The Perks of Being a Wallflower. Dir. Stephen Chbosky. Perf. Logan Lerman, Emma Watson. Summit Entertainment, 2012. Film.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower treads some pretty well worn coming-of-age paths but manages to do so in a riveting and heartfelt manner. The film has the unusual distinction of being written for the screen and directed by the author of the novel on which it is based, Stephen Chbosky. The story is clearly close to Chbosky and he, along with a superb cast, handles the themes with great honesty and respect, never letting melodrama or over sentimentality creep in.

The film centers on Charlie (Logan Lerman), a painfully introverted budding novelist growing up in early '90s Pittsburgh. He has difficulty making the transition into high school and makes no friends. That is, of course, until he is taken under the wing of a bunch of energetic and lovable misfits, including Sam (Emma Watson) and her openly gay step-brother Patrick (Ezra Miller), who drag Charlie into life with their appetite for the world. Along the way Charlie learns how to belong, discovers sex and eventually finds love. So far so clichéd and, along with many other coming of age stories, the film can occasionally seem intent on playing out the wish-fulfillment fantasies of the introverted young writer. Chbosky, however, makes the narrative fresh by never looking down on the material and also by focusing on the psychology that underpins every character's actions in aching emotional honesty. Every character struggles to find a way of dealing with the cruel realities of clique mentality both in high school and in the world at large. As the film goes on we begin to discover and sort through the immense emotional baggage of the characters and rarely are we given simple solutions to eradicate the memory of past traumas. The film does not believe that simply "talking about it" will ease the pain of traumatic memories. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, however, keeps up an almost relentless positivity in spite of the darkness at the core of its tale. It is entirely un-cynical, perhaps to the point of being naive, but with such breathless commitment from the cast it is difficult not to be attracted to it.

Emma Watson's entirely plausible American accent is the least of her achievements in the film. Watson's Sam is infectiously lively, engaging and welcoming. It is clear why she has such an impact on Charlie. She embodies the spirit of a young girl who thinks she's more experienced than she is and, although Sam has been through a lot, her wide-eyed disbelief when she sees the real-world reactions to her step-brother's sexuality

betrays her. Ezra Miller's portrayal of Patrick is similarly pitch-perfect, resisting all temptation to caricature the character's sexuality and injecting a dose of humor into the film as an intriguing and likable foil for Charlie - light years away from Miller's turn in Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2011). Lastly of our main trio, Logan Lerman as Charlie is a magnetic presence in the film, almost ironic as he portrays the wallflower of the film's title. His awkwardness never comes across as forced and in the rare occasions where Charlie lets loose his emotions they seem to pour from Lerman, and we cannot help becoming caught up in his crisis. Paul Rudd delivers a solid performance as Charlie's supportive English teacher and we even get a welcome cameo from Joan Cusack at exactly the point in the film where we need her quiet warmth and soft-smiling energy.

I have only a few minor issues with Perks. I had a slight hesitation in buying into the presentation of Patrick and Sam as relatively unpopular oddballs. After all, they are funny, smart, and not so straight-laced that they won't get drunk or high once in a while. They are also good looking - not just easy on the eye but spectacularly attractive. It is hard to believe that this would not affect their social standing in an American high school. I do understand that Patrick's being openly gay might be ostracizing in Pittsburgh in the early 1990s, but this does not explain Sam's unpopularity. When one of the driving factors of the film is the eminent likeability of these two overtly attractive characters, it is difficult to understand why they belong to the misfit tribe. Another issue is that the film never seems to acknowledge that the group the central characters create for themselves is just as much of a clique as the jocks and the bullies which the film is so understandably critical of. I know it is better to be part of a group that does not hurt and humiliate others, but at certain points in the film the group of misfits themselves seems uncomfortably exclusionary.

I had a more major issue with the movie's apparent message that introversion must be attributed to a deep-rooted psychological scar from one's past. That introversion can only be understood as a kind of post-traumatic symptom. I realize that every character in the movie has a scar of this sort, but Charlie's are far more numerous and severe. They are also presented much more as the root of all of his social problems. I am almost certain this was not the intended message, but at points the film seems to say: "You can be introverted only if there is something seriously wrong with you." It seems unable to believe that some people are simply quieter than others.

Taking the bad with the good though, the film's main message is that everyone, in their own way, has a rough time in life, but good friends can help you get through the darkest moments. It is a simple statement and one that we have heard from this genre before, but when it is as touching and well put together as Perks 1 do not think we mind being reminded one more time.

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