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Film

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*Desire and Disillusionment: Exploring the Happy Few*

“The Happy Few,” who encapsulate love and connection, are profoundly curious and complex, and desire knowledge from others with shared experiences. In Eric Rohmer’s 1970 film *Claire’s Knee*, viewers are transported to a picturesque French vacation where the characters explore the complexities of human relationships and pose philosophical questions about each other's actions.

Each character has a purpose in discovering the human mind and what lies in the most intricate part of the body—each with a different way of approaching the question. The main character, Jerome, faces one moral dilemma after another; his internal conflict forms the crux of the narrative, highlighting the film’s exploration of happiness and fulfillment.

The film delves into the concept of desire as a fundamental human experience, yet one that often leads to disillusionment. Jerome’s initial attraction to Claire represents a kind of idealized love that is often romanticized but remains largely unattainable. As he seeks to engage with her, he simultaneously grapples with his own moral integrity and the societal expectations placed upon him—the question of acting on desire or reflecting upon it.

Jerome’s contemplative nature leads him to prioritize his moral integrity over his desires. He often rationalizes his inaction by considering what is deemed socially acceptable, revealing how societal norms can stifle genuine connection. This tension between personal desire and societal pressure raises profound questions about the nature of happiness and fulfillment.

From the outset, Jerome is captivated by Claire's youth and beauty, representing an idealized version of love that many might romanticize. He claims, "But if I had a woman made to order, I think I'd give Claire's measurements," which proves his infatuation is rooted in fantasy rather than reality, as he projects his desires onto her without truly understanding who she is as a person. This idealization sets the stage for disillusionment as he grapples with the reality of their interactions. She is a young girl who is, rightfully, attracted to a boy her age, not a middle-aged man with a more profound dialect. This creates a cat-and-mouse dynamic, with Jerome as the cat, captivated by the delicate and unattainable Claire.

On the other hand, Claire's sister, Laura, is an exciting counterpoint to Claire in the film. While both sisters are involved in a complex web of attraction and desire, their approaches and emotional dynamics are markedly different—Laura's youthful exuberance and impulsiveness contrast with Jerome's contemplative nature. Laura once said to Jerome, "Having fun is being alive. For instance, today I'm very happy. Tomorrow, I may be sad. So then I make myself think of something else. I concentrate on one specific thing and how fantastic it is, and I'm happy for the rest of the day." Laura lives in the moment, not being swayed by what others might say or tell her to do; she embodies a young and impulsive beauty, enjoying deep conversations with adults yet is easily influenced by her emotions.

While Claire embodies a particular mystery and emotional depth, Laura is more straightforward and less burdened by the complexities of adult relationships. This difference in maturity affects how each sister interacts with Jerome and navigates their desires. Laura's infatuation with Jerome can also be seen as a quest for validation. Her eagerness to engage with him suggests a desire to be desired, reflecting a common youth theme—seeking approval and

affirmation through romantic interests. This contrasts with Claire, who seems more secure in her identity and less reliant on external validation yet is not preconscious like her sister, Laura.

Both sisters exemplify different facets of "The Happy Few," each contributing to the film's exploration of desire and connection. With her mystery and depth, Claire draws others into a complex emotional journey, while Laura's vibrant pursuit of love offers a more straightforward path to connection. Together, they illustrate how individuals navigate their desires and relationships, enriching the narrative of *Claire's Knee* and highlighting the complexities of human emotion.

However, Rohmer's examination of "The Happy Few" is layered with irony; The characters often engage in self-reflection, recognizing their desires yet failing to attain the fulfillment they seek. How Laura, intelligent and witty, plays with people for fun yet never engages in a relationship with those she seeks out, or Jerome, who is deeply attracted to Claire, doesn't dare to step past the line, instead only trying things out in his head and thinking upon it instead of acting upon it. Jerome explains,

“She arouses a desire in me that's real yet has no purpose and is all the stronger because of it. Pure desire. A desire of nothing. I don't wish to act on it, but it bothers me to feel it. I didn't think I'd ever desire a woman again. And I don't even really want her. If she threw herself at me, I'd refuse.”

Thus, Jerome's interactions with Claire and the other women reveal a profound sense of isolation despite their proximity. His desire for Claire becomes a double-edged sword, offering moments of elation while simultaneously deepening his internal conflict.

The film suggests that the pursuit of happiness is not just about attaining love but also about the emotional turmoil accompanying it. The characters' struggles illuminate the paradox of

desire—where the very act of seeking connection can lead to a sense of alienation. This irony enriches the narrative, as the viewer is left to ponder whether the quest for love is inherently flawed. In this sense, “The Happy Few” is the human brain, layered in intricate thoughts and ideas that are, ironically, never achieved. Love is a form of possession, yet it can also be a kind of freedom. Ultimately, the characters illustrate the delicate balance between passion and rational thought, suggesting that true fulfillment lies in navigating both complexities.

*Claire’s Knee* effectively explores the complexities of desire and the elusive nature of happiness. The characters’ struggles illuminate the challenges of navigating their emotions within the constraints of societal expectations, ultimately questioning whether true intimacy and fulfillment can ever be fully realized. The phrase “the happy few” encapsulates this journey, suggesting that genuine connection is a rare and delicate experience amidst the contradictions of human desire. Yet, in the end, the characters will always choose for themselves: “When something pleases me, I do it for pleasure,” as Jerome always does.