



Wall-E

Rated G. Our ratings: V- 1; L-0; S/N -.1. Running time: 1 hour 43 min.

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.' Matthew 25:21

In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. Genesis 9:13

Wall-E “has no form or comeliness that we should esteem him,” and yet the other night I saw him warm and gladden the hearts of a theater full of children and adults. The little robot is a square trash compactor with arms mounted on a pair of caterpillar treads, topped by two searchlights or scanners. Thanks to the magic of the Pixar animators, Wall-E is as cute and cuddly as Bambi, even though he is a machine. His name is an acronym for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class, and like ET, he has been left behind. When almost seven hundreds earlier, humans had either died off or had joined the migration from the polluted Earth, Wall-E apparently had been overlooked, and so for all those years he has been going about his duties of gathering up trash, compacting into solid square cubes, and then stacking them sky high.

It is a sad commentary upon our throw-away culture that Wall-E for seven hundred years has not run out of work. (Are you old enough to remember when “throw-away” was a positive description, meaning you did not have to wash the paper cups and plates or pay for the expensive repair of a cheap appliance?!) Day after day the little robot has gone about his chores faithfully, his only companion a small cockroach—talk about “the meek shall inherit the earth”!

Then comes the day when another robot appears on the scene. She, for we soon learn that her name is Eve, is oval-shaped, sleek and streamlined compared to Wall-E's old fashioned clunkiness. And she is deadly, blasting away at almost everything that moves because she is a search robot sent out, like the dove in the Noah's Ark story, to scout for life on dangerous, hostile worlds. When Wall-E manages to confront and assure her that he is no threat, the two haltingly exchange names. We can tell that Wall-E is smitten. What unfolds is both a love story and a quest to save humanity so that people can leave their space ark, “be fruitful and multiply” to repopulate the Earth. But what if the robots serving humans are programmed to protect their masters from all dangers, which includes returning to an Earth that all the video archives show as hopelessly devastated by pollution? Are Wall-E and Eva up to the task of overcoming such opposition? Also, equally important, are humans, so pampered by robot servants that they have grown so fat that they have given up walking, able to meet the challenge of returning and taking up a new way of life?

Writer-director Andrew Stanton (who won an Academy Award for *Finding Nemo*) obviously respects his audience, providing no character to explain what is going on. Indeed, during the first twenty minutes or so there is no dialogue, the film taking older members back to the days of Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp trying to cope with outrageous circumstances. Even when we finally see humans aboard their huge ark of a ship, the filmmakers rely mainly on visuals to tell the story, rather than dialogue. The film serves as a non-preachy parable on ecology, perseverance and faithfulness, and hope. If you enjoyed the two Star Wars robots, the thrilling flight of Lois Lane and Superman, Peter's first delight in his new-found Spiderman powers, or the challenge of *2001: Space Odyssey*, you are sure to love this soon to be a classic! Oh, yes, do stay for the credits and see an over-view of Earth's future and some wonderful homages to the style of great artists.

For Reflection/Discussion -- *The following contains spoilers, so wait until you see the film before reading further.*

1) What did you think of Wall-E when you first saw him? Not much to look at, is he? How do the Pixar

animators lead us to see the humanity built into him?

2) What does Eve's name make you think of? How is this a sci-fi "creation" story, as well as one referencing Noah and the Ark?

3) Compare Eve's initial response to the strange or un-expected with that of Wall-E. How is he like "the meek of the earth"?

4) Compare Wall-E and Eva to other film robots— C3PO and R2D2 in Star Wars; Robbie in *Forbidden Planet*. How do the filmmakers "humanize" the robots? How does our imagination participate in the process of anthropomorphizing of machines? Ever named a car? What about ships?

5) How is the need for companionship dealt with in the film? (Note the poignant scene in which Wall-E sits gazing up at the stars.) Compare this with the Tom Hanks character in *Castaway*. What does Wall-E's watching a tape of *Hello, Dolly* contribute?

6) What does Wall-E's never running out of work for seven hundred years say about us and our use of the earth's resources? (Note: those planning to discuss the film might ask that participants check out "dollar stores," gift shops, flea markets and garage sales ahead of time and note what is being offered for sale. How much is useful, and how much of the material is clutter or so poorly designed and cheaply made that it is soon useless?)

7) What has happened to the humans aboard the huge space ark? How is this a comment upon today's "super-sized" humans, many health authorities now warning us that obesity is the new threat to our children's health? What are the humans mainly interested in? How is this the logical extension of advertising with its consumerist philosophy? Compare this with its opposite, as in Isaiah 55:1-2 and Matthew 6:19-21.

8) How is the little green plant carried by Eve the symbol of new possibilities or beginnings? How does it seem both fragile and tough?

9) How does the Captain show that he is suited to command despite his obesity? What do you think of his statement, "I don't want to survive, I want to live!" What is the difference between the two? How is the ability to discern between them the essence of being fully human? What reference to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey* do you hear in this scene? How is this as pivotal a moment in the story as the scene was in Kubrick's classic film? How did you feel as people all over the ship began to stand on their feet?

10) Science fiction fans will see here the influence of Jack Williamson's great 1947 story "With Folded Hands," which he later made into the novel *The Humanoids*. One of the best stories probing the unintended consequences of mechanization, it would be a fine follow up to *Wall-E*. Williamson's thesis went against the usual humans fight against tyrannical robots by depicting a society in which benevolent robots catered to every need, leaving its citizens with little to do except to sit back "with folded hands" and enjoy the fruits of the labor of the robots.