Can TikTok Start a Revolution?

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Written by Nicole Steinberg, \textit{Staff Writer}

As I was scrolling on TikTok the other day, I came across a post of a young woman painting but the audio was an urgent message about the military coup and the terror Myanmar citizens are experiencing because of it. On Feb. 1, the election certification from last November was forcefully stopped by a military coup. It has been over two weeks since the military assumed power in Myanmar, and since then hundreds of thousands of citizens have taken to the street to protest the election fraud that occurred. In response, the military has arrested over 400 protestors, enforced a curfew and banned gathering of six or more people.

Despite the government's announcement, hundreds of thousands of people take to the street waving red flags in support of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi’s political party: The National League of Democracy. The military has since blocked Facebook and other social media in Myanmar that citizens were using to communicate about the current events and organize protests. However, the social media network proves too robust for governments to completely shut down online communication or limit information from overseas from reaching Myanmar.

As seen in the 2019 protests in Hong Kong and the protests against the government in Thailand, it seems the interconnectedness of platforms across state borders makes it virtually impossible for regimes to stop information from getting out.

Professor Fields, who has done research on Asian political systems, says, “On the one hand, social media can help to strengthen civil society and facilitate civil disobedience but it can also divide society and exacerbate differences.” The extent to which overseas information can be accessed, which was not possible just 10 years ago, poses a threat to authoritarian governments, unless state capacity is substantially stronger than civil society.
The protestors in Myanmar are using the three fingered hand signal that was used in protests against the government in Thailand—a signal adopted from “The Hunger Games.” The ability for protest tools and signals to spread to different communities in South East Asia shows that social media has created a vast network that transcends physical borders. Because the network is so interconnected there are ways to circumvent censorship of a single country. But how effective is public protest and disapproval in ousting a military government?

The short answer is that it depends on the capacity of the state. While online forms of protest and activism are useful tools of dissent, they can only act as a vessel to bring about social change.

Professor Fields says, “If a revolution is going to succeed, it somehow needs to make the transition from a virtual protest to a real world social and political change. In the case of the Hong Kong protests, the state very clearly had the upper hand, but just because China can do it, doesn’t mean Iran, Thailand or Myanmar can do it.” It is still too early to tell what will happen in Myanmar, but thus far, efforts to suppress protests have not worked, as more and more people join in protest daily. The media remains to be a double edged sword, as both the regime and public intend to use it to achieve their goals.
Nicole Steinberg, Staff Writer.

Nicole Steinberg is a Political Science and International Political Economy double major at the University of Puget Sound. Among other things, Nicole enjoys writing about international current events and covering local news. She writes from Tacoma, WA but is originally from the San Francisco Bay Area. After graduation this spring, she hopes to travel and write for an international news publication.

How Blaxploitation Gave Way to a New Voice in Hollywood

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Written by Regan Strauss, Staff Writer

Disclaimer: I am a white person and my first exposure to this blaxploitation genre was "Dolemite Is My Name" in 2019, so take everything I’m about to say with a grain of salt. I’m merely writing this to celebrate early black voices that paved the way for people of color in film. Dolemite’s cast was majority black, but was written and directed by white men, so ironically a movie about blaxploitation films doesn’t fit the genre in itself. That hiccup aside, this movie was a great way to view a part of this massive culture that started in the 1970s. I am not the target audience, so it’s obvious why I can’t make as close of a connection. Through my narrow lens, I can see why this genre exploded when it did and why it was so important. The 70s was the perfect era for black led voices to be heard after the overly conservative, tight-lipped 50s and the civil rights and hippie movements of the 60s (especially with the rise of the Black Panthers and war protests).
“Dolemite Is My Name” centers on one of the real life blaxploitation stars, Rudy Ray Moore. He was a stand up comedian and creator of the Dolemite pimp character featured in a series of films beginning in 1975. It also shows us names that were new to the scene, like Lady Reed and Jimmy Lynch Leroy who acted alongside him. It’s a complex movie that shows the passion and fun that went into these black run films, but also the difficulties in getting funded, finding locations that will allow you to shoot and actually seeing theatres. This film got me to realize how white Hollywood was and also how refreshing this must have been for the black community. No genre is perfect, but this one did a lot of firsts and made a massive impression on the film industry.

To start, it was the first time where films were entirely run by Black people, including the director, writers, actors, costumes, music, etc. These movies showed one of the earliest black heroines like Coffy and Foxy Brown. Because of its inherent racial, feminist and sex forward tones, it was another effective form of black resistance (one that really got in your face unapologetically). Black remakes of movies like “Blackenstein” and “Blacula” were a way for black kids and adults to see themselves represented in active, passive or white lensed ones.
like the servant, homeless person or slave. Furthermore, it was a way for Black people to take control of situations they tended to be on the losing side of, like “Shaft” with two black detective leads, instead of the ones being beaten, harassed and arrested. It gave the community a new sense of authority, without taking themselves too seriously. For example, in “My Name Is Dolemite,” during one of the sex scenes in Rudy’s film, everything on the set shakes and crashes down and the noises from the two actors are goofy and overexaggerated. It must have been a way to play an activism role, without being bogged down with all the pressure and difficulties the black community still faces today. It was their community’s comedic relief and escapism.

Because it was made by and for the black community, it was the one space to be fully uncensored. Speciallficy in the way one talked (swearing, slang), acted (mannerisms), dressed (loud prints, tight pants, afros, African symbols), as well as music taste (disco, funk, soul, blues, jazz). One didn’t have to put on the phoney, timid Southern accent or dress down with muted colors to blend in to the background as much as possible. It was probably a way to reclaim the N-word, use it to feel empowered and back in control, and make white people uncomfortable, like how it’s used in rap and hip hop today. Another way of making white, Christian society uneasy was having a space for Black women to embrace their sexuality and femininity while asserting power. They didn’t have to only take the quiet or very loud maid or the grumpy, religious grandmother. One could play a prostitute to show a more sensual side, an undercover prostitute about to go on a killing rampage or a kung fu master to explore being a dominating badass who rights a wrong (like finding out who sold your sister bad drugs or who
killed your husband), when normally treated as the least valuable group in the outside world.

The original “Dolemite” had unbelievable success, costing about $100,000 dollars to make, while earning $10 million at the box office. 44 years later, “My Name is Dolemite” was nominated for two golden globes, made millions at the box office, was critically acclaimed and had Oscar buzz. That alone shows how the influence of this genre has permeated into the 21st century. A form of blaxploitation is still alive today with filmmakers like Spike Lee (“Da 5 Bloods,” “BlacKkKlansman,” “Chi-Raq,” “Bamboozled,” etc.), John Singleton (“Boyz N The Hood,” “Poetic Justice,” “Four Brothers,” “Baby Boy,” the “Shaft” remake, etc.), Jordan Peele (“Key and Peele,” “Get Out” and “Us”). These three directors are quoted as pointing to blaxploitation as a huge inspiration in their respective careers. Like the director of “Dolemite Is My Name,” even white directors are intrigued, like Quentin Tarintino with “Django” and “Jackie Brown” (not sure if that’s a good or bad thing. It means more people outside the community are seeing it as a legitimate art form and want to tell black stories without forcing white biases, but is it a form of white washing?). Even with the continued issue of white favoritism in Hollywood/award shows and racism in popular films and social media, Blaxploitation was one of the art forms that changed the game forever for minorities and allowed a whole community a place to speak, with a well deserved, overdo megaphone for all to hear.

Regan Strauss, Staff Writer, Op-ed Journalist

I am an English Major with a Creative Writing Emphasis. I’m in LA, California.
majority of social issues (Frankly too many to list), music, and movies through this publication. Might get a graduate degree in creative writing (undecided). I want to be a professional freelance writer who focuses on poetry, short stories, and opinion/research essays after I graduate.

'Saint Maud' Review

2/19/2021  0 Comments

Written by Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film Analyst

*Minor Spoilers for “Saint Maud”*

It’s been just over one year since I saw the first trailer for “Saint Maud” and nearly one year since the last time I sat in a cinema. The classic A24 logo zoomed into frame and was immediately juxtaposed against the sadistic and cultish imagery that closed with this magnificent wall of text:

In a year that I’d rather forget, I easily remembered “Saint Maud.” It’s from A24 and their track record on horror films is well above par. Perhaps I’m a fan of A24’s style. Perhaps it’s because they’re a small production company that markets itself like a major studio. Perhaps it’s more because the film was enjoyable.
independent production and distribution studio that was started in 2012 and based out of New York. The studio routinely puts out some of the most compelling films of the year, every year since it began. This includes: “Uncut Gems,” “The Last Black Man in San Francisco,” “The Lighthouse,” “Hereditary,” “First Reformed,” “The Florida Project,” “Lady Bird,” “Moonlight,” “Room,” “The Witch,” “Ex Machina” and “Under the Skin.” Those films do not even include the other popular releases which I was not as keen on as others. Needless to say, I was keen on catching this release.

Then the thing happened ... y’know, the thing. Now it’s 2021 and “Saint Maud” is being released via exclusive streaming on a lesser-known service called Epix. I hadn’t heard of the service prior to release and after perusing its library, which consists of the identical titles to its superior rival, Amazon Prime Video, I’m surprised it still exists.

“Saint Maud” stars Morfydd Clark as Maud, a palliative care nurse. She attends to Amanda, a middle-aged woman suffering from Lymphoma, played by Meryl-Streep doppelganger Jennifer Ehle. Maud is a recently born-again Roman Catholic who is searching for existential meaning, but when she believes she has found it in converting Amanda, things don’t go as planned. This is English writer/director Rose Glass’s debut feature-length film, and likely Clark’s breakthrough starring-role.

Morfydd Clark, Rose Glass, and Jennifer Ehle (left to right)
Clark is breathtaking in this film, a maleficent force of nature unconcerned with the petty tasks that us mere mortals spend our days toiling over. Maud has a higher calling. Although there is narration from the titular character that provides insight into Maud’s psyche, Clark’s mannerisms are truly what tell the story. Maud stands rigid as her morals when conversing, unreactive and monotone; something else is always on her mind. Without knowing what her thought process is, she appears to be a lonely and despondent young woman, and that is reflected in her interactions with others. When Maud is enveloped by God, she writhes on the floor and Clark makes one of the most terrifying facial expressions I have ever seen (“Truth or Dare,” take notes).

Ehle has less material to work with since she is usually confined to her bed or a wheelchair in scenes. That being said, there is great interplay between her and Clark in their scenes together. Amanda is the counterweight to both Maud’s fanaticism and introversion, expressed in Ehle’s varied tone and body language. As with many of the best psychological horror films, less is more when it comes to acting.

After watching this film, I will be sure to keep my eye on Glass. Glass lulls one into relaxation with many beautifully composed still shots, ones that simply observe and rarely follow. Once Maud’s psychosis begins to interfere with reality, the film itself is destabilized through the acrobatic contortions of the camera. The world is inverted and unknowable; Maud has taken control. Glass implies a delectable meta-narrative with these cinematographic decisions that viewers will likely not even realize until they’re already thrust into the madness.
Aside from this meta-narrative, there is also an important critique about millennial values in “Saint Maud.” In Maud's many communions with God, she confides in him that she knows she is meant for a higher calling, something more virtuous than caring for the sick. She isolates herself and cuts off connection from any plebeian who tries to give her affection. She only indulges in vices to spite her Lord, but it is always apparent from her coldness that she does not enjoy it. Maud is a catastrophization of the millennial child at the intersection of mental illness. Maud is a bitter and self-loathing but equally arrogant and entitled person who is above the tedium of hard work because she has a higher purpose. This is also fomented by her mental illness. Although this portrayal of the millennial is reductive in that sense, the critique of entitlement ought to provoke some reflexivity in us students at the University of Puget Sound. Film for thought.

My main gripe with “Saint Maud” unfortunately is that it didn’t do much for me as a film. I acknowledge the inherent uselessness and subjectivity of that statement, but I can’t help but feel that I won’t remember this film a year from now. The scariest moments of “Saint Maud” are all in the trailer (an anomaly for A24) and the film is completely predictable. Given that this film is very short at 84 minutes, nothing should feel wasted. However, the 40 minutes devoted to building tension feels diminished when the catharsis is entirely what you expect it to be. As a result, I finished this film amused by what I saw but not emotionally compelled in any direction. I was unaffected.

After a year of anticipation, I’m happy to have had the opportunity to get the closure on this film that I was hoping for. While it is not of the same league as “Diabolique,” “Rosemary’s Baby,” “The Exorcist,” “The Babadook” or “Hereditary,” “Saint Maud” is a twisted debut from a director who I look forward to seeing evolve in this space.

7 out of 10.
Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film Analyst

Logan Canada-Johnson is a Communication Studies and Philosophy double-major from the East Bay, California. He primarily writes about film releases and film culture, but is also interested in philosophy. He performs a number of other roles on campus, including Campus Films Programmer, President of UPS Film Club, officer in Sigma Alpha Epsilon, and debater in Ethics Bowl. He plans on obtaining a Doctorate in Cinema Studies after his Bachelors.

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Calling All Robins

2/19/2021   0 Comments

Written by Eliza Long, Staff Writer
2020 was a rough year.

2021 is undecided, but definitely doesn’t feel any easier. In some ways it feels worse with a riot in D.C. and another acquittal for Trump within the first two months of the year. But with the not-so stellar events comes the escapism, and if you’re anything like me you, turn to happy, safe, comforting things.

And if you’re on the same wave-length as me, you return to DC Comics’ “Robin War.”
Robin War is honestly one of the best comics I’ve read that has come out in the last decade. It isn’t as angsty as Batman associated comics tend to be (probably because there’s no Bruce Wayne, a.k.a. Batman). The four male Robins, past and current, are being brother-ish (they’re trying) and it’s the introduction of Duke Thomas (future Batman mainstay, a.k.a. Signal). Plus you don’t need to read any comics beforehand to understand the story in its entirety. It’s its own contained thing.

But the best thing about it is the teenagers taking up the Robin mantle and standing up for themselves and their city.

Normal human teenagers with no training or experience or powers just decided to become Robin and protect Gotham City—the crime capital of the United States and potentially the world—and they do. And if that isn’t inspirational, I don’t know what is. Especially because it wasn’t easy. You see Duke Thomas, a young Black man, get arrested for wearing the color red. You see a council woman sell out children for a place in a secret society. You see children in cages and Damian Wayne, the current Robin, turning on his allies to protect someone who can no longer defend themselves.

It’s not easy and they still stand, even if they doubt themselves. They’re Robins. They still fight and refuse to give up.

We should too.

We’re already starting to stand: the BLM protests, gun control walks, Women’s March, speaking out about climate change and calling out public officials. We just need to keep it up. Show the world it can’t force us down.
Hello, I'm Eliza. I'm currently living in Tacoma, but I'm from Southern California. I'm interested in learning more about anything and everything (trying to be a well-rounded person). I'll probably be writing about pop culture things like comics or more literary things like poems and novels and authors. It'll just depend.

Thanks for reading!