

HENRY POOLE IS HERE

US, 2008, d. Mark Pelington



This is a film for those who prefer nice films with a touch of the spiritual. It is a film that would give ulcers to devout members of the Sceptics Society. It would be dangerous to the health of those who are members of the Association for the Prevention of Sentiment in the Movies.

Why is this?

Henry Poole is a morose man who wants to buy the house he grew up in but has to settle for one up the street. He wants to be alone and says he will not be there long – which makes us suspect already that he is not long for this world. This does not make for a cheery plot. There are attempts to be cheery on the part of the neighbours and the check-out girl at the supermarket who, despite her thick lenses, quickly sees that Henry is a miserable human being and she offers herself as a good listener. No deal. Henry just wants to be left alone.

What changes the plot and what disturbs Henry is his Latino neighbour detecting the face of Jesus on an outside wall that has been newly plastered. Is it or isn't it? The audience never gets a really good look. And, that is one of the points. Does it matter? If it doesn't, why bother? And if it does, what does it mean in terms of faith and, of course, miracles?

Henry is of the sceptic school of thought. However, people start to come in pilgrimage. The little girl next door (who records voices, which becomes an important plot device at the end) has not spoken since her father abandoned her and her mother a year earlier. Henry becomes friendly with her and she speaks, miracle or not. Her mother is a charming and cheerful person and makes friends with Henry.

Most audiences will see where this is going. Henry is faced with a belief crisis. The solution will satisfy those who want a feeling answer to issues. By that time, the sceptics may have fled the cinema.

Luke Wilson, sad and lonely, is on screen most of the time as Henry. Radha Mitchell is very nice as the sympathetic friend. Adriana Barazza is convincing as the face-of-Christ-prone neighbour.

And, faith and miracles are still possible.

