

FILM TRaC*

Fall 2019

*teen reviewers
and critics



REVIEWS

Parasite

(2019, dir. Bong Joon-ho)

Bong Joon-ho reveals the striking disparity between classes through his immensely thought-provoking thriller *Parasite*.

Ki-woo cunningly begins a string of lies when he gets a job as a tutor for the elite Park family. He manages to convince them that his sister, Ki-jeong, is a qualified art therapist, and eventually gets his parents to work in the house as a maid and driver, but only after framing the loyal ancillaries through a series of well-coordinated schemes.

The film progresses in a happy-go-lucky manner as the Kim family revels in their triumph over the gullible Parks, until a sinister subterranean discovery turns their world upside down.

The happier moments where the family seems to have not a single care in the world are presented with a yellow tone and a buoyant soundtrack which makes the viewer long for moments like those. On the other hand, as the 'parasite' reveals itself, a gray tone instills a sense of fear and abhorrence as well as pity for the short lived joy of the Kims. The lighting in the Park house exudes elegance, and, in turn, a sense of superiority; but it conflicts with the emptiness and shadows, accompanied by a grim soundtrack that provides an eerie sense.

Since most of the film takes place in this house, it provides the perfect setting for suspense. The smooth camera movement put you in the shoes of the characters: it provides an intimate view to connect to the emotions and morals of the viewer.

Throughout the film, allusions are made to the contrast between the lives of the rich and poor. As the Kims realize they truly are different from the Parks, it brings out a loathful side of them. You get conflicting feelings as you pity both families, although

you know clearly which one is in the wrong.

Parasite is a teeth-clenching, edge-of-your-seat movie jam-packed with twists. Definitely a must-watch.

Racquel Ramlall

■

Parasite, directed by Bong Joon-ho, focuses on the impoverished Kim family. When Ki-woo's friend, introduces him to tutor Park Da-hye, the daughter of a wealthy family, Ki-woo takes the opportunity to get the rest of his family to work for the Parks through a series of elaborate schemes. But one night, when the Park family goes on a camping trip, the Kim's discovery of what lies beneath the mansion threatens to destroy what they have achieved.

The movie's message is geared toward class inequality between the rich and poor. The film cleverly uses a fast camera direction to the point where it's dizzying for the viewers to follow as it explores the Park mansion. It emphasizes the difference between social status as Ki-woo barely makes it into the frame whenever the Parks are home. Each scene is used cleverly to showcase the movie's message about inequality, as with a flood: the fact that the water comes from uphill shows that those who are wealthy don't have to deal with problems that those below them have to face.

The film ties together sardonic comedy with melodramatic suspense naturally and not one scene feels out of place. The soundtrack, although unmemorable, aids in creating the tense mood, whether it's one of fear or of mocking. It was most effectively used during the end, when it shows that the connection and cycle between the what was left of the Parks and Kims will continue to stay.

Parasite's dark but comical approach to social classes wasn't for me. Although I enjoyed the interactions between the characters, and the insightful

cinematography, I didn't enjoy the series of twists and the amount of gore in the second act. The story suddenly turns 180°, with one revelation building upon another all within a span of one day. It moved too fast, where I was unsure what was happening.

Although I wouldn't watch for a second time, *Parasite* is undeniably an excellently crafted film. I recommend this film to those who enjoy the thriller genre, or someone who wants a fast-paced, but meaningful movie to watch.

Sophia Wai



Peggy Sue Got Married
(1986, dir. Francis Ford Coppola)

In *Peggy Sue Got Married*, a middle-aged woman dealing with regret about her life goes to her high school reunion. She faints and wakes up as a senior in high school, taking the opportunity to make different decisions in an effort to change her future. Instead, she ends up learning the secrets and truth about her relationships that she did not know when experiencing high school the first time.

The plot and premise of the film was intriguing and well-developed. Similar to other movies that explore time travel, you leave the film unable to stop thinking about it. However, the film goes above

and beyond, as it paints an atmosphere of longing and sentimentality that is very difficult to accomplish.

There is no better word to describe this feeling than "nostalgia," and *Peggy Sue Got Married* captures the very essence of the word. Viewers of 2019 are transported back in time from the 80's to the 60's along with Peggy Sue. I've always been fascinated by everyday life in the past and what is must have been like to go through day-to-day life in the decades before I was born. I like to imagine what past times I never experienced would look and feel like, and

the film definitely showed me how it could have been.

Every aspect of the film, from the set, costumes, characters, music, capture the feeling of nostalgia. As Peggy Sue revisits her old bedroom for the first time, we see the bittersweet tenderness on her face. As Peggy Sue goes to visit her grandparents, we see the sunlight peeking through the trees. It will remind anyone of their own childhood or teenage experience, even if they are still young or have lived a completely different life.

After watching *Peggy Sue Got Married*, you can't help but wonder what you would do if you were given the chance to change your own past. Would you take it?

Kiera Lynch

■

In a tonal as well as stylistic departure from his critically-acclaimed *Godfather* trilogy (well, part 1 and part 2, at least), Francis Ford Coppola tells the story of Peggy Sue (Kathleen Turner), a former



prom queen who, having just divorced a cheating drunk and Peggy's high school sweetheart (Nicholas Cage), reluctantly attends her high school reunion with her daughter. As the night unravels, so does Peggy. Through a series of unfortunate events, Peggy is transported back to her high school days, during the colorful and dynamic 1960's. Hijinks, tumultuous relationships, and teenage melodrama ensue, building to an unearned and frankly disappointing conclusion.

But let's start with the good, and, to be fair, there is a lot to enjoy here. Kathleen Turner's performance as the titular character manages to balance the cynicism of adulthood with the carefree naivety of youth. Her comic timing is great, and she handles the more emotionally charged scenes with ease.

Elsewhere, the performances prove to be wildly uneven: some nice, some annoying and others a mismatched mix of the two. I have never really been a fan of Nicolas Cage and his performance here didn't help. He is painfully one-note and his character is so annoying that I wanted

him to be struck by lightning.

Speaking of lightning, a massive, supernatural storm becomes a major plot point in the increasingly bizarre final act, abandoning any sense of narrative consistency as it barrels towards the frustrating conclusion. I won't spoil it, but the ending doesn't gel for a number of reasons.

Joseph Hillyard

Elevator to the Gallows (1958, dir. Louis Malle)

A fundamental example of French New Wave cinema, *Elevator to the Gallows* follows two lovers as they attempt to embark on a journey where their love would be able to blossom without constraints. However, unexpected twists stop them from ever fulfilling their commitments.

The elegant, dreamy shots are accompanied by a breathtaking score composed by Miles Davis. The black and white film also adds to the element of mystery developed in the storyline and allows for the score and physical beauty of

the actors to truly distinguish themselves.

Through dramatic close-ups, everything seems to be personal. (It also seems free of clichés, despite that being the very base of the plot.) Melodramatic long shots and a provocative score heighten the senses and aura of Old Hollywood and make it a uniquely French sensory trip. The acting and portrayal of the characters is astounding: in the fluidity of internal monologues presented through their tormented expression, every single detail in their faces effortless.

At first sight, the film seems like a more individualized, personal noir film taken from a Hollywood assembly line and then patched up with old-world Europeaness; however, it proves to have much substance and value in the representation of old cinematic tropes that makes for a completely new experience. Ultimately, it provides the perfect introduction to the French New Wave cinema.

Kimberly Dominguez

The classic 1958 French film, *Elevator to the Gallows*, directed by Louis Malle, stars one physically separated couple, and one couple that stay together throughout the entire film. Since it is a crime film, there's murder, suspense, and drama, but was it portrayed well enough?

The suspense was portrayed mediocrity okay, although everything else, such as the acting, was bland. The writing for the characters was poor and the editing jumpy. For example, when Julien Tavernier (Maurice Ronet) is shooting his boss, it doesn't even show or auditorily show that he just killed him. Also, for characterization, the flower girl that goes on a crime spree with her lover, sees her lover stealing Julien's car and starts creating a ruckus, and then she gets into the car with him, and she's freaking out (yet acting stupidly as she waves her arms in the wind acting like she doesn't give a damn).

Later on in the film, her lover shoots two German people, and she doesn't have the slightest bit of expression.

The way it was shot was beautiful, especially the ending. The music by Miles Davis was beautiful and fit the French aesthetic. The zoom out on the film was mesmerizing, and almost brought tears to my eyes, but also because of the dialogue of Florence Carala (Jeanne Moreau), as well as the cinematography.

Anna Oboladze

■

Elevator to the Gallows is a classic French film from the 1950s directed by Louis Malle that tells an intertwined story told from multiple perspectives with the theme of "everything that could ever happen in less than 24 hours."

In *Elevator to the Gallows*, cinematography was key. Cinematographer Henri Decaë was able to show the characters in each shot but also what was around them. This makes the plot more believable, to show that the main characters are not the only people in this film, and that there is still a world around. This is why the cinematography in this film is so outstanding: it's both visually pleasing and helps the audience to better understand the plot.

The pace of *Elevator to the Gallows* was imbalanced. The style of the film involved a pretty consistent cut off of scenes, usually when there was a big build up happening, making the film even more confusing. The plot would suddenly build up and then there would be no outcome of the build-up. This feature of the film tended to confuse and throw off the audience.

Although the pace of the film seemed slow at some parts, the acting was able to carry the plot and always intrigue the audience. The roles of Julien Tavernier (Maurice Ronet) and Florence Carala (Jeanne Moreau) both are suspicious characters and both have multiple scenes

where the context of it could be considered boring or repetitive, though Ronet and Moreau's acting makes up for it.

What is so unique about both of their roles is that for the majority of the film, both Julien and Florence are isolated from other people in the scenes, with very little speaking. This causes the majority of their acting to be conveyed through their actions, especially through their facial expressions. Ronet and Moreau made them notable and outstanding.

Isaac Platt Zolov

■

The Impostors

(1998, dir. Stanley Tucci)

"There's just one thing I don't get. If the two of you needed the money so badly, why didn't you just sell tickets?" This quote confronts the main loophole in the plot of *The Impostors*. It comes at the end, when a viewer may have forgotten about it until looking back. The two main characters, Arthur (Stanley Tucci) and Maurice (Oliver Platt), do not respond. Instead they just make a face that emphasizes their stupidity: they clearly did not think of that. The movie simply needed a reason for the adventure, and this was the best they could give. It can be best described as a result of lazy screenwriting, saved by incredible performances.

Arthur and Maurice are two struggling theater actors who are terrible at their job. The film is split into chapters, which helps bring structure to a film that is too ambitious for its own good. By the third

chapter, Arthur and Maurice have devised a plan that utilizes their acting ability to get free pastries, though I can't quite remember if that timeline is exactly true, as the specifics of the film are not memorable. At a play, they are jealous, and end up talking smack about the lead actor in a bar, who overhears. Then we find them on a ship going on a voyage that only the upper class can afford.

It becomes a complete mess when the second act begins. There are so many different storylines to follow on the ship: the main characters trying to avoid the actor they insulted, who for some reason is also on the ship; Happy Franks (Steve Buscemi), a suicidal musician, and why he is suicidal; Emily (Hope Davis), an edgy teenager who finds herself obsessed with sadness; multiple romances, etc. Sometimes the characters' stories

intertwine, sometimes they do not. One scene will focus on Arthur and Maurice running from the insulted actor, the next will be Happy Franks complaining, without any sort of relation. These transitions seem awkward and unnecessary. If the film just stuck to one story, it'd be a much easier watch.

The only redeeming qualities are the acting and cinematography done by Ken

Buscemi, Allison Janney, Isabella Rossellini, and many more, and they all were able to bring their own special quality to this film. However, Oliver Platt and Stanley Tucci had the hardest job. They are good actors who needed to master the art of acting like bad actors. And they did. Had they failed at this, the movie would be unwatchable. So big props to them for their skill.

At the end, we are left knowing the movie is too indolent to truly offer a reason as to why the main characters ended up on the ship. If your suspension of disbelief is larger than mine, perhaps this is not a concern. Yet, it feels unfair that the movie gets away with that and being a structural mess.

The Impostors is a poorly written movie that grows hard to follow and enjoy, despite any well-done acting and cinematography.

Emily Auringer

■

Directed by Stanley Tucci, *The Impostors* revolves around two aspiring actors who will go to great lengths to practice their craft, and the sticky situation they mistakenly get themselves into. As they work to escape from their unexpected turn of events, they come across a wide variety of characters, some of which are involved with their own diabolical plans and their unsuspecting targets.

This film brilliantly portrays a wide assortment of people with their own strong personalities. Each member of the cast perfectly embodies their role and is able to depict an outrageous version of the type of person their character is. For example,

Kelsch. The colors in each scene were absolutely stunning. If a character was wearing a certain color, that color could be found on a prop in the same scene. (For example, one scene included the hotel staff gathered around their captain. There was a white teacup which so elegantly accentuated the captain's white outfit.) This is a minor detail which adds a lovely style to a movie lacking a consistent substance.

The movie managed to include Steve



the con-artist couple with exaggerated French accents, or the suicidal divorcee who monologues extensively at the bar to a newly-found love interest about love and death.

The film's structure and overall plot seemed to have a slower paced beginning. However, the climax accelerated to a rush of action and deception that kept the audience hooked.

Overall, this movie was hilariously crafted and invokes a nonstop amount of laughter.

Mairin Mahaffey-Dowd

■

Stranger Than Fiction

(2006, dir. Marc Forster)

Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) one day wakes up hearing a voice (Emma Thompson) narrating his life. He soon realizes that he is the main character of a novel. The plot shows the drastic changes to Harold's precise, perfect life as he quests to find this author narrating his actions.

The film also focuses on the author's



perspective, who deals with writer's block, confusion, and her assistant (Queen Latifah), but Will Ferrell is really the star of the film. Ferrell has been known for decades as a comical actor who commonly stars in humorous roles, so at first, it is surprising to see him in this role, but he does an amazing job.



Crick isn't a straightforward character. He's not always happy, he's not always sad, he's not always angry, he's always a mix of emotions. The audience is clearly able to see Crick's development as the film progresses through the change of his actions, personality, mindset, and appearance. These qualities of Ferrell's acting make *Stranger Than Fiction* a film to recommend.

Never in a million years would I ever think of a plot like this. It is in this genre of film of these plots which are both so realistic and abstract at the same time, which is pretty rare to see in any plot.

Stranger Than Fiction is a really unique film which makes you think, no matter how many times you've watched it. Could there really be an author of my life? Can the future really be predicted? What is the voice in my head? Could this be real?

Isaac Platt Zolov

■

4 Months, Three Weeks and 2 Days

(2007, dir. Cristian Mungiu)

A deeply disturbing psychological drama that sees Otilia, a college student, try to assist her roommate Gabita in having an abortion during the 1980's in Romania, where the practice was outlawed and demonized. Cristian Mungiu and his cinematographer effectively use natural light combined with a minimalistic visual style to create the grim and often tense film.

For me, this was a deeply polarizing film. Anamaria Marinca delivers a deeply compelling performance as Otilia, growing increasingly desperate as the situation becomes more and more complicated. However, the film never develops the friendship that acts as her motivation,



keeping them at a distance.

As physical manifestations of the patriarchal society that forces women to turn to extreme measures in order to exercise their reproductive rights, I could have done without most of the machismo and aggression found in the male characters. I found them more tedious than revelatory, adding very little to the plot rather than delivering any type of nuanced commentary on the strict, conservative society the characters occupy.

Joseph Hillyard

■

Big Trouble in Little China

(1986, dir. John Carpenter)

This classic 80's hit paints the tale of American truck driver Jack, and his partner, Wang.

The dynamic between Jack and Wang is slightly underdeveloped as Wang tries to execute Jack within the first ten minutes of the film, but they instantly go back to being friends in the next scene, in which Jack drives Wang to the airport. The movie

follows the two saving their loved ones from magic Chinese ninjas. Their journey is filled with obstacles as they traverse the captor's fortress, at one point discovering an underground sex dungeon and freeing the prisoners.

That doesn't mean that the plot was smooth, though. Throughout the film, Wang is never portrayed as being a magic ninja, but at a dire situation, he appears to be at the same level as his opponents, being able to fly through the air.

I would recommend this movie to anyone who enjoys a good laugh at strange relics from the 80's, whether the laughter is directed toward the film or its construction.

Sam Magaseyev

■

Knives Out

(2019, Rian Johnson)

Knives out is a twist on the classic murder mystery. This movie perfectly balances drama, comedy, mystery, and action. It's almost impossible to give it a true category.

In the best way possible this movie makes fun of itself, but different from other parody movies, this one takes itself serious enough to have a complex and fascinating plot with twists that will make your jaw drop. This movie's cinematography is a major role in what makes it so good.

My one issue with this movie is the plot holes. A major one, which doesn't spoil the plot in any way is how Harlan Thromby (Christopher Plummer) got so rich, while refusing to sell movie rights to any of his books (authors only get so rich from selling movie rights). But this movie was so entertaining. It's the type of movie that starts out a little slow, but then suddenly it's impossible to take your eyes off of the screen.

Zoe Kirschner

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MOVIE SUMMARIES

Blue is the Warmest Color

(2013, dir. Abdel Kechiche)

A teen forms an emotional and physical bond with an older art student. This bittersweet film explores the entirety of their relationship from the sweet yet intense moments to the raw and vulnerable ones. -sw

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

(2000, dir. Ang Lee)

A beautifully shot martial arts film about a quest to find a missing sword has a touching score, beautiful cinematography, and outstanding performances from Michelle Yeoh and Chow Yun-Fat. -ipz

Boyhood

(2014, dir. Richard Linklater)

The heartfelt story of a boy's first 18 years of his life—actually filmed over an 18-year period—does a fantastic job conveying the struggles of growing up in the early 2000s through outstanding acting, soundtrack, outfits, and set design. -ipz

Little Manhattan

(2005, dir. Mark Levin)

A 10-year-old growing up in Manhattan (Josh Hutcherson) deals with the pain of first love, along with his parents' impending divorce. Full of laughs, yet still emotional and relatable. -kl

Donnie Darko

(2001, dir. Richard Kelly)

A film about time traveling, mental illness, and saving the world starring Jake Gyllenhaal explores the real world with a demonic bunny taking over a teenager's life and mind. -ea

Diary of a Wimpy Kid

(2010, dir. Thor Freudenthal)

a middle school boy having to deal with his abusive older e-boy brother, who existed before that was even a thing, and his best friend who is he heavily ashamed of due to his lack of development based on probable undiagnosed illnesses. based on the book series. -ea

Midsommar

(2019, dir. Ari Aster)

A psychological thriller following a group of American students as they become immersed in a seemingly innocent pagan cult; full of carefully crafted absurd nonsense.

-kd

Blue Jay

(2016, dir. Alex Lehmann)

An emotional journey between two high school sweethearts. With the intensity of their relationship countered by their timid personalities, the movie makes for an intriguing ride. -ea

The Imitation Game

(2014, dir. Morten Tyldum)

Biopic tells the emotional story of a genius engineer during World War Two. The film's emotional score works brilliantly to depict the war of understanding one's own identity in a disapproving time. -mmd

Notting Hill

(1999, dir. Roger Michell)

A small bookstore owner's life changes forever when a famous actress walks in. Both heartwarming and adorable, this movie is timeless. -zk

The Matrix

(1999, dirs. Lilly and Lana Wachowski)

Imagine finding out that the world is actually a simulation? This masterpiece starring Keanu Reeves has great effects and will always be an action packed masterpiece. -zk

Goodburger

(1997, dir. Brian Robbins)

A teenager decides to work at a local burger joint and must deal with his mentally unstable coworker and defeat an opposing restaurant. -sm

Fences

(2016 dir. Denzel Washington)

A heart-wrenching exploration of familial strife and the cost of failed dreams, featuring stellar performances all round, especially from Viola Davis who deservedly won an Academy Award. -jh

The Addams Family

(2019, dir. Conrad Vernon)

While showing the heartwarming strength of a tight knit family, this dark comedy about a chaotic family's changed life when a long lost member returns demonstrates a humorous approach to overcoming the difficulty of confronting the past. -mmd

The Good Liar

(2019, dir. Bill Condon)

A Hitchcockian thriller about an aging con man and the widow he plans to swindle nearly collapses under the absurdity of its plot, but stellar performances from Helen Mirren and Ian McKellen keep the film together. -jh

8th Grade

(2018, dir. Bo Burnham)

A young girl in her last week of middle school tries to come out of her shell. One of the most relatable movies of all time, sometimes so much so that it is painful.

-kl

Judy

(2019, dir. Rupert Goold)

Telling the story of an iconic performer during her waning years, this film mostly coasts by on the strength of its subject matter and the cast. Led by an almost unrecognizable Renée Zellweger. -jh

Mid90s

(2018, dir. Jonah Hill)

A visually pleasing film about a young teen in Los Angeles who uses skateboarding as a way to get away from his troubled family at home, has amazing cinematography, acting, and one of the best soundtracks I've heard. -ipz

Alphaville

(1965, dir. Jean-Luc Godard)

In the far future, AI controls an entire nation of people. It's one detective's job to destroy it from the inside while also finding love. His role, perfectly crafted as a jolly gangster from the 50's, combined with a low budget, makes this an unintentional comedy. -sm

Booksmart

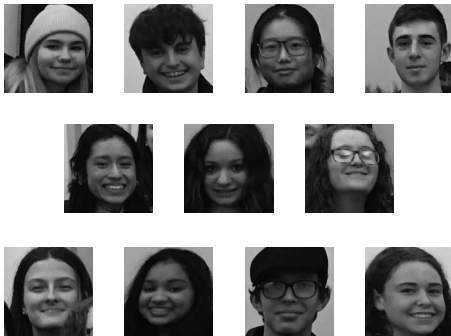
(2019, dir. Olivia Wilde)

Two high school geniuses decide to party the night before their graduation. An emotion-filled film that captures the struggles of being in high school. Outstanding performances by Kaitlyn Dever and Beanie Feldstein will get you in the feels. -ipz

Little Monsters

(2019, dir. Abe Forsythe)

Adding a few humorous wrinkles to the well-worn tropes of classic zombie movies, this charming little indie film from Australia follows a school teacher (the always worthwhile Lupita Nyong'o) as she defends her class from a horde of flesh eating zombies. -jh



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