Deepa Mehta Saltzman, Norma Bailey and Danièle J. Suissa’s

**Martha, Ruth & Edie**

The short story holds the potential to express strong feelings attached to a situation, no matter how shortlived, commonplace or simple the situation appears. This condensed form of writing pleases and intrigues the reader in its ability to get to the heart of the matter, to exemplify life’s most ordinary and passionate moments.

*Martha, Ruth and Edie* is a film based on three short stories. From these points of departure, stories by Cynthia Flood, Betty LaFond and Alice Munro, an unusual process ensued. Three screenwriters, Anna Sundor, Janet Macdon and Barbara O’Kelley, adapted the stories for three directors. Deepa Mehta Saltzman, who originally conceived of the idea for the film and produced her project with her husband Paul Saltzman, and directed one of the sections. Directors Norma Bailey, noted for the beautifully crafted films *Fire and The Nile*, and Danièle J. Suissa worked on the others. Together the three created the connecting story, pulling together the tales of the workers, strangers to one another.

That story goes like this: three women find themselves at a seminar meant to help the exclusively female participants confront their fears and share one another their feelings about sex. Hyperbolic and pretentious Whitby Germain (Page Fletcher) leads his ladies on this journey. Becoming vehement and disturbed as he makes her way out towards the bathroom, he pronounces that fears is making her move that and that she owes it to her sisters to stick it out. However, the calm and composed Edie, played graciously by Lois Maxwell, continues down the aisle and is joined by Ruth who balks at Germain’s attempt to humiliate Edie. Outside the closed door of the seminar they laugh at his absurdity. They happen upon Martha who is in the closed door of the journey. Becoming vehement and disturbed as she is late. Martha, Edie and Ruth find each other at a seminar meant to help the broken-hearted women share with one another their feelings for him. They ask her on their first date. Martha’s acting displays yet another series of emotions: her original goodness, her youth and love are gone, the following pain and disappointment wave. We see Edie now curious and amused by her new suitor.

Bailey’s ability to find and show resonance in the ordinary allows the rendering of the short story to be as successful as it is here. Bailey is consistently sensitive to the ephemeral. The quick, knowing glance between Edie and her charge, as the young postman makes his intentions clear, speaks of the girls’ complicity. It doubles back to an earlier shot where the two girls sit together at the window and pine over the simple object, a lighter, sparks a story. That story goes like this: three women sit together at a window and pine over the story to be as successful as it is here. Bailey is consistently sensitive to the ephemeral. The quick, knowing glance between Edie and her charge, as the young postman makes his intentions clear, speaks of the girls’ complicity. It doubles back to an earlier shot where the two girls sit together at the window and pine over the simple object, a lighter, sparks a story. That story goes like this: three women sit together at a window and pine over a simple object, a lighter, sparks a story.

One of Mehta Saltzman’s goals for the film was to create a different feeling for each Martha, Ruth and Edie. The third vignette is about Martha, a woman with two children, whose husband comes home one night and tells her that he is leaving her for another woman. Jennifer Dale plays the part of the super-mom who has devoted the last 17 years of her life to her home, husband and happiness. As her world falls from under her, Martha decides to take a big risk and returns to her pre-marriage career of teaching. This time she ventures into a men’s prison and teaches literacy skills. The subtlety of changing emotion seen in Edie’s story and the humor displayed in Ruth’s are never fully realized in this section of the film. The story’s potential to be funny and sensitive is shortcircuited by the awkwardness of the script. In the prison, stilted dialogue and stereotypes abound. Large complex issues have not successfully been boiled down to some comprehensive representation. The detail and succinct, well-chosen scenes crucial to the short-story film’s success are lacking. The result is a strain in the acting and direction of this section.

**CINEMA CANADA**

**Film Reviews**

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