the utterly misguided nonsense that they are; by informing the audience that it was not the intention of his film to attempt to judge any of the encompassed parties in it.

Rather than a simple documentary on the hate that separates us, this film transcends such confines by eloquently defining how the nature of our fears can unite us. I'm concerned that viewers will attempt to label this movie as a graphic depiction of divisive hatred and death. Much more than that, this is a wonderful masterpiece that captures our continual, terrifying struggles to live.

