

'Dirty Pretty Things'

"There is nothing more dangerous than a virtuous man," says Guo Yi to his friend Okwe, who happens to be the protagonist of "Dirty Pretty Things."

Okwe is not the only virtuous person in the film. Senay, Okwe's friend, is so devoted to her Islamic faith that she refuses to sacrifice her virginity, even when it might make her life easier.

These honorable people do not live in a world of clean suburbs with a church on every corner and a Wal-Mart selling every middle-class desire. They live in a rundown section of London, where seedy people are accustomed to everyone operating with the same skewed morality.

"Dirty Pretty Things" begins with a man struggling to make ends meet as a cab driver by day and hotel desk clerk by night. Early in the film one learns that this man, Okwe, is also a doctor. Why he is not practicing medicine is not clear for a while, but his former profession is very important to the developing plot.

Okwe shares an apartment with a maid from the hotel, Senay. Despite the suspicions of many, their relationship is purely platonic. When Okwe responds to a problem in one of the hotel rooms, he discovers that the commode is flooding the bathroom. What Okwe finds blocking the toilet plumbing is best discovered while watching the film. The meaning of this discovery will force Okwe and eventually Senay to make some serious decisions about their lives and their relationship.

Roger Thomas

“Things” is the latest film from director Stephen Frears, who made such films as “The Grifters” and “High Fidelity.” Like many of Frears’ films dealing with moral dilemmas, the characters here are flawed, but they seek to be better people than they have been in their past. They want to rise above their situation, but in a fallen world, the climb often seems steep.

The script by Steve Knight is being touted as an Oscar contender. The film is a love story, a mystery, a character study and a morality play. It is a smart, concise script with great dialogue, quirky supporting characters, and two leads whose relationship evolves as each makes moral choices for his or her personal survival and the survival of the other.

The most powerful moment in the script comes when Okwe implores Senay to “wake up and realize that this is the real world.” This speech is for her benefit, but perhaps also for his own. It is certainly a turning point in the film.

The climax may seem a bit contrived for some, but certainly the conclusion is nothing like the standard Hollywood ending. (It should also be noted that the adult content of this film, especially the portrayal of the fallen world where Senay and Okwe must exist, may offend some viewers.)

In the song “It’s a Fine Life” from the musical “Oliver!”, this line is sung: “Who cares if straight laces sneer at us in the streets; fine heirs and fine graces don’t have to sin to eat.” These words sum up the main theme of “Dirty Pretty Things.”

Few Christians would affirm that codes of morality or God’s law change

depending on life circumstances, because that would lead to “situational ethics.” On the other hand, few people living comfortable middle- or upper-class lives can assert with absolute confidence exactly which virtues they would affirm or abandon if suddenly their own survival, or the survival of someone they loved, was at risk.

“Dirty Pretty Things” places virtuous people in a fallen world and dares to ask the question, “Will they sin to survive?” The answer is intriguing, saddening and honest.

[Roger Thomas](#) is pastor of First Baptist Church in Ablemarle, N.C.

MPAA Rating: R for sexual content, disturbing images and language

Director: Stephen Frears

Writer: Steve Knight

Cast: Okwe: Chjwetel Ejiofor; Senay: Audrey Tatou; Guo Yi: Benedict Wong.