By Nathan Simms

By all accounts, Blade Runner 2049 (Villeneuve, 2017) was a box office bomb. With an estimated budget of $150 million, the film needed to make significant returns to break even, which it failed to do. However, do not let its financial success be the deciding factor in whether or not you see it. Despite its poor performance, Blade Runner 2049 is a visually stunning and philosophically poignant sequel to a film that never needed one.

The original Blade Runner (Scott, 1982) helped to usher in and define Neo-Noir in American cinema. Stuffed with smoke and smog, the Los Angeles of 2019 is a dark and mysterious place, where Blade Runner Rick Deckard hunts humanoid robots known as Replicants.
30 years later, Blade Runner and Replicant K-played wonderfully by Ryan Gosling-hunts even more advanced Replicants in a future that is considerably more bleak. The visuals of 2049 match wonderfully with the cityscape and Neo-Noir feel of the original. Known for his prior collaborations with Denis Villeneuve, Cinematographer Roger Deakins absolutely builds upon the visual language of the first film and evolves it into something that simply must be seen to be understood. 2049 features a number of wide, sweeping shots which show the world in its gritty glory. As human pollution has worsened, the smoke and fog of the original are exacerbated to a point of figurative suffocation.

A number of times, K leaves the city and travels through an agrarian portion of California to work on his case.
In these scenes, we get our largest glimpse into the effect of pollution outside of an urban environment. And it looks very much the same. The permanent night and neon light of the city are absent in these scenes, but the sun-bleached vistas that are offered instead are not much more uplifting. Ultimately, the cinematography of this film is an experience unto itself. It is evident that Deakins and Villeneuve but an extraordinary amount of thought into each shot and sequence. Each and every scene features something eye catching, from the overall composition to the miniscule details featured in the mise-en-scene.

The story of Blade Runner 2049 is also artfully crafted. The questions posited in the original, such as "what makes us human?" are addressed again in the sequel and are significantly expanded upon. At the same time, the ambiguity and general lack of closure from Blade Runner continue into 2049, leaving the audience with a feeling that they cannot really put a finger on.

Blade Runner 2049 is a movie that simply must be experienced to be understood. It is one of the most raw and visceral films that I have seen in recent memory, and its visuals and soundscape stick out in my mind. 2049 is cinematographically gorgeous film and a surprisingly good sequel to an 80’s movie, a definite departure from recent pulpy 80’s remakes. Despite its financial failure, maybe 2049 will find its success in the same manner that the box-office bomb Blade Runner did, finding its identity as a cult-classic.

"The Witch" Review: A Story of Inner and Outer Demons

By Jack Waterman

I have a bit of a confession to make; I, a self-proclaimed cinephile, don’t really like movie theaters that much. I don’t like the astronomical prices, I don’t like stepping over spilled drinks, I don’t like the noisy people in the audience, and I don’t like the 20 minute long previews. Why do I bring this up? Because I actually saw The Witch in a clean, empty movie theater, and it was legitimately one of the greatest viewing experiences of my life. The showing was largely free of distractions, and I was able to focus much more intently on the film’s minute details. And there were a lot of minute details.

The Witch is a 2015 horror film directed by Robert Eggers, who has a relatively sparse list of directing credits, and primarily does work in production design and costume design. The film centers around a family of Puritans during the early 17th century, excommunicated from their church and living in a remote part of the New England wilderness. After their newborn baby disappears, strange happenings start occurring around their homestead, and the family begins to spiral into paranoia...
As is all too common with critically acclaimed, low-budget, independent horror films, *The Witch* was tragically overlooked by most of the general public, and the few casual filmgoers that did see it gave it lukewarm reviews. And I openly admit that this is not a movie for everyone. It is practically the dictionary definition of a slow-burn horror movie, and those expecting a ceaseless onslaught of jump scares and crimson showers of viscera will be sorely disappointed. Though it is only about an hour and a half, the film never once felt rushed or bloated, and in fact feels quite a bit longer than its running time. You can feel the family tearing itself apart minute by minute, and the sense of despair and dread that pervades the movie is crushing.

The tone of *The Witch* is further enhanced by the simple, yet highly effective camera work. Admittedly, you won’t find too many surprises; the camera generally remains stationary, and there is little in here that will truly wow you. Nevertheless, the cinematography has this sinister, creeping feeling that bodes very well with the film’s subject material. As Drew McWeeny from HITFIX observes, “It feels like we’re watching something we should not be seeing.” The color palette (or lack thereof) also contributes to the film’s atmosphere: bitter, bleak, muted hues make it seem as though the life has been sapped from the landscape, highlighting the tormented family’s hopeless situation.
The acting and characters are where this movie truly shines. All of the actors, even the youngest children, do a superb job. Everyone speaks in a flowery, times-accurate King James-y lilt, which works wonders in regards to immersion. Though, if someone were to watch *The Witch* without knowing this beforehand, it would probably make the movie hard to follow. As a matter of fact, this was far and away the biggest complaint I heard about the movie. Still, for those of us who are dead set on historical accuracy, you will be greatly satisfied. But to be honest, even if there were no accents, the characters would still be fascinating. There’s a huge emphasis on the role of religion for early European settlers, and the constant struggle between religious life and the well-being of the family makes for a captivating and suspenseful story.

Is there anything I didn’t like about this movie? From purely objective, critical perspective, there’s very little in *The Witch* to find fault with. I do think that I should give a fair word of warning, however: though this movie doesn’t have a whole lot of onscreen violence, is still very unsettling and disturbing in its implications. An example would be when the movie reveals the ultimate fate of the family’s missing baby. I should also mention that this movie is exactly as scary as you want it to be. And no, that isn’t meant to knock the film’s scariness overall. This just means that if you’re willing to use your imagination, really invest yourself into the characters, and analyze the fine details, *The Witch* can become the scariest movie you’ve ever seen. What you put into the movie is directly proportional to what you’ll get out of it. If you allow it to, it will worm its way into your mind, gnawing at your subconscious, and certainly make you think twice about going into the forest alone. And as a horror fan, that is about the highest amount praise I can give.

*The Witch*

A Crisis of Faith: A Review of Silence

By Emmanuel Gundran

Martin Scorsese, in his newest film *Silence* (2016), wrestles with themes of faith in the midst of hardship and feeling abandoned by God. The story follows two Portuguese Jesuit priests, Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Garupe (Adam Driver), who travel to Japan to search for their mentor Ferreira (Liam Neeson). Along their journey, they meet with the Japanese
Christians who face persecution under a stubborn, murderous inquisitor (Issei Ogata). While Rodrigues watches as his brothers and sisters in the Lord are murdered, he questions why God would allow God’s children to suffer for their faithfulness.

It is heart-breaking yet so compelling to watch a man like Rodrigues be constantly beaten down, both physically and spiritually, but still continue onward for the people he cares for. At the beginning, he is an idealistic, devout Christian who wants to see the man who mentored him again. Over the course of the film, he is weathered down by persecution to the point of him being ridden with sickness and malnutrition. When he finally meets Ferreira after a long journey into the heart of Japan, he is crushed to find out that his own mentor has literally stepped on the face of Jesus and joined the Buddhist faith, helping to burn Christianity out of Japan.

If there are any major flaws the foremost would be its length. The film is over two and a half hours long, and it definitely shows. There are sequences that tend to hold on quiet or serious moments or to focus on scenery. Moments like these do make the film live up to its own title. However, I think that the slower pace of the film helped me get a better sense of the importance of each scene. One of the ways through which the Japanese Inquisition force the Christians to recant their faith is through stepping on an image of Jesus. These scenes slow down to focus on the crucial decision that each Christian must make, whether to deny Jesus or face their deaths. Even Rodrigues must make this choice that will be his ultimate test after all that he had faced to reach Japan. I believe it is appropriate to have these slower moments to let the film’s heavier themes solidify in audiences’ minds.

As a Christian myself, I felt that I could resonate with Rodrigues’ own questions of faith. Though many Christians will not have to face the same kind of persecution and doubts as Rodrigues, circumstances in Christians’ lives will force them to think critically about what they believe in. One may not have faced the deaths of their loved one before their eyes, but others may have encountered a belief that was different from their own and caused them to see the world from a different perspective and caused them to question their own worldview. Like Rodrigues, sometimes I am faced with the uncomfortable moments of God’s silence, moments where either God does not give an answer or has an answer that does not satisfy my questioning.

These are the moments that Martin Scorsese wanted to capture through Silence and cause audiences, especially those who are Christian, to get a grasp on difficult questions that the film brings up on faith and sacrifice.
Get With the Times: Finding American Culture's Current Values through Animation

By Emmanuel Gundran

American culture's changing socio-political climate has changed radically over the past one hundred years. These changes have also shaped the way that filmmakers craft their work, whether they encourage the current culture's trends or challenge them. A film like *Zero Dark Thirty* (Bigelow, 2012) re-enacts, in gruesome detail, the hunt for Osama Bin Laden in 2011, practically making it a reactionary tale of the events. However, a film does not need to have overt references to real-life events for it to be rooted in a particular time and place in history. It is very clear that *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004), from the fashion to the pop culture references and even the technology (or lack thereof), is a product of the mid-2000's culture. Films such as these preserve culture, like a time capsule of sorts, and show either what filmmakers or audiences at the time valued about their culture. The same holds very true for animated films, and, in addition, it shows what filmmakers at the time wanted to communicate to children, the primary audience for most animated films. Animated films in the 2010's, by analyzing their culture and content, portray the decade as an era of mass connection, individuality, and emotional vulnerability.

Due to the growing accessibility and overall usefulness of electronic devices, especially smartphones, American culture in the 2010's has become more interconnected than ever before. Marshall McLuhan correctly predicted that technology would allow everyone to become more connected with one another, and compares what society has become to "a global village" (63). Films like *Wreck-it Ralph* (Jackman, 2012) and *The Lego Movie* (Lord and Miller, 2014) are the result of inter-connectedness...
in pop culture because of their inclusion of characters that the filmmakers knew their target audiences would instantly recognize. The Lego Movie features Batman (Will Arnett) from DC Comics as one of its main protagonists while other familiar characters like Dumbledore from the Harry Potter franchise, Han Solo from the Star Wars franchise, and Gandalf from the Lord of the Rings franchise play supporting roles throughout the film. Meanwhile, Wreck-it Ralph has the title character (played by John C. Reilly) meeting up with Bowser from the Super Mario Bros games and Zangief (Rich Moore) from the Street Fighter games in a ‘villains anonymous’ meeting. The way that these characters from vastly different franchises are able to crossover with such ease demonstrates how online social media has created a space for fans of all of these franchises to connect with one other. Users on the Internet can post on online forums where they can discuss their favorite games, shows, or movies, create a web of other fans, and even encourage outsiders to join their fandom.

While American society in the 2010’s has become very inter-connected through online media, it is also very adamant about individuality and self-discovery. Ever since the country’s beginnings, individuality has been a strong American trait. The Declaration of Independence was written as a means for the country to individualize itself from Great Britain and recognize its citizens’ rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (US 1776).” Brave (Andrews, Chapman, and Purcell, 2012) and Moana (Clements and Musker, 2016) both display through their protagonists that aggressive individuality that American’s have. Merida (Kelly MacDonald) of Brave is a great example of individuality at work, as she rebels against her family’s marital customs to forge her own path using her bravery and skill with a bow. Similarly, Moana (Auli’i Cravalho) breaks with her family’s comfortable, isolationist traditions to explore the open seas and follow the adventurous traditions of her ancestors. Both Merida and Moana do eventually return to their families later on to make amends, emphasizing the importance of family in an individual’s life. However, each of them do so in different ways. While Brave ends with Merida reconciling with her family and strengthening her relationship with them, thus emphasizing a greater need for community rather than isolation, Moana ends with Moana not only returning to her family but also shaping her tribe’s culture through her strength and courage, thus showing that someone can inspire bravery in others. Both films deal with the issue of individuality and one’s relationship to their community in different ways but recognize that one cannot always live in total isolation.

Finally, there is the idea of allowing one’s emotions to shine through and show kindness to others that is becoming more important to American society. In an interview with The Atlantic’s Julie Beck in 2015, psychologist David Caruso states that American culture has a “relentless drive to mask the expression of our true underlying feelings” (“How to Get Better At Expressing Emotions”). It’s this drive that’s demonstrated in Disney and Pixar’s Inside Out (Doctor, 2015). The film’s main
characters are the five basic emotions of a young girl named Riley Andersen (Kaitlyn Dias) who help her through her day-to-day activities. Throughout the film, Sadness (Phyllis Smith) is pushed further and further away from the other emotions when she causes Riley to have unpleasant moments in her life. This perfectly represents the mask that Caruso says is so common in America. To paint a better picture oneself as a strong, self-reliant individual, one may hide their sadness or other negative emotions behind a mask of happiness or strength. However, Inside Out teaches that sadness cannot be held for long, and that people have an innate need for catharsis, an outlet for embracing sorrow. Before Riley can run away from home on a bus and give in to depression, Sadness is given back control of her thoughts. Thus, Riley runs back home to her parents from the bus and tearfully hugs them both, finally giving her a moment of catharsis.

Because culture is always changing, one has to wonder how films, especially animated films, will change with the times. With racial equality, gender dynamics, and political correctness becoming more relevant issues, perhaps more films such as Zootopia (Howard and Moore, 2016) will come out of the woodwork to address them. Then, who knows how other films will respond to, or even reshape, the culture moving forward? These films preserve the values and challenges of a generation, and will give future generations a perspective of where American culture was and where it is going.

Works Cited:


Scared Silly: HouseBound and the Redemption of Horror-Comedy

10/9/2017

By Jack Waterman

In general, horror-comedies haven’t been doing particularly well as of late. To be sure, there will occasionally be an independent horror-drama that will sweep through film festivals winning all kinds of accolades, but rarely will there be anything that is both scary and funny. Admittedly, some of this could be that the overall quality of horror films seems to have dropped somewhat over the past couple of years. However, this doesn’t fully explain why horror-comedies just don’t
seem to work anymore. Most them are either not scary, not funny, or both, and there doesn’t seem to be any real explanation for why. Even less common is a well-made horror comedy that is also well received by both critics and audience members. The New Zealand horror-comedy *Housebound* (Johnstone, 2014) is one of those rare films. It’s hilarious, terrifying, brutal, and touching all at the same time. It was extremely good; so good in fact, that I found myself subconsciously avoiding other horror-comedies after seeing it. For the longest time, I didn’t understand why. It wasn’t until I saw *IT* (Muschietti, 2017) a few weeks back that I finally discovered how to fully articulate my thoughts about the current state of horror-comedies, and more importantly, what can be done to fix them.

First off, it’s critical to establish what a horror movie is and what a comedy movie is. In layman’s terms, the former is intended to make you shriek in terror, and the latter is intended to make you shriek with laughter. Right off the bat, there’s a distinct similarity between the two: both genres of film are carefully formulated to elicit powerful emotions and physiological responses. But therein lies the rub; how does one make a film that is both frightening and funny when these two adjectives are often regarded as being each other’s antonym? Well, in some cases, that is exactly the point. In movies such as the classic *Ghostbusters* (Reitman, 1984), the film alternates between scariness and hilarity in precisely the right proportions. Just before one of them starts becoming too prevalent, a joke or a scare in thrown into the mix and turns the tables on everything. For instance, at the beginning of the movie, the Ghostbusters come face to face with the ghost of a librarian. After a humorous debate about how to best approach it, they attempt to pounce on the ghost, only to have the apparition transform into a horrifying monstrosity and screech like a banshee at them. Just as the audience is becoming comfortable with the comedic tone of the film, it pulls a 180 and makes everyone in the audience jump out of their seats. The fear when making horror-comedy seems to be that putting in something too funny or too scary will disrupt the flow of the sequence and yank the viewer out of the movie. Indeed, this is the delicate balancing act that is so hard to pull off, and ultimately what distinguishes a good horror-comedy from a bad one.

In *The Horror Spoofs of Abbott and Costello*, author Jeffrey S. Miller divvies the horror-comedy subgenre up further into black comedy, parody, and spoof (Miller, 1). Black comedy is characterized by dark, morbid content being played for laughs, as opposed to being sacrosanct (example: *Evil Dead 2* (Raimi, 1987)). A horror parody typically isn’t scary in the slightest, but is rather a deconstruction of the horror genre, and is almost exclusively intended to be humorous (example: *Shaun of the Dead* (Wright, 2004)). A horror spoof tends to treat the horror genre and its various sub-genres with more love and affection than a horror parody, and they generally contain fear and fancy in equal proportions. Spoofs are typically what most people think of when they hear “horror-comedy”, and this is largely the category that *Housebound* falls under.

I mentioned earlier that seeing *IT* was the catalyst in figuring out what my problem is with (modern) horror-comedies. As previously noted, *IT* is a fantastic movie. However, one thing that I didn’t talk about in my review is that, while the movie is quite scary and quite funny, it isn’t really both of those simultaneously. It is, as I mentioned, a comedic horror movie rather than a pure-blooded horror-comedy. For instance, the film has some fairly spooky sequences in the beginning in which Pennywise is shape shifting into incarnations of the main characters’ deepest fears. Yet the moment the sequences conclude, the movie immediately cuts to the other main characters making sex jokes. It’s not so much that these scenes aren’t scary or funny, but rather that they have nothing to do with each other. And again, this is ultimately the most glaring issue with modern horror-comedies: their inability to properly blend humor and horror. In the masterfully crafted *An American Werewolf in London* (Landis, 1981), the two build off of and inform each other; nutty hilarity morphs into hair-raising frights, and moments of heart-stopping terror give way to outrageous (and somewhat twisted) laughs.
"I didn't mean to call you a meatloaf, Jack!"

Here’s a more specific example directly from HouseBound. Near the climax of the movie, the main character Kylie’s probation officer, Amos, is attempting to pry open an old wooden door. The film’s antagonist, serial killer Dennis, is sneaking up behind him clutching a butcher’s knife. Amos is muttering something about needing a thin, metal bar of some kind. Dennis now is standing directly behind Amos, and is seconds away from stabbing him. The suspense is at a fever pitch. Then without missing a beat, Amos turns around, grabs the knife out of Dennis’s hand, and with a casual “Thanks.”, uses it to crack open the door.

Why does this scene work so well? How is something so incredibly scary able to be transformed into something so hilarious?

To put it bluntly, it’s because of audience expectations. Expectancy violation is one the most fundamental principles of both comedy and horror. In both areas, there is a gradual buildup to a pop or mini-climax (that is to say, a punchline/scare). In some cases, the buildup may be prolonged significantly to release as much tension as possible when the pop finally comes (or in the case of films like The Blair Witch Project (Myrick and Sánchez, 1999), it may never come). The kicker is that it’s not as simple as plugging things into an equation and getting an audience reaction. Certain styles of buildups and pops are more commonly used then others, and audiences learn to recognize these styles pretty quickly if they are used too often. What we see used in Housebound is a somewhat stereotypical buildup to a very creative and wacky pop that is the complete inverse of what we were anticipating. Tension is still released, but in a surprising and unexpected way. This is what is meant by an expectation violation.

HouseBound truly is a rare gem indeed; it’s one of the last of a dying breed of classic horror-comedies. There are many lessons that can be gleaned from its cleverly structured plot and pops. Who knows, perhaps there will someday be a resurgence of excellent horror-comedy. Until then, it’s comforting to know that, while the sub-genre is struggling, it is far from dead.

Citation
Like many fans of the X-Men cinematic universe, I was distressed when I first heard Hugh Jackman was wrapping up his portrayal of the hard-hearted, cigar-smoking, Canadian mutant Logan James Howlett (better known as Wolverine) with one final film. Jackman’s Wolverine is comparable to Heath Ledger’s Joker in how he took a rabidly popular fan-favorite character – one of the most frustrating, complex, and interesting original members of the X-Men – and made him come alive like the character stepped out of a comic book and onto the screen, but still kept the performance completely his own. With his good looks and raw talent, Jackman drove the franchise so much that he eventually got to have his own spinoff movies.

The poor quality of the two films that precede Logan - X-Men Origins: Wolverine (Hood, 2009) and The Wolverine (Mangold, 2013) – is part of what makes Logan so incredible. X-Men Origins: Wolverine is quite possibly the worst film Jackman has ever done. Knowing Game of Thrones showrunner David Benioff helped write the screenplay makes me weep. This pustule of a film also features Ryan Reynolds as Wade Wilson (Deadpool); the fight scene between him and Jackman on top of a nuclear reactor is by far the most painful and ridiculous moment of a movie comprised of many painful and ridiculous moments strung together. Fortunately, critics were more pleased with The Wolverine than they had been with X-Men Origins: Wolverine, and Logan improved on the formula yet again, bringing it to a perfect close.

Many aspects of Logan are interchangeable with the other installments. The Wolverine movies are, as a rule, bloodier than the X-Men movies. Logan takes this to the extreme, as if the writers got paid extra for brainstorming creative ways for characters to die. (This does lead to a few beautiful moments, but mostly, it’s overkill). Logan has an excess of side characters, but, unlike the prior movies, uses them well. I was most impressed by Stephen Merchant’s Caliban, an albino mutant whose mutation allows him to sense and locate other mutants. The makeup effects and costuming for his character really stood out as excellent. Merchant is somewhat familiar to a niche of American audiences – Big Bang Theory watchers – since he guest-starred on a season of the popular CBS show as Amy Farrah Fowler’s (the phenomenally funny Mayim Bialik) new boyfriend, Dave, after her brief split with Sheldon Cooper (Jim Parsons). However, since his character only had a 3-episode arc, it was not really a good example of his capabilities. After Logan, I hope Merchant has more success in American cinema; he reminds me of a British Alan Tudyk.
More than its judicious use of side characters, it’s the way Logan brings emotion back into the Wolverine franchise that makes it so stellar. The social-psychological aspect of the X-Men franchise, especially in its best-executed moments – X2 (Singer, 2003), X-Men: First Class (Vaughn, 2011) and X-Men: Days of Future Past (Singer, 2014) for example – is what sets them apart from their competitors. The Wolverine movies always got more wrapped up in the spurting blood and flashing steel claws. As previously mentioned, Logan has those elements in abundance, but also isn’t afraid to get sentimental. Wolverine’s character is known for keeping his friends and emotions at a distance, but, in Logan, he holds both a little closer. The self-sacrificing, parental Logan in this movie isn’t an entirely new character – look at his relationship with Rogue (Anna Paquin) in X-Men (Singer, 2000) X2 (Singer, 2003) and X-Men: Last Stand (Ratner, 2006), and his actions at the end of Last Stand with Jean Grey (Famke Janssen) – but it’s a more direct and nuanced one that drives the movie’s most heart-tugging plot points. Certain moments in Logan are just as sad or sadder than Erik (Michael Fassbender) paralyzing Charles (James McAvoy) in X-Men First Class or when Jean Grey (Famke Janssen) kills Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart) in Last Stand. Logan is not a movie to watch alone, and I believe it’s not meant to be watched that way. Consider it a wake for the Wolverine franchise, or Jackman at his peak in the role. Logan is a dream end, and other superhero franchises should take note of its success.

Netflix's San Junipero and LGBTQ+ Representation in Science Fiction

10/2/2017

Yorkie (Mackenzie Davis) feels the sand of San Junipero beach. (Harris, 2016).
“And the Emmy goes to Black Mirror: ‘San Junipero’,” as these words rang out from the Emmy stage, Netflix made science fiction history. The episode actually won two awards that night, one for outstanding TV movie and another for outstanding writing for a movie. As Netflix’s premiere Sci-Fi anthology show, Black Mirror shows the way that technology can impact society in the future. The vast majority of the episodes are bleak and negative critiques of that future, with dark and thought-provoking themes. It seems only fitting that one of the more positive episodes garnered two Emmy’s. “San Junipero” demonstrates what a LGBTQ+ relationship looks like on a mainstream television show and raises questions about the validity of simulated worlds.

“San Junipero” opens with Yorkie, the twenty-something female protagonist, who goes to a bar in 1987 and meets Kelly, a whirlwind on the dance floor. The two strike up a friendship after Yorkie helps fend off one of Kelly’s ex-boyfriends. From there they continue to spend time together, every weekend, until exactly midnight—when the simulation starts over. Both Yorkie and Kelly go to San Junipero via digital uplinks, and our limited by the time the computer allots. Much like a massive online game, they enter the simulated world for just a few hours, and are forced to exit. Outside of the computer, Yorkie and Kelly are actually in their late 60’s and in retirement homes. They use San Junipero to escape from their realities. The city of San Junipero looks like any other coastal town, but it is nothing more than a picturesque digital retirement home. 85% of the residents are deceased, their consciences being uploaded to the computer. Other elderly people can visit, like Yorkie and Kelly, but they are limited to trial periods. Both the residents and the temporary visitors can choose what year they want to visit, allowing them to recapture their youth in both physical and temporal terms.
Although San Junipero is a love story, the science fiction background creates a unique outlook on our future. LGBTQ+ individuals are rarely seen in Sci-fi films, besides the couple in this summer’s Alien: Covenant, I cannot think of a notable character in a Science-Fiction film who is not of a heterosexual orientation. The majority of onscreen couples are heterosexual or single, with a ton of science-fiction films not showing sexuality at all. Seeing a happy homosexual couple in this episode is important because it reflects our reality. Despite the controversy that often surrounds gay rights, there are people of different sexual orientations, and the display of them in the near future allows individuals to identify with characters just like them.

After visiting, Yorkie decides she’s ready to “pass over” and become a permanent resident of San Junipero. Before her body dies, Kelly decides to visit her in the real world. The older Kelly takes a self-driving vehicle to Yorkie’s retirement home, where she finds the 61 year-old, paralyzed Yorkie. A worker at the home tells Kelly that Yorkie has been paralyzed for 40 years, the result of a car accident after Yorkie’s parents rejected her sexual orientation. In the simulation, Yorkie regains her ability to walk and speak as well as freedom to express her sexuality without fear of society. The clear tragedy of San Junipero is that Yorkie is unable to be herself until after she’s already dead. The terms of her societal experience put her into her condition and she waited for 40 years for something better. San Junipero was that something better, but she could not fully experience it until she received what amounts to medically-assisted suicide. “San Junipero” brings a new light to the discussion on gay rights and equality. It is a bluntly stated critique of our society that Yorkie was only able to find freedom in death.

At the end, Yorkie and Kelly reunite as permanent residents and drive off into a literal sunset as Belinda Carlisle’s “Heaven Is a Place on Earth” plays. This is the happiest ending of any of Black Mirror’s few episodes, but the triumphant montage is
intercut with scenes of a giant warehouse. Inside are countless blinking lights, all plugged into stacks of servers, tended to by giant robotic arms. Yorkie and Kelly together transcended their human bodies and are now stored as pulsing electronic signals. Inside the simulation they seem happy, but the filmmakers are asking if their happiness is real. We cannot know if Kelly and Yorkie are legitimately “human” in a simulation, but the optimistic nature of the finale signals that it may not actually matter.

The final shot of the episode: hundreds of thousands of blinking lights, each one a digital consciousness

IT Review: The Rebirth of Mainstream Horror
9/29/2017

By Jack Waterman

Speaking as someone who isn’t really a coulophobe, I could never really grasp what it is about clowns that freaks people out so much. Sure, it can be kind of awkward interacting with them, but I tended to view them more as eccentric weirdos than aberrant monstrosities. But having recently seen the 2017 theatrical rendition of Stephen King’s bestselling novel, IT, I believe I have finally discovered why clowns are so feared. And that someone apparently remembers New Kids on the Block.

IT (2017) is directed by Argentinian filmmaker Andy Muschietti, who some might recognize as the director of both the short and feature length versions of Mamá (2008 and 2013, respectively). The film centers around a group of middle school students, known as “The Losers Club”, who are being tormented incessantly by both bullies and their own parents. As if things couldn’t get any worse, they also find themselves being stalked by a morphing, demonic entity known as Pennywise the Dancing Clown, otherwise referred to as “IT”.

IT (2017)
The Losers Club, preparing to fight Pennywise.

First and foremost, go see this movie. Now. As of the time of writing, IT is still in theaters and has managed to overtake The Exorcist as the highest grossing horror movie ever. IT’s a very good movie. One of this year’s best, in fact. I am aware that there are a lot of people who don’t particularly care for scary movies. And make no mistake, this movie is certainly scary. As previously mentioned, this movie singlehandedly managed to make me afraid of clowns for the first time in my life. Just the way Pennywise looks, with his glowing eyes and his unnaturally proportioned face, was enough to have me looking over my shoulder for about a day after seeing IT. Possibly owing to the stellar makeup and special effects, I felt intimidated by this clown in ways that I really hadn’t with other depictions of “scary” clowns.

Despite this, I would absolutely recommend that the timid among us go see the movie anyway. Why? Because the actors are just too darn fantastic to ignore. Indeed, what truly makes this movie great are not IT’s sequences of nail-biting terror, but the hilarious and endearing characters. Anybody can relate to at least one of the members of the Losers Club, and I found myself rooting for the team every step of the way. The persistent volley of expletives rushing out of the kids’ mouths never failed to make me chuckle, and their steadfast devotion to each other warmed the heart of this dour horror fan. All of the child actors (and most of the adult actors) do a fantastic job with their roles, and I can’t wait to see what projects they’ll end up in next. In a sense, IT is a horror movie for people who don’t like horror movies.

A big question that’s been asked is whether IT is faithful to the source material. I confess that I have only read a handful of Stephen King’s short stories, so I wouldn’t really consider myself to be the arbiter of all things King. I do think, however, I have a good enough understanding of his writing to determine why films based off his sordid tales tend to have a spotty reputation. His books can be incredibly dense and full of minute details that don’t always translate well to film. IT is based on a book that is 1,100+ pages, so it obviously wouldn’t be practical to attempt a word for word adaptation. I have it on good authority that IT successfully captures the spirit of the book while picking out the unnecessary bits, distilling the experience down to a comfortable two hours. The only real contention I have with IT is the somewhat sloppy pacing of the third act.
film seems to peak early at the end of the second act, and it takes a significant amount of time to bring the tension back up to this level for the third act. But to be honest, I loved the characters so much that I didn’t even care that much. I was merely happy that I could spend more time with them.

But the most important aspect of IT is probably the monumental effect the movie has had on the horror community. For the first time in years, a horror film has come out that is loved by audiences, hailed by critics, and financially successful. All of a sudden, horror has become (or is at least becoming) mainstream again, and there are already more scary flicks on the horizon. Not to mention, IT raised the box office out of the slump it was in. And if that wasn’t enough, Muschietti is also directing a sequel to the first movie, and I can’t wait to see IT (chapter 2).
One of the first films that started what Walt Disney Studios calls the “Present Era” of Disney Animation from 2009 to today was *Princess and the Frog* (Clements and Musker 2009), Disney’s first hand-drawn animated film in five years since *Home on the Range*. The film is a retelling of the classic fairytale of The Frog Prince set in 1950’s Louisiana. A nineteen-year old girl named Tiana (Anika Noni Rose) works day and night as a waitress at two diners in New Orleans to pursue her dream of opening her own restaurant. She eventually crosses paths with Prince Naveen (Bruno Campos) from a kingdom across the sea who is turned into a frog after making a deal with a voodoo doctor named Dr. Facilier (Keith David). When Tiana, believing in the fairy tale about the frog prince, kisses the prince-turned-frog Naveen, she too is turned into a frog. Now, the two must find a way to break the curse.

Even though the film only made over $786 thousand on opening weekend and didn’t make enough to support its estimated $105 million budget, the film was received very well by critics and made history as starring the first African-American Disney princess. Tom Huddleston of *TimeOut* admired it for daring to recreate the animation style of Disney’s earlier films from the 90’s and succeeding (“The Princess and the Frog”). Candice Frederick of *Reel Talk Online* praised it for inspiring audiences no matter their age or color to pursue their dreams (“The Princess and the Frog”). Although the film does not directly touch on the issue of race, it is seemingly implied with Tiana, an African-American woman who works to get what she wants, and her best friend Charlotte, a White noblewoman who is privileged to have anything that she wants. As Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* points out, putting these two characters together will inevitably create parallels to the conflict of race and class in the real world. (“That Old Bayou Magic...”) However, for the sake of not risking losing money, the film does not engage the issue directly. Nevertheless, this subtle social commentary would show up in later Disney animated films.

While other Disney-animated films that premiered after *Princess and the Frog* such as *Tangled* (Greno and Howard, 2010) and *Wreck-it Ralph* (Moore, 2012) had as much, if not more, success with critics and the box office, it was *Frozen* (Buck and Lee, 2013) that became a cultural phenomenon and put Disney Animation on the map once again. It follows the story of Elsa (Idina Menzel) who runs away from her kingdom to create an ice palace in the mountains to hide her ice powers from the world. However, her sister Anna (Kristen Bell) will go the distance to find her and bring her back home. The film made over $1 billion worldwide, won two Oscars at the Academy Awards, launched a short film, a sequel, a Broadway musical, and

*Chicken Little* is an adaptation of the classic fable of the same name.

*Tiana is praised as an inspirational character for people regardless of their race and age.*
How did this Frozen frenzy happen? For one, there is the hero’s journey story structure that people can easily latch onto. Lucinda Everett of The Guardian cites a six-year old that she talked to, who told her that the film has the familiar story structure of characters you know and love who solve a problem and have a happy ending (“Why is Frozen so popular?...”). Another reason here is that the film came at just the right time for its audiences. By 2013, social media had been a major part of the younger generations’ lives. The film’s praises were sung all across YouTube with users’ covers of “Let it Go”, and friends and family could share their enjoyable experiences watching the film and encourage others to watch it as well. Third, despite the familiarity of its story structure, Frozen also happens to subvert many of the tropes that are commonly associated with classic Disney movies. For one, there are two princesses in the film rather than one. One princess, Anna, is the hero of the story who travels the country to find the other princess, Elsa, her sister. The film even goes as far to subvert the typical romantic tropes of Disney princess films. The male lead, Kristoff (Jonathan Groff), who follows Anna on her journey is a rugged loner who finds that even reindeer are better than people. Though he eventually becomes Anna’s love interest, it does not happen without conflict. Meanwhile, Elsa becomes a Disney princess whose personal arc does not end with her falling in love with a man. Perhaps this style of subverting tropes and providing social commentary would inform later Disney Animation features such as Zootopia (Howard and Moore, 2016), which deals with racism and classism using anthropomorphic animals, and Moana (Clements, Musker, et. al, 2016), which continues Princess and the Frog’s tradition of creating a strong, female lead and focusing on the culture of ethnic minorities.
Coming Home to a New Beginning: A Review of Spider-Man Homecoming

By Emmanuel Gundran

Spider-Man Homecoming (Watts, 2017), a refreshing take on the ongoing superhero genre, proves itself to be a unique entry in the long-running Spider-Man film franchise. The film follows the story of Peter Parker (Tom Holland), a high school student in New York City who works as a superhero between keeping up his academic obligations and keeping his hero identity a secret. When criminals like the Shocker (Logan Marshall-Green) and the Vulture (Michael Keaton) arise, Peter has to spring into action. However, being inexperienced as a superhero comes at a price, as he unintentionally causes large amounts of property damage and risk for civilians along the way. During his career as a hero, Peter must learn the importance of power and responsibility.

The film’s overarching theme of Peter learning from his mistakes as a superhero make this film stand out from the other Marvel films with heroes who are more experienced. Throughout the film, Peter, as Spider-Man, makes mistakes while going about his duty. When he tries to shoot webs and swing around a small town, he realizes that he cannot swing from a tree and plunges into some young girls’ camping tent in their backyard. There’s another moment in which Spider-Man tries to use advanced web technology that was built into his suit, but he fails and falls on his face. Eventually, Peter meddles with the technology in the suit so much that he has his suit taken away by his mentor, Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.), and has to learn responsibility without the majority of his powers.
The Mexican way of life and death, according to Del Toro, is a legacy of pre-Columbian times, from Mayan and Aztec cultures that accepted that blood would be spilt in the natural course of things. "It is unnatural to deny effort, adversity and pain," he says. As a teenager, he sought out the Republican refugees who had fled to Mexico in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, a period he explored in Pan's Labyrinth, and which continues to fascinate him. "The priest, the professor, the culturally sophisticated guy in Mexican movies had a

The cast, from the lead actor to the villain and supporting characters, is comprised of a talented group of both young and old actors. The choice of Tom Holland as the titular character seemed like a natural fit, and it shows through his performance. Holland's young, energetic personality in real life transfers well to playing this optimistic yet inexperienced version of Spider-Man. It helps that Holland is younger, being twenty-one, so that he could sell the idea that Peter is a newer superhero. Jacob Batalon, who plays Peter's best friend Ned Leeds, is great as a comedic support character. While the humor of the film can get unexpectedly bawdy, he makes it feel natural for his character. The best cast actor in the film goes to Michael Keaton's Vulture. As an actor, Keaton brings intensity to any role that he's given, from Batman, to Dogberry, and Birdman. One particular scene has him interrogating Peter in a car, and it shows just how intense he can be while speaking in a voice no higher than a whisper. However, what makes Michael Keaton one of the best actors in a villainous Marvel role is his ability to play the blue-collar everyman.

Even outside the menacing Vulture costume, Keaton shines as an intimidating antagonist.

The flaws that the film has are mostly tied to its connection to previous entries in the Spider-Man franchise and to some of the differences it has with the original Spider-Man comics. The death of Peter's Uncle Ben is a major plot point in other films such as Spider-Man (Raimi, 2001) and The Amazing Spider-Man (Webb, 2012) and the event is considered a major moment in Peter's life, as it motivates him to become a hero. Meanwhile, Uncle Ben is not given as much as a single reference by name in Homecoming. This makes Peter's personal motivation seem shallow, only wanting to help the people of New York City because it is just the right thing to do and not because of some personal compulsion. While Captain America: Civil War (Russo & Russo, 2016) explored some of this version of Peter Parker's motives, this film did not develop them as much as it could have.

With this said, Spider-Man: Homecoming, despite being bogged down as the sixth in a series of Spider-Man films, makes itself a fresh new take on a classic superhero.

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and so on and so forth. Del Toro was impatient to get started. "The Book of Life movie reviews & Metacritic score: The Book of Life is the journey of Manolo, a young man who is torn between fulfilling the expectations of ... A great celebration of the art and culture of Mexico, but also accessible and enjoyable for everyone. A must-see. 8 of 13 users found this helpful. 

"The Book of Life" bedazzles your eyes and buoys your spirits as it treads upon themes most commonly associated with the macabre universe of Tim Burton. But instead of being gaga for ghouliness, this Mexican fiesta of animated splendor is packed with visual delights far more sunny than sinister as they burst forth as if flung from an over-packed piñata. A collaboration between fledgling Reel FX Creative Studios and 20th Century Fox, "The Book of Life" is a rare cartoon feature that doesn't just deserve to be seen in 3-D, but practically demands it. Complementing the eye candy is a quirkily e