Issue #15

"Shiva Baby" Review

5/1/2021  0 Comments

Featured Authors
Jewish representation in mainstream film and television media is few and far between. Whereas Christian film has become a subgenre unto itself, the proliferation of films celebrating Judaism is much more limited in the US. Representation in media is one of the fundamental ways that knowledge about subjects propagates and culture is formed, so it's of utmost importance that we shine the spotlight of mass media on cultures, religions, and ideologies that are historically underrepresented in American media. Enter newcomer Emma Seligmann and her hilarious debut “Shiva Baby,” an excellent example of positive Jewish representation.

“Shiva Baby,” starring Rachel Sennott, Molly Gordon, Polly Draper and Danny Deferrari, weaves intersectionality into a delightfully focused, witty and sardonic narrative. Sennott, largely inspired by Seligmann herself, plays Danielle, a bisexual woman fresh out of college who is forced to sit Shiva for a recently deceased relative. For those who are unfamiliar, sitting Shiva means gathering with the family who has lost a loved one and praying with them in their home for a week.

When Danielle’s sugar daddy, his family and her ex-girlfriend show up, chaos unfolds in the tight quarters of a two-story house.

This resembles the description of a horror movie more than a comedy and, in many ways, Seligmann directs “Shiva Baby” like it is horror. Maximizing the anamorphic lens of her camera, Seligmann repeatedly situates her characters in the middle of the frame to induce the claustrophobia that we love to feel when watching “Rosemary’s Baby” (1969), “Ringu” (2000) or “Get Out” (2017). Seligmann’s intuitive stylistic choices ratchet up the...
The editing, on the other hand, leaves something to be desired. The editing massively favors coverage shots, or different angles of the same action, many of which feel superfluous. These coverage shots are placating for short attention spans, but they feel unrestrained and occasionally frustrating. Fortunately, this is one of my very few complaints.

By writing from her personal experience, Seligmann easily incorporates her nuances into the character of Danielle. Danielle holds many complex and contradicting ideologies but thrives in them, a nod to the fourth-wave Feminist logic that we inevitably hold views that are antithetical to one another. Her guilt as a person for having not found her career path, her perceived failures as a Jewish woman and the collective scorn of society as a sex-worker are all burdens to shoulder. It is undoubtedly a recipe for disaster that afternoon, but it is also a perfect arrangement for the sarcastic, dry humor that this film revels in.

“Shiva Baby” eschews Neoliberal and second-wave Feminist logics in its comedic presentation. The humor in “Shiva Baby” predominantly targets the absurdity of Danielle’s situation, the tension between tradition and progressivism and the microaggressions about body image and sexuality. The sarcasm is laid on thick here. In an interaction with Danielle's ex-girlfriend, her ex lionizes the workaholic wife of Danielle's sugar daddy: “She’s like a hot business woman, basically single mom, so stressed out but you can’t tell.” In a later conversation with that woman, played perfectly by Dianna Agron, Danielle glibly rejects the post-Feminist lifestyle that Agron leads: “I don’t want to be a girlboss, that’s not my type of thing.” It’s ironic like the #girlboss attitude in the
What makes for good representation in media? I'll concede that I do not have an answer to this magnificently broad question, but I pose it to say this: “Shiva Baby” has taken a step forward in intersectional representation. While there is no formula or organized plan that elucidates the steps for perfect representation in media, film corporations and executives could learn a thing or two from watching this film.

2020 and 2021 have also been starved for intelligent comedies and satires. The value of such, aside from the obvious relief that laughing provides, is the possibility for reflection on the absurdity of our institutions and ideologies; comedy lowers our guard and makes us vulnerable. While Seligmann could have used her story to make a competent drama, she utilized the unique brand of Jewish humor, as she calls it, to deliver one of the best comedies of the new decade.

I may surprise some by not giving this film a perfect or near-perfect rating. Aside from the criticisms I have leveled already, I'll admit that the film did not personally hit me in the way a 9 out of 10 or perfect score would. This is the plague of film journalism---the complete subjectivity of it! Instead, do yourself a favor and go support this film and its creator however you may.

8 out of 10.
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.

Letterboxd: https://letterboxd.com/TheHalfNerd/
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/logan-canada-johnson-647417201/

History Really Does Repeat Itself

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Written by Eliza Long, Staff Writer

With the spike in hate and violence towards Asian Americans, specifically Chinese Americans, during the pandemic it seems relevant to bring up the fact that this is not the first time this has happened in the United States. As at the start of the 1900s there was an outbreak of the plague—like the actual plague—that hit Chinatown in San Francisco and Hawaii.

However, this is probably the first time most people heard that this ever happened. I didn't know until I watched a video about it on Youtube and even then the video is more about the disease than the treatment of Chinese Americans.

The Bubonic Plague in... San Francisco?
Like a lot of history regarding the treatment of Asian Americans, it tends to be forgotten or overlooked when people talk about other issues. It's the same reason you don't know about California's laws against people of Chinese descent or overlook the fact that the U.S. specifically created immigration laws to keep people of Asian descent out of the U.S.

Another aspect of Asian history that is rarely talked about is that Chinese people were heavily associated with disease and being diseased. Mostly because white Americans believed they contributed to the rise in syphilis and made people sick via opium.

This association actually framed healthcare on the west coast by not allowing Chinese people into normal hospitals and instead referring them to hospitals for leprosy, but this was only if they showed up in the first place. Most, if not all hospitals in the late 1800s to early 1900s did not have translators and there was no attempt to explain why our medicine was so different from what they were used to.

There was no empathy or understanding, just the expectation that anyone who is in America should conform.

It's one of the reasons why Chinese Americans were so targeted. They refused to give up their culture, instead creating their own hospitals to ensure they would not lose their identity. These hospitals had Chinese doctors who understood them and didn't blame them for spreading diseases.

So when they were hit with the plague, they didn't seek help from outside of their community. They internalized, kept their sick hidden and out of sight. They stayed silent because they were positive that they would be blamed.

The fact that this resonates with today's cultural and societal environment is sickening.
contributing to it.

It feels like some sort of messed-up Groundhog's day.

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**Eliza Long, Staff Writer**

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!

0 Comments

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**The Cultural Disconnect between American Students and Visiting Dijon-based Lecturer and Journalist**

4/30/2021 0 Comments

Written by Rachel "Checks" De Guzman, *Editor-in-Chief*

On April 22, the students of French 295 had a special opportunity to speak to a practicing journalist in France. FRE 295 French Cultural Experience is a newly-formed course that substituted the necessary study abroad experiences for French majors and minors at the University of Puget Sound. Students whose study abroad experiences were canceled due to COVID-19 found themselves face-to-face in real-screen-time with native French speakers and University of Puget Sound alumni who currently reside in...
from the visiting lecturer that the French press must uphold the freedom of expression, the privacy of an individual and the respect for the truth. There was some alignment of views on journalism as a civic duty, especially regarding journalism as a mechanism that encourages public reflection and engagement, with some variance on how to encourage such public discourse. However, the disconnection between the American students and the French journalist became increasingly apparent, nearing the end of the hour.

Journalism as practiced by the Dijon-based feminist showed its own limitations as she had only circulated her specialities of gender and gender disparities within the domain of economics and gender. She did not mention race until the Q&A section where several students posed their questions of the overlap of race and gender and of readership inclusivity. When she did respond, there was a clear distinction of gender and race. The overlap was only exercised in order to mention the France's ongoing issues on Islamist separatism and pushback from its national burqa ban, which was effectively meant to preserve laicité, or neutrality, particularly in the face of two social mechanisms—church and state.

By the end of the class, there was not sufficient time to make a cultural exchange about critical race theory. It left students like Rachel Jackson, a senior in this course, frustrated. Jackson says, “I'm sorry, I really cannot imagine talking about feminism for an hour and not talking about intersectionality.”

To the French journalist, a critical race theory like intersectionality overcomplicated the conversation because, in France, it was widely accepted and understood that race was distinctly different from gender.

However, from the view of the American students who understood that an intersectional experience of race and gender may inhibit an individual's ability to freely express, they were left disoriented by the technicalities and complexities of laicité which may or may not have been the key to connection. With regard for the language barrier and the limited time for discussion, the presentation had left an impression that the individual's rights of expression permitted a journalist to avoid coverage on an
The students of French 295 have already been exposed to laïcité through the course itself and introductory discussions, but it often leads students like Jackson down a rabbithole. At a basic understanding of laïcité, Jackson says, “it’s divisive to have your own public set of beliefs,” but this launches her and the rest of her class into a paradox of neutrality.

The course, hopefully, remains a one-time opportunity, especially as non-graduates are eager to travel to France next academic school year for a real immersive experience. Laïcité continues to interest students of the University of Puget Sound, and extended exposure to laïcité and its workings in France will be the key to understanding the growing debate around American critical race theories and the disputed threat it poses to French identity.

Rachel "Checks" De Guzman, Editor-in-Chief
Rachel “Checks” De Guzman writes from Southern California, just north of Los Angeles. She writes satire, book reviews, performance features and op-ed pieces on current events and social media movements. At the University of Puget Sound, you’d find her walking around North End or touring larger Tacoma on public transit. Follow her on Instagram: @r.e.a.d.checks