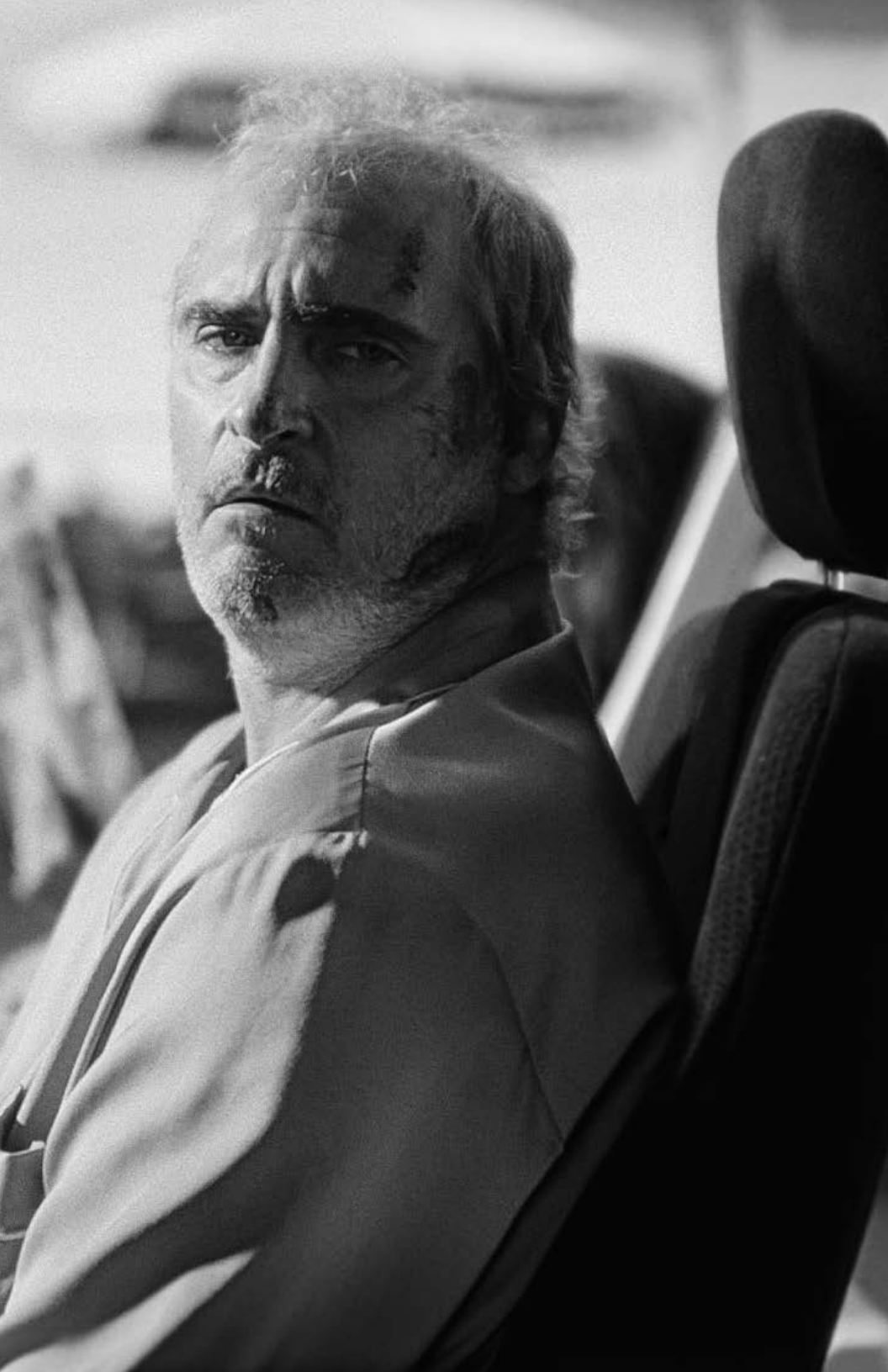


Spring 2023

FILM TRAC*

*teen reviewers
and critics





REVIEWS

Beau is Afraid

(2023, Dir. Ari Aster)

To call Ari Aster's new film deeply unsettling would be an incredible understatement: *Beau is Afraid* demands an audience reaction—specifically deep and unrelenting discomfort.

With *Beau is Afraid*, Aster, known for his psychological horror films such as *Heredity* (2018) and *Midsommar* (2019), has concocted an admittedly very unique depiction of fear, guilt, and shame. The film exists as a blend of negative emotions that are thrown haphazardly into a loose, almost *Odyssey*-like, narrative. There is not one moment of safety across the three long hours of *Beau is Afraid*.

The film follows Beau, a stunted man-child in Joaquin Phoenix's flabby, almost 50-year-old body, as he traverses a dystopian landscape on a journey to his mother's funeral, encountering Jobian levels of psychological suffering. The viewer is left to question the source of this suffering: Beau clearly suffers from some mental illness, yet the film seems to blame his psychological unrest on Beau's mother, citing various, yet unspecified, childhood traumas.

Beau is Afraid starts as a portrait of simple, everyday fears that are ballooned to extraordinary sizes. The first act is steeped in fear, as Beau encounters trouble with literally every action that he takes. He lives on a street with an absurd anarchy of poverty and violence: his neighbors blast music that makes the walls shake, other neighbors blame Beau via angry notes aggressively slid under his door, his house gets trashed by homeless people when he runs to go to the deli, a venomous spider is on the loose.

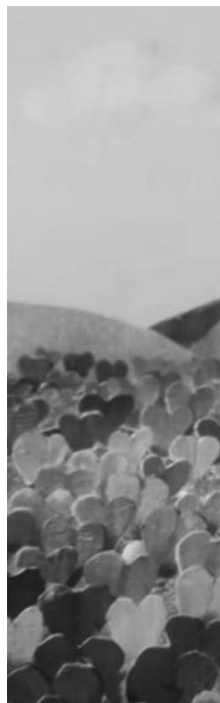
Misfortune is cranked to an absurd level, blending horrific violence and discomfort with a strange, dark humor. This results in an act that plays almost like a painting:

precise yet sprawling, frantic yet silly, painted in a warped, disturbing fashion. It is fairly brilliant in its concentrated portrayal of fear, a strong start to a film that quickly dissolves into increasingly confusing and, upon closer inspection, hollow narratives that seem to go on for far too long.

After this first act (which ends with a naked Beau getting hit by a truck), the film dissolves into a waking nightmare, an odyssey that gets increasingly difficult to watch. But while *The Odyssey* is a tale of a man trying to get to his wife, *Beau is Afraid* is a tale of a boy trying to get to his mother. If this parallel reeks of Freudian psychology, it should.

Beau is Afraid centers itself, among other things, on Freud's theories regarding young boys and their mothers—particularly the Oedipus Complex and the manifestation of those subconscious desires. While the film never explicitly credits Freud (and distorts his Oedipus Complex in significant ways), it undoubtedly uses this presupposed argument to explain the stunted and sexually repressed inner psyche of Beau. The idea of the subconscious, however, acts as the framework of the film. The majority of *Beau is Afraid* takes place in the titular character's mind; his subconscious desires are cleverly hidden as plot points and themes across the film.

Despite Phoenix's effective acting throughout the film, it is difficult to root for Beau, giving the viewer one less constant to grab onto amongst the quickly changing scenery and confusing imagery. Despite being with Beau for the entire three hours, he does not *do anything*. Everything happens *to* him, and all he can do is watch,





wide-eyed and crying, as it happens. This results in a character devoid of life: we see Beau's fear, but we do not see any of the other emotions that make him a person. We see his suffering, but we are not sure why we are supposed to care.

Combined with an already haphazard narrative, this lack of a strong main character leaves the film feeling ungrounded and hollow. The power of *Beau is Afraid* is in its effect; Aster is not trying to tell a story about a specific character and that character's specific journey. Rather he is using his journey to explore the Freudian subconscious and the way that it manifests fear, guilt, and shame.

Beau is Afraid's final scene is very reminiscent of that of *Midsommar*; an act of abrupt, starkly comedic violence acts as a stamp of closure, concluding a film that lacks a real message while doing a lot. It leaves viewers in shock, as they steep in the emotions the film has conjured up: anger, discomfort, anxiety. It is a film

one endures, but its method is warranted. While exaggerated, the portrait of fear that it paints is a very real one.

Beau is not likable, not rootable, but he is, in some aspects, weirdly relatable.

Beau is Afraid is a nightmarish acid trip on a warped path of trauma, but elements of it contain universal truths. Is the three-hour runtime necessary? No, much of the film could have been left out, but the power of *Beau is Afraid* is in its effect. It is hypnotically captivating, it is terrifyingly relatable.

Lucien C.



Beau is Afraid, directed by Ari Aster, known for the films *Hereditary* and *Midsommar*, is an emotional roller coaster that follows a paranoid man as he sets out on an improbable journey to visit his mother and faces his worst fears along the way.

We are viewing this movie through Beau's eyes as he ventures outdoors into a fantasy version of the modern city he lives in. The police will shoot you for simply standing in front of them, you can purchase an AK-47 from a vendor on the sidewalk, and crime is so prevalent that he has to run to his front door each day to escape a swarm of homeless people who are prowling the streets like zombies. He lives in a world where all of his worst fears come true.

Playing Beau is Joaquin Phoenix, who without his brilliant acting you would be perplexed to why sit through it. Phoenix helps you root for the character until you can't anymore.

This three-hour nightmare never once makes you feel satisfied. *Beau is Afraid* constantly is making you think and try to predict the ending, but then spins the plot in a whole new direction. This film never felt enjoyable because of the constant anxiety I felt. But underneath all of its absurdity, this proved how discontinuous far-out stories can be produced in this day.

As I left the movie theater, constant questions and thoughts flooded my mind. I tried to explain what I watched to anyone but as I tried there was not a sentence summary I could find.

Ruby W.



Everything Everywhere all at Once (2022, dir. Daniels)

Everything Everywhere All at Once is a story about a family broken by years of miscommunication and misunderstanding. Waymond (played by Key Huy Quan), the story's goofy, warm-hearted father, finds himself trapped in a marriage where love has all but evaporated. His daughter, Joy (played by Stephanie Hsu), has dropped out of college, and has grown frustrated with her mother's inability to accept her personhood. At the

heart of it all is Evelyn (played by Michelle Yeoh), a dejected, inattentive mother who struggles with which course she wants to take in life: to watch it crumble, or to actively try to better her life. Evelyn's choice is tied in the fate of their jointly-owned laundry, and the multiversal conflict that challenges her belief systems.

I loved *Everything Everywhere all at Once* when I first watched it in theaters. It's hard not to be enamored by 120 minutes of pure visual delight. On a 12 million dollar budget and a limited VFX team, the Daniels managed to create a story that pulls off rapid cuts and bold visuals with ease, and merges together family drama, beautifully choreographed action, and bizarre humor into a movie that never fails to land its emotional blows.

Everything Everywhere's conflict is driven by two core philosophies: it's a war between cynicism and compassion. Joy, or Jobu Tupaki, is disaffected by her mother. Joy is by and large an upset of first-generation immigrant expectations: she's a college dropout, she is estranged from her parents, and she is a lesbian. Incurring the quiet pain of her mother's emotional neglect, she turns to the film's Bagel.

What is the Bagel? It's Joy's belief system, wrapped up into one visual metaphor: across all universes, states of being, and realms of knowledge, at its center, life has no inherent meaning. So why bother? Or, better yet, why care at all?

However, on the other end is Waymond Wang, the soft-spoken husband of Evelyn. He finds himself in a similar position to Joy: trapped in a marriage where love has all but faded. He cannot communicate his issues without being ignored, and we find their relationship on the brink of collapse.

However, he takes the direct opposite approach of Joy: he operates on the philosophy that being compassionate is its own form of redressing indifference. To be kind is to accept that life has no guiding



principles, but that caring still has its own pragmatism: it fulfills ourselves, and it fulfills others.

This conflict between ideas is relevant as it is moving. We live in an era of the Information Age where information is near-constant: we are not only aware of the last national tragedy, but we will know almost instantaneously when the next one will happen. Having watched this film in



early 2022, I was (willingly or not) privy to every detail of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the continual rise of new COVID variants, or the Sunset Park shooting. Subject to the 24/7 news cycle and the infinite scrolling feed, we know more than we care to know, and we see more than we can empathize with. In this circumstance, it's easy to become Jobu Tupaki. What can I do? Why should I even care?

Everything Everywhere gives us the tools to combat this: no, we cannot conceivably engage with the informational mess that forms our world; but yet, we can choose to show affection, vulnerability, and kindness in our corner of the world.

Ken G.

Suzhou River

(2000, dir. Lou Ye)

Moudan (Zhou Xun), the teenage daughter of a local criminal, is transported by Mardar (Jia Hongsheng) on his motorcycle each day along a filthy river. Gradually, they find themselves growing fond of each other. However, despite having a secret crush on her, Mardar becomes involved in a plot to kidnap the young girl and hold her for ransom. The plot fails, and it ends with Moudan jumping into the polluted river, and, no matter how much people searched and looked, her body seemingly disappears. She was gone.

Years later, Mardar is released from prison and runs across a nightclub performer who resembles his long-lost sweetheart.

Lou Ye, the director, takes a very different approach to movies as we know it.

The film has a very documentary-like and even “video diary” type of tone: most scenes from the movie are taken on an unnamed protagonist’s video camera in first-person POV. Lou builds the whole story from the protagonist’s own storytelling and perspective, but we never get to see him at all; he was one of the many mysteries that made the film even more interesting and remarkable.

Throughout, Lou Ye cleverly intertwines two of the main plots of the film together, taking the audience on a wild ride of twists, turns, and wonder.

Suzhou River felt so real and raw. What started as a cliché of secret-forbidden lovers ended up turning into something



much more complex, and that's something a lot of films try to achieve but can't.

Delyse M.



Suzhou River is hauntingly beautiful.

It follows a filmmaker in search of work and the entire movie is filmed through his handheld camera creating an interesting viewing experience. Within the starting sequence, he meets and falls in love with a woman named Meimei and their love story is an integral part of the film. As the filmmaker and Meimei grow close, Meimei tells the filmmaker the love story of Moudan and Mardar, unknown names she has repeated since the beginning of the film. Throughout the movie we learn the connections between the two stories.

The film's singular perspective adds a lot to this film. We're left to wonder about the accuracy of everything portrayed since it is from only one person's view point, and we wonder who characters are when they are off screen, away from whoever is capturing the film. It also allows everything to feel more genuine. We see real city streets and

real people, and even the emotions feel more real due to the homemade quality of the film.

Like the film's capturer, you find yourself mesmerized by the female lead and the mystery surrounding her. It heavily moves the story along and the introduction of the additional love story adds even more depth to the movie and its mysteries.

Suzhou River is an extremely unique experience as it is both visually and conceptually captivating.

Zion I.



The film *Suzhou River* takes place in Shanghai in 2000. Through the streets of Shanghai, Mardar rides his motorcycle as he drives around Moudan, the daughter of his boss, a local criminal. Mardar is tasked to capture the young teenager and hold her for ransom despite his obsessive love for the girl. As the plan falls apart, Moudan escapes and is nowhere to be found. Years later, Mardar finds a nightclub performer identical to Moudan. The movie tells the story of Mardar and Moudan's

love, as well as the identical nightclub performer, Meimei, and her boyfriend, the videographer's love.

The film is done through a first person perspective. It explored unconventional style choices such as grainy quality, loud background noises throughout the film, and adding cuts in the middle of dialogue. It was cheap on purpose. These style choices gave the movie a raw and natural vibe. Because of this, the film had a very impressive grasp on the culture and way of life at the time.

I loved the imperfection throughout the movie. The multiple love stories going on were very alluring. As the movie continued, I became more interested in the significance of the beginning of the film, and the connection between the two couples. The director veered away from the common occurrences in films where main characters bump their heads and forget their pasts. Instead we were brought along into discovering the parallels in the relationships.

Silvia S.

■

The Batman

(2022, dir. Matt Reeves)

The Batman follows the story of Bruce Wayne: the titular vigilante exacting revenge on the criminal underworld that had taken his father from him as a child. The Riddler, the primary antagonist, aims to expose the interior corruption of Gotham City through a violent political uprising—complete with bloody assassinations, public exposés, and live-streams that aim to rile up Gotham's disenfranchised citizens.

Following the Riddler's bloody trail, Bruce is roped into a conspiracy that threatens to unravel both the city and the family legacy that Wayne is heir too. As Batman, Wayne has to radically reconsider how—and why—he fights.

The Batman is an amazing experience throughout its impressive three hour runtime. The performances by Paul Dano as The Riddler and Robert Pattinson as Bruce Wayne perfectly sell these characters as broken, desperate individuals locked head-to-head in a battle of wills.

The film's narrative—a mystery surrounding a conspiracy that implicates Gotham's upper circle—is equal parts



layered and engaging. As the Riddler's interrogations start to turn inwards, interrogating Wayne himself, one cannot help but feel as distraught and sickened as Bruce Wayne himself. Moreover, the transformation of Batman's image as an icon of fear into one of inspiration is a reinvigorating take on a character that has been exclusively defined by his unabashed aggression. This is all underscored by a powerful score by Michael Giacchino that captures the beating heart of a dying city.

However, what's frustrating about *The Batman* is its failure to engage with its political overtones.

Batman's Gotham is portrayed as a decrepit mirror of 70's NYC, modernized for a 21st century audience. It's a city overridden by gang activity, a police force unequipped to tackle it, and a faux democracy that directly profits from its spoils. Paul Dano's Riddler, in defiance of a stagnant public bureaucracy, fashions himself an agent of change.

Riddler's political theology is inherently progressive in nature. He offers scathing critiques of public institutions, demanding transparency and accountability from elected officials. Riddler's acts of vigilantism critique two intertwined factions of Gotham: the political and the wealthy. He aims to reveal the hierarchy

of power of Gotham's government, and laments the social status that individuals like Wayne take for granted.

Bruce Wayne is presented as a natural foil for Riddler: both of them are vigilantes attempting to ameliorate institutional failures. Where the two individuals diverge is that while Wayne lived a comfortable trauma within his father's mansion, Riddler was neglected in the decrepit walls of a state orphanage.

One would naturally expect these circumstances to create rivaling political stances, but *The Batman* refuses to broach the conversation.

Whereas Riddler has a staunch belief system, Bruce Wayne is a politically neutral character: he offers little in the way of argument or contradiction. His struggle throughout the film is not a social reckoning, but a personal one: it's Bruce investigating how he fights rather than what he fights.

When faced with how he contributes to Gotham or the type of man his father was, the movie either ignores the conversation, or offers remedial arguments that help avoid any larger examination of Bruce as a figure in Gotham's society. As a result, the conflict between Riddler and Batman falls flat because, ideologically, the Riddler has won from the start. We disagree with



the Riddler because he revolts us on an emotional level, but we've never reckoned with his beliefs on a logical one.

The Riddler's fanciful acts of domestic terrorism are uncommon, but a democracy that fails to protect the people is our constant reality. We come away with no grander insight into the relationship between the state and its people. Instead, all *The Batman* has to offer is the idea that violence is bad: a painfully impotent message from such a complex narrative.

Overall, *The Batman* is a premier comic book movie, with a unique story that interrogates the idea of retributory justice by showing how a man grows beyond it, and boasts one of the most compelling comic villains in the process. However, its refusal to reckon with the social conversation it presents creates a film that, like Wayne, is a defender of the status quo.

Ken G.



Hana and Alice

(2004, dir. Shunji Iwai)

Shunji Iwai's *Hana and Alice* tells the story of two friends making the transition from middle school into high school. The film follows the convergent stories of the two girls: Hana, as she attempts to become closer to Mark, her new crush, and Alice, as she attempts to break into the modeling industry. The pair's relationship comes to strain as Hana develops an obsessive, stalk-ish routine on Mark—following him around on his morning commute, breaking into his social circles, and watching him from a distance.

Opportunity strikes when Mark suffers a mild concussion, allowing Hana to swoop in and convince him that he suffers from amnesia: insisting that the two are a budding couple. As her lie becomes more elaborate, Hana is forced to loop Alice into her con. The film explores the separate lives of these two characters, and how their

actions come to hammer away at what remains of their friendship.

Hana and Alice is a visually powerful film. By incorporating primarily handheld, overexposed shots, the viewer is allowed into intimate perspectives of Hana and Alice's personal lives, thoughts, and interactions. The narrative is arranged by piecing together encapsulated moments that paint an overall picture of these characters and the external circumstances that motivate the decisions they make. In a way, this film feels like a documentary of the circumstances it depicts, an effect that makes it feel real in a way that character drama seldom does.

I found Alice's half of the story to be extremely engaging, revealing the character to be multifaceted and motivated. She fervently chases her dream of becoming a model, showcased through her constant failure to be accepted by advertisers, photographers, and directors.

The most compelling scenes of the film come from her interactions with her father, whom she has not seen in years: in conversation, he talks to her about the unique nature of giving gifts. This, in conjunction with her mother's inability to find stable romance, come to influence her love language as a character. The way these separate dramas in Alice's life come to intersect and influence each other are beautifully done, creating a character that feels lived and three-dimensional.

Despite the film's masterfully created atmosphere, it suffers from the way it represents consent. Fundamentally, the romance that the story builds centers around Hana's treatment of Mark. Over the course of several months, she attempts to build a relationship with Mark by creating emotional dependency. Mark does not have any explicit attraction to her, but he remains in a desperate bid to recover a part of himself. As he starts to unravel her deception, she opts to further the con: accusing him of being a bad romantic partner, convoluting the lie she tells him,

and continuing to take advantage of his anxious attachment.

The film never fully grapples with the exploitative ways Hana treats Mark. While her behavior is seen as “bad” in principle, Mark’s agency as a victim never takes precedence over Hana’s emotional turmoil as an abuser. Hana’s behavior is presented as a mishap, a slight character flaw. It’s an apparatus to tell the actual story of the film: the reconciliation of two friends. Mark, in the process, is sidelined while Hana is tacitly forgiven.

In conclusion, *Hana and Alice* is a feat of aesthetics: it’s a film that shines

a soft, romantic light onto the lives of its titular protagonists. However, its visual and narrative simplicity fails to cover for its frustratingly dismissive portrayal of consent, where implicit abuse reads as a meet-cute rather than what it is: abuse.

Ken G.

■

In Bruges

(2008, dir. Martin McDonagh)

If *In Bruges* succeeds in anything, it’s in making sure not to waste a single drop of energy.

Directed by Martin McDonagh and starring Brendan Gleeson and Colin Farrell, *In Bruges* follows two hit men fleeing to the beautiful city of Bruges, where they must spend two weeks with each other as they wait for more details from their boss (the incredible Ralph Fiennes). This escape gets complicated, however, when their boss

tasks one of them to kill the other.

Bruges was a setup, only chosen by the boss so “the boy could have a nice place to die.” This proves to be a moral strain, and sets in motion a series of actions that are nonsensical and brilliant.



If *In Bruges* has anything in common with McDonagh’s recent *Banshees of Inisherin* (they’re completely different stories, but the returning actor-director trio feels almost too intentional), it is in their construction of a self-contained story: *Banshees* was small in scale, unfolding an increasingly dramatic conflict with only a handful of characters on a little island off the coast of mainland Ireland; *In Bruges*, though it operates on a larger scale (the film sees the characters exploring every bit of Bruges), uses a similar mechanism in how it uses its limited elements to develop a story. Each character is crafted with incredible deliberation, with their individual quirks and physical presences serving the storyline as well as contributing to the film’s comedic root. There are the two main characters, of course, each played with a devastating wit and charm, but also the side characters, who flow in and out of the story in an almost theatrical manner: the aforementioned Ralph Fiennes, who

must leave his sunny home in England to track down his disobeying hit men in Bruges; an angry Canadian couple that come back to haunt the main character in the third act; a dwarf on horse-tranquilizers whose existence we brush off as a loose comedic tail ends up unintentionally tying the thematic bow on the film.

Every element of the film is just like this: every joke is called back in effortless and relevant ways; every plot point builds on the other without tying itself up in complications.

In Bruges basks in the success of its efficiency, while still leaving room for humor and moral ponderings.

Lucien C.

■

Boyhood

(2014, Dir. Richard Linklater)

Boyhood accomplishes a nearly impossible task. Directed by the ambitious Richard Linklater, *Boyhood* is a coming of age story filmed over the course of 12 years. The audience follows Mason (Ellar Coltrane), his bossy sister (Lorelei Linklater), his hardworking mother (Olivia Evans), and his doting yet largely absent father (Ethan Hawke) through these 12 years, watching the actors age in real time.

Boyhood's ambition, however, isn't only in its method of filming, but rather what this method attempts to accomplish. *Boyhood* is hardly a story, at least in the traditional sense. There isn't a traditional conflict, nor is there a recognizable climax to the film. Despite this, it remains wholly engaging. *Boyhood* is painting an image of what it is like to grow up.

For each few years of Mason's life, we get just a few, important scenes that tell us everything we need to know about him and his environment. We watch as eras are defined by the bad marriages Mason's mother gets into; we watch curiosity and interest bloom in young Mason as he goes from video games to photography; we watch him and his sister as they go through their chubby brace-faced teenage years and become adults. We watch people develop and change in a truly authentic manner, a manner that could only have been unlocked with the slow burn method of storytelling that *Boyhood* uses.

This is the impossible task: portraying life, love, and change in the purest and truest form possible: "Life is just a series of firsts," Mason's mother exclaims after helping him move into college. "I thought there would be more than this."

Boyhood depicts growing up through these series of firsts, acting like a memory of the most monumental moments of

the young boy's life. It does not accomplish this task without certain missteps, however. There are certain subplots that feel forced and unnecessary, important plot points are left unresolved, and there are moments that drag. In fairness, however, in life there are many nonsensical moments, many inconclusive moments, and many boring moments; *Boyhood's* narrative faults are simply the narrative faults of life. *Boyhood* paints an effective portrait of growing



up, successfully avoiding the clichés of traditional coming-of-age films while telling a story that is both tragic and uplifting.

Lucien C.

■

Tori and Lokita

(2023, dirs. Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne)

Tori and Lokita follows the story of two immigrants in Belgium. The directors create a beautiful friendship between the two characters, who both realize the harsh reality of living as immigrants in Belgium.

Tori was granted his papers, which meant he can legally stay in Belgium, but

you can see the innocence in him: after all, he is still a little boy. While the world around him keeps getting more serious and he takes on more responsibility, you still see the beautiful youthfulness that Tori carries with him.

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's point was strongly received throughout the movie. They were not trying to be subtle about it. One disappointing thing about the movie is it did not incorporate actual immigrant stories into the film. The two directors had no one on their team who experienced the horrors of immigrating to a new country with no papers. Instead, it was two white male directors trying to tell the story of African immigrants in France. Perhaps because of this, the audience feels distanced from the subject. If they

incorporated this aspect the film could've done a beautiful job and would've solidified the point to the viewers and create a sense of authenticity. But instead it was two middle age white men who created a PSA film which they have no connection to.

Elias Y.

■



Lokita still doesn't have her papers, and is willing to do anything to get her papers. Lokita is finding any way possible to stay in Belgium without being separated from Tori. The camera follows their harrowing journey with an uneasiness that makes you feel like you're actually in the movie. The film makes you feel uncomfortable: why are all these bystanders letting this happen? No one seems to care about their struggles. You almost want to jump through the screen into the movie and do anything you can to help them.

Pablo Schils does a beautiful job at portraying Tori. Even though Tori is supposed to be this mature young man,

Emily the Criminal

(2023, dir. John Patton Ford)

In *Emily the Criminal*, the new Netflix film starring Aubrey Plaza as the lead, Emily is an artist in L.A. struggling with student debt: a fairly simple dilemma for millennials today. Because of a felony conviction, she dropped out of college, and her only option is to work as a food delivery woman. One of her friends at work refers her to a friend who has a "get rich quick" money scheme: Youchef, a charming fellow who runs a credit card scamming business with his two brothers. Emily hits it off immediately with Youchef and becomes enriched as the scams



become bigger and bigger.

Both Aubrey Plaza and Theo Rossi play their roles extremely well: they never go over the top but you feel as if they go deep to the point where you feel the characters are real. The film may seem pretty predictable to most viewers but the acting makes up for it: you will be glued to the screen for the entirety of it. The plot had so much potential but never fully lived up to it.

Some plot points feel rushed at certain times: you want Emily's relationship with Youchef to be more developed. This is saved by Audrey Plaza's stellar performance. You see the desperation in her eyes throughout the movie and how she is willing to do anything to get what she wants.

The film, one of John Patton Ford's first breakout films, touches on a major issue: the idea that Americans will always be in debt. You don't feel as if Emily is a criminal which goes opposite of what the title; Emily is just unfortunately put in a situation where this is all she can rely on to get out of the circle of debt her circumstances put her in. It's almost as if

she is getting redemption on the thing that caused her to do this in the first place: she is stealing from the credit card companies that are putting her in debt.

Elias Y.

■

Paris, Texas

(1984, dir. Wim Wenders)

Directed by Wim Wenders and written by Sam Shepard, *Paris, Texas* is a poignant story about a man named Travis who lost touch with his family and tries to reconnect with them after years of being apart. Travis



is found by his brother, Walt, in Houston after a four-year hiatus. Together they embark on a journey to find their lost

connection and overcome the pain of the past.

This masterpiece of American cinema is a visual and emotional tour-de-force, with stunning cinematography that captures the

and thoughts. The film doesn't fail to hold your gaze with each slow shot. I recommend it if you're looking to be invested but not emotionally ruined.

Ruby W.



beauty and loneliness of the vast and empty landscapes of the Southwest.

The story of Travis and his attempts to reconnect with his son and wife explores themes of loss, regret, and the search for redemption.

The story starts to unravel as Travis goes on a road trip to find Jane, his wife. The use of color and natural light throughout each scene compliment each other in the best way possible. The whole time you are in awe of the beauty behind what you thought was just desert.

Although the pacing of the film can feel slow at times, and the narrative can feel meandering, the work lets the audience indulge in the atmosphere of the film. While this allows the film to delve deeper into the emotional landscape of the characters, it may also turn away those who prefer a more fast-paced movie.

Paris, Texas is a stunning and emotionally resonant film that makes you feel numerous emotions

All Quiet on the Western Front

(2022, dir. Edward Berger)

All Quiet on the Western Front is an antiwar film based upon Eric Maria Remarque's 1929 novel that follows Paul Baumer, an enthusiastic young recruit for the German army during WWI who gets sent to the front line and soon realizes the war is not as he thought it would be. The film follows his journey throughout the war in an action-packed two and a half hours that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

Made in Germany, the film depicts the brutality of the war. It does not hold back and, for some viewers, some scenes may be hard to watch. The film has many gut-wrenching scenes and is filled with loud gun fire sounds throughout. But it would not do the war any justice without depicting brutality to its full potential. The filmmaker does a great job of that. Felix Kammerer, making his debut here in the



role of Paul Baumer, does a phenomenal job: in almost every scene you can see his

raw emotion.

The movie also addressed a lot of problems we see today. The film talked about the indecisiveness of the government and how many lives were lost because of those decisions. Today, the Russia-Ukraine war rages on while many lives are being lost.

There would be no better film to win best international picture of the year. The film was moving and gave a great portrayal of a masterclass of a book. We can use this movie to show the harsh realities of war.

Elias Y.

■

Real Life

(1979, dir. Albert Brooks)

Real Life is a realistic view into the world of a filmmaker. It follows director Albert Brooks, whose goal from the beginning is to create a movie fully based on reality. He wants a real family to do real things in front of his cameras and he wants to show how entertaining real life can really be, but during the process, we realize real life is not what Brooks is truly after.

This movie is so interesting because it is a movie about a movie. We see all the things that would normally be hidden during a normal film during the creation of the film within the movie. Everything style-wise is generally reality-based as this is a movie about real life. Costumes and the way the movie is shot is mundane, but set design choices such as the extravagant construction of Brooks's home hint toward his materialistic personality.

Real Life is extremely enjoyable. Comedic elements are not only well-placed, but relevant as they consistently moved the story along and told us important things about the characters.

Almost everything that happened showed us the real personality and goals of Albert Brooks despite his outward persona and this was done skillfully and subtly. His character wasn't very original as he played a stereotypical Hollywood persona, but the movie was still able to maintain an air of spontaneity through the great performance of its lead.

Zion I.

■

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2 (2015, dir. Francis Lawrence)

A thrilling conclusion to an iconic franchise that unfortunately did not match up or fit the vibes of the other movies, especially the first two, whose creation was impactful and different. This movie, however, felt like a common superhero movie.

The plot had an ending that truly succeeded in tying up all the knots of this



complicated society, but what this movie couldn't accomplish was the feeling of uniqueness and creativity.

This movie starts off confidently, with an emotional scene of Katniss dealing with the extent of her injuries that her male counterpart, Peeta, gave her, and continues

as Katniss attempts to reconnect with Peeta and deal with her feelings—or lack thereof—for Gale, while fighting the power and leading the rebellion.

The movie imitates life when it comes to taking over dictatorships where the leader of the rebellion, clearly hungry for power, gets it and soon becomes what they were fighting.

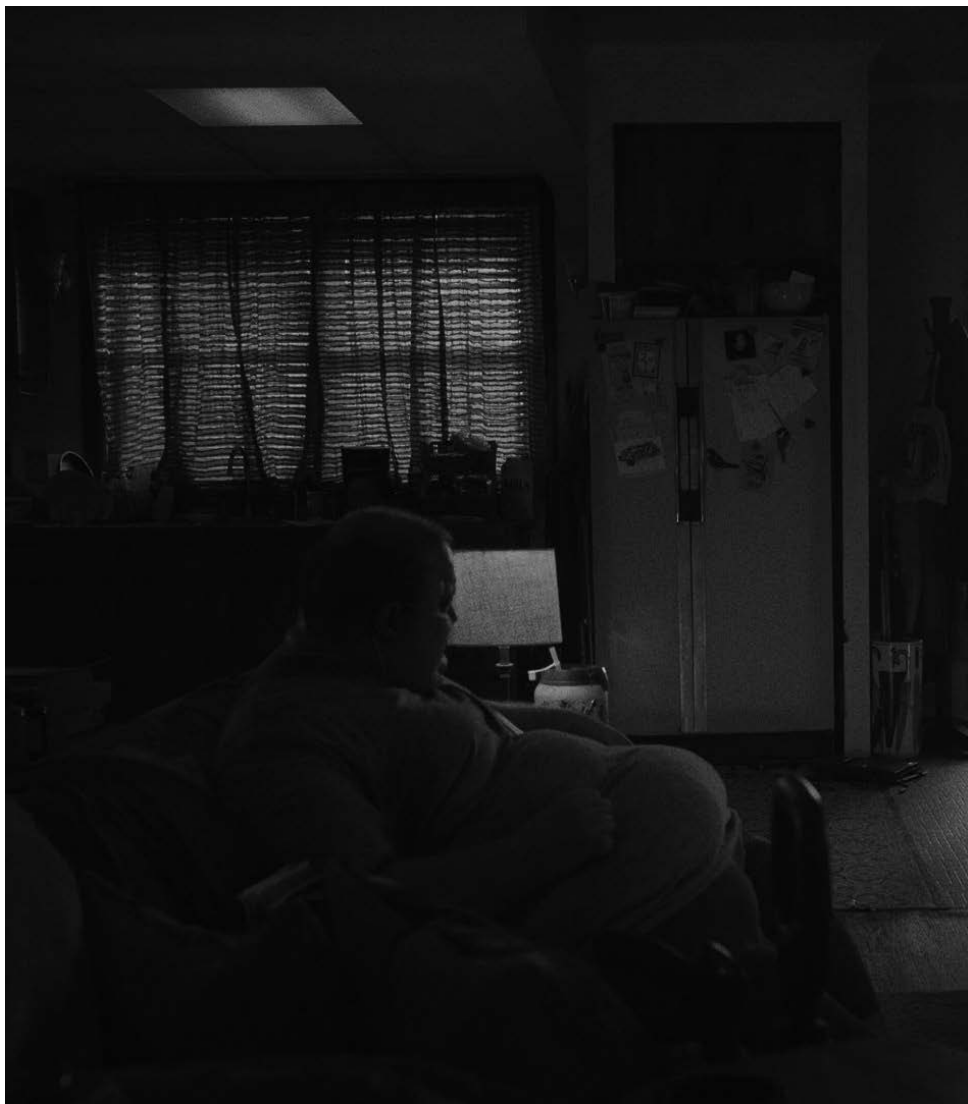
Without the context of the other movies, *Mockingjay – Part 2*, would not stand on its

own. Summing up this movie quickly takes away from the overall complicated plot of the *Hunger Games*.

What this movie really did was make me want to read the books where I can tell the plot must have been better shown.

Evelyn P.

■



The Whale

(2022, dir. Darren Aronofsky)

The Whale follows Charlie, a man struggling with obesity, as he makes a living teaching English online, his only connection to the outside world.

His weight and its effects are the focus of the story along with his attempts to reconnect with his teenage daughter, Ellie. Ellie is unwilling to reconnect with her

father, still burdened by his abandonment. Charlie faces the battle of living with his weight, along with disconnection from his family. Within the film's main message, elements of religion, love, and familial dynamics are weaved in.

The movie is shot in a smaller aspect ratio, trapping the audience within the confines of Charlie's reclusive life. The entire movie takes place within his house, the majority within his living room. Like him, we struggle to move from the space on his couch. In addition to this, constant muted colors emphasize the movie's dark tone and contribute heavily to the atmosphere.

The Whale was an extremely moving story. Despite its singular setting, I found myself engaged throughout the entire film. The dialogue itself, while at times lacking, was well understood by its cast and elevated to its fullest potential by their acting. I appreciated the inclusion of Charlie's love for English throughout the movie as it added more depth to his character, and his final scene was beautiful up until its very end, as the sequence ends with a moment that left many viewers with questions. However, none of those questions took away from the heavy emotional impact of *The Whale* and the importance of the message it successfully conveys.

Zion I.



MOVIE SUMMARIES

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

(2020, dir. George C. Wolfe)

Chicago, 1927. Ma Rainey is a famous blues singer whose band gathers at a recording studio. Her band is made up of four men: all black artists in a time of racism and exploitation. An interesting story, it has a dramatic and surprising ending. -bl

Hugo

(2011, dir. Martin Scorsese)

An orphaned boy lives alone in a railway station in Paris in the 1930s. His prized possession is an automaton his father rescued. Director Martin Scorsese does an amazing job, as Hugo uncovers a mystery surrounding his father's automaton and its relation to the pioneering filmmaker Georges Méliès. This movie sparks compassion, sympathy and love. A masterpiece of a film about cinema, childhood and adulthood. -ss

Till Death

(2021, dir. SK. Dale)

About a woman who is unfaithful to her unlovable husband and his revenge when he finds out. -ep

The New Guy

(2002, dir. Ed. Decter)

The heartwarming and funny story of Dizzy, a high school loser who, by transferring to a new school, redesigns his image using the learnings of a man he met in jail, becoming a newer, cooler individual, and, in doing so, is able to become a popular kid, beat up the main jock, and steal his girlfriend, the hottest girl in school. This movie was created for giggles. -ep

Bodies Bodies Bodies

(2022, dir. Halina Reijn)

A group of rich 20-ish Gen Z-ers get stuck in their friend's mansion for a night during a hurricane, and one of the members of the group mysteriously dies. It takes the classic "cabin in the woods" horror trope and modernizes it to be a fun, slightly campy commentary on the way technology has affected Gen Z; with an interesting twist at the end. -sw

American Psycho

(2000, dir. Mary Herron)

Investment banker Patrick Bateman is an obsessive and narcissistic serial killer who starts to go further and further away from sanity. Very graphic, it makes you feel as though you are in the head of the main character, and it didn't feel boring to watch. The open ending leaves room for interpretation. -bl

RRR

(2022, S.S. Rajamouli)

Set in pre-independence India, it follows two men whose revolutionary journeys have crossed. They become very close friends, but little did they know their villains were each other. Every scene could be unraveled with an hour conversation, every second filled with suspense and emotion. An outstanding movie that is sure to leave you thoroughly entertained, it creates a new standard for storytelling, cinematography, and special effects. -rw

Beau Is Afraid

(2022, dir. Ari Aster)

An unending piece of art that follows a man over the course of what feels like years. Beau Wasserman, played by Joaquin Phoenix, is going through some of the worst, most confusing days of his life. A perfect movie if you want to put your head in a blender and then try to put the pink squishy insides back together for hours, maybe days later. Not for those who like an easy to follow and easily explained plot line and movie structure. -ep

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