Readers' responses to recent film reviews on the WSWS

24 May 2010

On "San Francisco International Film Festival 2010 Part 4: An Indian masterpiece"

My thanks to Joanne Laurier for a thoughtful, lyrical piece on Satyajit Ray and his film.

It is a refreshing read, free of the laboured hagiography sadly typical of common attempts (many of them Indian) to describe Ray and his métier.

The passing away of ruling classes, in Ray's time, was worthy of a cinematic essay at the time.

I'm afraid it is not so today in India—in South Asia—wherein the all-consuming greed of the new rich leaves their societies little time and space for cultural pursuit and reflection.

Outside a few struggling film societies, the insight and methods of Ray, Kurosawa, Huston, Renoir are ignored, for the shrill idiocies of Bolllywood and the infantile products of contemporary Hollywood sweep everything before them.

Rahul G
Goa, India
21 May, 2010

On "*Iron Man 2* and the sad state of American filmmaking today"

"In regard to *Iron Man 2*, the emergence of so many comic book and superhero films following the events of 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq has been one of the least attractive phenomena in recent filmmaking. These works, in which super-powered police figures—and in the case of Iron Man, a highly militarized policeman—battle pure evil on a global scale, often carrying out the bloodiest acts of violence and vengeance, as fantasy-like as they are, no doubt speak to a real phenomenon: the extent to which a whole social grouping, including prominent and wealthy figures in the entertainment industry, has signed on to the 'global war on terror' or the Obama version of that."

Having not seen *Iron Man 2*, but suspecting that your political analysis of it is correct, this paragraph is unfair and inaccurate, at least as far as comics are concerned.

The recent Batman series is based in a single city, as is the Spider-Man series. Superman—as is frequently complained about by Superman fans—has yet to confront any "cosmic" level villains in his films, mostly wrangling with "criminal mastermind" Lex Luthor. Other Marvel Comics franchises include the Punisher series, Elektra, and Daredevil. All of these are vigilantes who fight fantastical street criminals. The Fantastic Four films confront "global" problems, and the Incredible Hulk films showcase confrontations with a corrupt American military apparatus. It is clear that most of these superheroes do not confront "pure evil on a global scale."

It's worth noting that comic books are a medium that come into their own (the Silver Age of the 1960s) when post-war optimism and faith in the possibilities of science were arguably at their peak. Along with jazz, comic books are one of the few art forms that are uniquely American. Much like jazz, comic books enjoyed a mass working-class audience while being maligned as "not art."

While there certainly is a political point to be made about the degradation of Hollywood and militarism on film, how this reflects poorly on the medium of comic books is beyond me. The fact that Hollywood has seized onto the medium as a cheap way to sell tickets reflects poorly upon Hollywood, but not comics.

Further, it is simply untrue that the films contain "the bloodiest acts of violence and vengeance." Far more troubling in this regard is the "torture porn" sub-genre of horror exemplified by the "Saw" series or the slew of grindhouse remakes ("The Hills Have Eyes," "Last House on the Left" and the forthcoming "I Spit On Your Grave").

Considering the high caliber of analysis and commentary on the website, I am highly confused as to why the writer would have to resort to hyperbolic, untrue statements that malign an American art form to make his point. There certainly is enough wrong with *Iron Man 2* and with Hollywood to point out while still remaining honest and accurate.

Nick P
18 May 2010

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I agree with everything you say here. I thought that myself when I saw the first *Iron Man* movie: What are Jeff Bridges and Gwyneth Paltrow doing playing support roles in a superhero movie? But because they WERE it was actually really enjoyable—just a bit of harmless fantasy, with the whole obnoxious baggage of American culture of course but a bit tongue in cheek, but very well done and entertaining.

Of course, it would be nice if Hollywood would make movies for grown-ups more often—Clint Eastwood funnily enough seems to be the only person who seems to still try this consistently—but failing that, as someone who loved DC comics as a kid, I am tickled pink that CGI has got to the stage where they can be realised on screen convincingly—I CAN hardly wait for Green Lantern especially.

How about the Flash next, and a Justice League of America? Eventually all the tech tricks—CGI, 3D and whatever next—will be so commonplace that story telling, character, and even social

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comment might get bums on seats again. Now that the technical problems of realising Sci Fi and Fantasy on screen are being overcome, the limits of the material available to work with are becoming obvious—the classic Sci Fi of the golden era, the 50s and early 60s, was mostly "of its time" and really not very well written, and I say that as someone who loved it and still revisit some old favourites. It would be nice if we now moved on and got some imagination to match the technology.

I recommend the Sci Fi channel TV series remake of Battlestar Galactica—it ran for 5 seasons; for about 2 and 1/2 seasons it looked like it was delivering a real grown-up Sci Fi experience—in fact it DID at first, but then the writers lost it. Or the director lost control, as tends to happen with series dependent on the backing of the money men.

So, still unsurpassed is the 90s series Babylon 5—five seasons, but the first two are VERY slow—looks dated now, not much CGI, but really lived up to the idea of Sci Fi as a means of commenting on current trends in the world. Seasons 3 and 4 are the best TV ever to me; it seems so prescient now it's hard to believe that it was made BEFORE the Bush regime.

Anyway, of course this is all a distraction from the class war, so I'll leave off now. Best wishes.

In brightest day, in blackest night,
No evil shall escape my sight
Let those who worship evil's might,
Beware my power...Green Lantern's light!

James L
London
18 May 2010

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I usually enjoy the movie critiques, but this one fell short. The author didn't even see all the movies before making his stern judgment. The computer generated movie about dragons for instance is very good and very imaginative. Dream Works is continuing to make amazing steps with the use of their animation systems.

So before making these sweeping exclamations try actually watching the movies. Without such basic knowledge it comes off like ranting. Secondly, having a slightly expanded criteria might be useful, not all movies need to take massive social perspective. Children's movies are a good example.

Oliver C
18 May 2010

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Hollywood has simply run out of ideas. They've used up all the good novels, science fiction, short stories and plays. They've moved past stories based on TV shows and carnival rides and have now turned to breakfast cereals, comic books and fortune cookies for inspiration.

When you think about it, it is highly unlikely that any young writer in the industry today has ever heard of Frank Capra, Billy Wilder, Howard Hawks, Paddy Chayefsky, or Dorothy Arzner.

PK
19 May 2010

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While I can agree with the author on some points, I think that his criticisms completely missed the point of the film.

Iron Man 2 reassures the US population that the US only fights the good fight. Its intentions are always good. Tony's father is portrayed as a man whose work was to better humanity, while Ivan Vanko's father was only doing it for the money. Howard Stark's twisted world view justifies the slaughter of over a million Iraqis, tens of thousands of direct and indirect Afghan casualties, and more death and destruction around the world.

Iron Man has brought world "peace," but who is defining this peace? Most likely, the US. Quite possibly, Iron Man has aided the US in finally achieving world domination. So, as is the routine for the US government, when there are no more enemies to fight, new ones are created.

Do I need to even mention the military and weapon porn sequences?

The worst things about *Iron Man 2* are the most dangerous; the conditioning of USians and the world that the US kills, steals and destroys for the greater good of all. If you don't agree, well, you're a bad guy in the way of "peace."

Victor M
21 May 2010

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The capitalist system has entered a profound epoch of breakdown, akin to 1914-1945, and yet this finds no expression, let alone interest, in Hollywood. What a shameful situation.

Chris F
New Zealand
21 May 2010

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On "*Trash Humpers*: Another of Harmony Korine's exploitive freak shows"

I'm surprised the reviewer didn't recommend watching "Leave it to Beaver" for an "accurate" depiction of the working class of America.

Joel S
19 May 2010

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