

The Magic Lantern Show: “The Unexpected Pleasure of a Lie”

Let me begin by saying that I am not a critic. I have not been trained in criticism and I do not subscribe to Godard’s claim that in order to critique films, you must also make films. Being a filmmaker and considering myself an artist, I have no desire to write about the faults of movies or the choices I consider ill-advised by my fellow filmmakers. So, when I speak about Alejandro González Iñárritu’s masterful “Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)” within this article, I’m doing so out of admiration and the desire to simply “muse” on a movie experience that I consider a powerful representation of what film, in general, is capable of.

Operating in a subgenre that has been gaining traction as of late, especially from the Mexican filmmakers that are rising to prominence here in the States, Birdman and its director, Mr. Iñárritu, exercised what I’d call the most successful foray into “Magical Realism” to date. While visionary directors such as Terry Gilliam all but invented the genre in films like “The Fisher King,” Birdman seamlessly blends visceral realistic environments and performances from its stellar cast with fantastical practical and visual effects, merging a narrative that moves fluidly through the gritty realism of Iñárritu’s earlier “21 Grams” and something you’d find in Fellini’s “8 ½.” The result is a commanding, funny, emotional and truly unique movie experience.

Why I personally gravitate toward magical realism or grounded fantasy in general is because I feel it’s a better usage of the faculties of film. Fellini often called himself a ‘born liar,’ referencing the fact that film, not matter how representative of real life the subject matter may be, is always staged, manipulated to present a specific view. A common thread in all art is the concept of using lies to tell a greater truth. Orson Welles’ “F for Fake,” a playful *mockumentary*, examines this very contradiction and emphasizes the connection between magic and the movies.

Unless you are making a documentary and presenting reality exactly as it unfolds, you are using coercion to say *something*, even if that something is to remain speculative. Birdman goes one step further and is a harsh critique of the world’s obsession with comic book-based cinema and social media outlets. Almost in league with Sidney Lumet’s

“Network” in terms of brazen and searing satire, Iñárritu condemns and vilifies the relationship between critic and artist, at times allowing his inventions to speak directly into the camera, letting us know exactly what this film feels about criticism...which in itself, is a critique.