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Introduction

Disney-Pixar's 2008 animated feature film *WALL-E* received generous praise upon its release for its scathingly critical rebuke of corporate monopolies and for showing its audience a dystopian future and the consequences of hyper-consumerism and corporate greed.¹ Recently inaugurated into the Criterion Collection in 2022 (the only Disney or Pixar feature to have done so) due to its technical success as a "high-water mark of digital animation," *WALL-E*'s ethereal cinematography has also been well-received.² Set over 700 years in the future in 2805, the movie has been praised as one of Disney's few fruitful attempts at Science Fiction—a genre it has dabbled in so unprofitably that its lack of success, as Kevin Tash for *Collider* notes, forced Disney to fix the issue by "just buying out companies that were already successful in sci-fi action."³ Thus Disney purchased Lucasfilm for \$4 billion in 2012, adding to its repertoire the entire *Star Wars* franchise from which it has profited immensely: Lucasfilm has since brought Disney nearly \$12 billion, a near triple return on investment.⁴ J.P. Telotte has traced the history of Disney's largely unsuccessful attempt at a SF canon, from the 1954 television series *Disneyland* and its *Man in Space* series (1955-57) through to the eponymous *Tomorrowland* of the Disney theme parks.⁵ *WALL-E* frequently tops the list of Disney's better SF outputs and Andrew Stanton, *WALL-E*'s director, acknowledges the formative influence of SF on the film's conception.⁶

Much of the public and academic discourse focuses on an anti-capitalist reading of the film, particularly the role of the monolithic "Buy N Large" (BnL), a spoof corporation that monopolises every aspect of life on earth. BnL's corporate greed is not limited to terrestrial domination: BnL owns the AXIOM, a cruise-ship-like spacecraft to which humanity has been displaced, and there is even a fleeting shot of the moon with a "BnL Outlet Mall Coming Soon" sign. It is the film's purported social commentary, Martha Lane has recently observed, and themes of consumer greed and environmentalism that has kept the film relevant some decade

and a half after its release.⁷ This environmentalist message has also made it a target amongst many conservative commentators who bemoan the film as “leftist propaganda.”⁸ Joseph Laycock, reviewing *WALL-E* for this journal in 2008, writes that “from a religious perspective, *WALL-E* contains elements of theodicy and eschatology,” yet Laycock continues that the major plot point of the movie is “the folly of unchecked capitalism as the source of evil in this world” and focuses much of the review on these themes.⁹ It is this post-apocalyptic, garbage-strewn earth that has inaugurated plenty of conservative reading and criticism of the film—that it is anti-corporation, or pushes its political environmentalism onto too-young an audience.

Stanton has maintained in numerous interviews that the anti-consumerist, environmentalist messages were “not where [he] was coming from” but that “all [his] choices in the film came from what [he] needed to amplify the main point, which was the love story between these two robots.”¹⁰ For Stanton, “the most important commandment is to love one another” and a desolate Earth was merely a useful stage-setting.¹¹ This paper will not suggest that any environmentalist, anti-capitalist or anti-consumerist readings of the film (the majority of the public’s interpretation of the film) are in any way “misreadings” or incorrect interpretations of the film, but instead it will focus on ways in which the film conveys a Christian message focusing on love and labor. Starting with Stanton’s interview with *Christianity Today*, this will focus on a largely underexplored element of *WALL-E*: its theological aspects. *WALL-E* is both a new Adam, through his relationship with the physical Earth, and Christ, with the saving and redemption of mankind as his teleological end. The film, with *WALL-E* as its central character, leaps from Old to New Testament, connecting the more obvious allusions to Genesis and the Garden of Eden to subtler nods at redemption and salvation, the nature of humanity, and our relationships with each other. Thus the relationship between love and labor will be viewed not through a capitalist, or environmentalist lens, but

through a theological one. In this way, *WALL-E*'s depiction of humanity itself, even what it means to be human, is Christological.

A near-silent movie, the film follows the love story of a lonely robot, WALL-E, left behind on earth to endlessly repeat its directive to collect, and compress, trash. Humanity has displaced to the AXIOM spacecraft, floating through the cosmos in the hope of one day returning. WALL-E finds a small, green, living plant, and not realising its value places it amongst his other "collectibles," a miscellany of human knickknacks such as a Rubik's cube and a lighter. WALL-E's find, this proof of life, prompts the scientific probe, an adorable robot and WALL-E's love interest, named EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator) to come to earth to collect the plant for containment and examination. On seeing EVE, WALL-E immediately falls head-over-tread in love, and blindly follows EVE onto the AXIOM with calamitous, comedic, but ultimately salvific results. Onboard are robots who work hard to maintain the easy lifestyle of the humans, who are depicted as lazy and devoid of personality, emotion, or motivation. These humans move around on electric chairs, and are told what to eat, drink, and think—and when they do communicate, they do so through their screens. WALL-E's presence (and his comedic slapstick) on the ship upends this dystopian vision of humanity. His actions result in two humans having to speak to each other *in person*, and the captain wakes from his metaphorical slumber, overriding AXIOM's rather malicious autopilot and steering humanity back to earth. WALL-E's love affair with EVE is the catalyst to humanity's awakening.

***WALL-E*'s Environmental Message**

Despite *WALL-E*'s largely favourable public reception, the film has been treated harshly in academic circles. The trash-filled, garbage-ridden landscape, the lack of any plant life (other than the finding of the sapling that catapults the film's plot into action), and the dystopian

narrative of an abandoned earth all resonate with a society conscious of its own environmental impact and destruction. But Christopher Todd Anderson, Hugh McNaughton, Michelle Yates, and Maria Bose have all commented on the hollowness of the film's stance on the capitalist labor market and its inability to adequately grapple with the consequences of the consumer-driven destructive impact on the environment.¹²

Ann F. Howey has discussed the contradictions inherent in not just the film but its public reception, arguing that the “environmentalism promoted by the film is contradicted by its own position as consumable object and limited by its vision of environmental solutions.”¹³ She points to the hypocrisy of the film's marketing strategy, which included themed single-use plastics such as collectors cups and disposable plastic watches for its cinematic and later DVD releases, pointing to the parallel in the film itself of the literal rubbish WALL-E hoards in his home (his “postmodern bricolage”) and the irony of what is considered “collectible” and what is considered “garbage.”¹⁴ Howey's article also raises concerns over the messaging of the film and how its purported environmental moralising felt contrived, “preachy,” and “heavy handed” to some viewers.¹⁵ For those wary of the “Disney Empire” and its consumer practices, the hypocrisy was stark. As David Smith points out for *The Guardian*, “the mixture of an eco-friendly message with a vast merchandising operation has handed ammunition to right-wing commentators,” suggesting the film is a victim of its own making and emblematic of the “inherent culture clash between Pixar—cool, creative, formerly owned by Apple's Steve Jobs—and the cash-driven Disney empire.”¹⁶

Henry A. Giroux, in his second edition of *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* describes Disney's power to obfuscate its own role in corporate and consumerist monopolies as “perhaps the most disturbing of all the film's implications.”¹⁷ The lack of action by Disney is confounded, for Giroux, by the spoof BnL website created to go alongside the film's release, intentionally inundating the user with satirically sinister adverts and providing a

comically ominous disclaimer that gives BnL the right to distribute your personal data when engaged in “certain activities on our site such as using a menu, viewing, clicking your mouse or breathing.”¹⁸ In a remarkable salute to Disney’s incognizance, manifesting Howey’s commentary that the film is “particularly susceptible to having its environmentalism co-opted to sell products,” as of 2025 the spoof buynlarge.com redirects to disney.com, complete with Disney’s online shop.¹⁹ If there is any doubt at all about the film’s lack of self-reflection it can be laid to rest with the knowledge that Stanton took genuine inspiration from the Disney Cruise Line for his design of the AXIOM.²⁰

Maria Bose has suggested that WALL-E’s collection of trinkets and keepsakes is a symptom of Marx’s commodity fetishism that is mirrored in humanity’s treatment of the environment.²¹ Michelle Yates takes this criticism further, suggesting that whilst *WALL-E* appears to superficially mock our current consumer lifestyle, it “ultimately embraces, and even naturalizes” two categories fundamental to capitalism: labor and consumption.²² WALL-E’s collection of trinkets and his reliance on the literal rubbish leftover by human hyper-consumerism is, for Yates, illustrative of Marx’s commodity form: humans do not produce the means of their own subsistence but rather rely on commodity exchange. Yates suggests the film exemplifies what Carolyn Merchant has termed the “Edenic recovery narrative” whereby man (specifically) seeks to re-establish Eden on earth, suggesting that *WALL-E*’s solution is not to abandon capitalism altogether but to recover a more palatable version of it.²³

If the ecological message of the film contains inconsistencies, it is worth noting that the director did not intend this as the central message of the film. Andrew Stanton has repeatedly maintained that the apocalyptic hell-cape of a desolate earth was there *only* to act as a background to the real plot of the movie, that of a love story between two robots. In his interview with *Christianity Today* Stanton stated that he had no intention of “trying to make some sort of mean-spirited comment on consumerism or today’s society” but instead, every

secondary choice and decision was to emphasise the love story between WALL-E and EVE.²⁴ This then may help to explain the apparent hypocrisy in the message and the marketing: environmentalism *was never the intended message*.

Alissa Wilkinson, writing for *Vox*, summarises the apparent contradiction between the intent and reception of the film, observing nearly a decade after its release that “when Pixar released *Wall-E* in 2008, it was described as an ‘environmentalist parable’ so often that director Andrew Stanton felt the need to disavow the label” but that it has since become so associated with environmentalism that “whether or not Stanton ‘meant’ it to be an environmental tale is irrelevant.”²⁵ Others too have noted the friction between intention and reception: Alexa Weik von Mossner writes that Stanton (and, indeed, WALL-E himself) is an “involuntary eco-hero at best” and that whether intentional or not, “if we judge the film by the responses of critics, journalists and audiences, *WALL-E* seems quite powerful in its depiction of eco-trauma and quite successful in raising awareness about the possible ecological consequences of human action.”²⁶

Just because environmentalism may never have been the message does not, of course, make it a “misread” message of the film: it does not suggest that those who view the film as an environmental one rather than say, a Christian one, are “wrong” (indeed, this would suggest that the vast majority of *WALL-E* fans are, somehow, “wrong”), and it is not to deny one reading at the expense of the other. It does not suggest that *WALL-E* is, in any way, a “Christian” movie any more or any less than it is an environmental one. References to EVE as a biblical figure or the AXIOM as Noah’s Ark are so intertwined with secular culture, so mythologized in popular understanding, that their status can be interpreted almost entirely non-religiously. Stanton himself stated that the Noah’s Ark/AXIOM comparison was entirely unintentional, more of a happy accident, indicating that it “just worked in that allegory, so [he] ran with it.”²⁷ I am not proposing an ideological rendering of the film’s interpretation through a Christian viewpoint,

nor suggesting that the audience is somehow misinformed in its viewing of it as an environmental warning: meaning, after all, rests with the viewer, not the film itself.²⁸ However, the huge response to the film that focuses on environmentalism has meant that it has become a victim, almost, of its own success, with little scholarship exploring other aspects, particularly the theological ones.

The Gospel According to *WALL-E*

Stanton's interview with *Christianity Today* clarifies the creator's Christian roots. Discussing allusions to certain Judaeo-Christian elements in the film, Stanton states that, intentional or otherwise, his Christian values informed his decision-making, stating that "so much of the Old Testament is sort of built into our DNA." The implication here is that even if Stanton had tried to create a piece of work intentionally devoid of any reflection of his own belief system, he would have been unsuccessful; yet this does not mean he *intended* to make a "Christian" movie any more than he did an environmental one. For Stanton "the greatest commandment is to love one another" and it is this love between WALL-E and EVE that is the driving force of the movie.²⁹ The explicit focus on what has been interpreted as "throwaway culture" was not an environmental message, nor one that can be read only through the lens of commodity fetishism, but rather was intended to establish WALL-E as a creature desperate to "know" humans through the leftover detritus of humanity's existence on Earth some 700 years earlier. This is emphasised with WALL-E's obsession with watching and re-watching *Hello Dolly!* in that it reinforces the titular robot's loneliness and desire to connect with humanity by focusing on the act of handholding as a performance of love and companionship.

The comparison to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden comes easily when watching *WALL-E*. As Stanton himself observes, he "picked EVE as an appropriate title for the female robot. But 'Adam' just didn't have the underdog ring to it...but definitely [the film] had that

first man, first female theme.”³⁰ Timothy Lawrence’s 2023 opinion piece for *The Anselm Society*, “The Christian Cosmos of Pixar’s Wall-E” is perhaps the only response that really focuses on deconstructing the film’s Christian message, following Veronike-Nicole Ban’s observation that the “significance of the religious references encoded in the text” is “an angle thus far overlooked by analyses.”³¹ Ban focuses on hyperconsumerism as a false God, a redemption narrative, and the free will of the robots contrasted with the deterministic autopilot of AUTO, all of which she contextualizes within American civil religion. Lawrence takes a slightly different approach, instead suggesting the film sets forth a “profoundly Christian vision of the entire cosmos” sustained by love. According to Lawrence one of the film’s most prominent theological talking points revolves around the concept of labor. The entire purpose of WALL-E’s 700-year existence on earth is to labor; he is a waste-collecting robot who recharges himself every morning via solar panels. The desolation of a once greener, more pleasant land, and the cyclical nature of WALL-E’s life centered around his pre-programmed role of constant toil is evocative of Adam’s postlapsarian state. Genesis 3:23 makes it clear that toil is Adam’s punishment, and 3:17-20 reinforces mankind’s dependence on sweat and labor and ultimate return to earth through death and burial. Labor, then, is a central characteristic of humanity, and WALL-E’s seeming peace with his laborious, repetitive duty brings him just as close to humans as watching *Hello Dolly!* or his collection of souvenirs do. Indeed, WALL-E’s anthropomorphism is anchored *in* labor, the work he does with his hands (cf. I Corinth 4:12). Hands, or rather, handholding, is how WALL-E learns through *Hello Dolly!* to show affection and ultimately love in the form of companionship: there are numerous, often comical, scenes where WALL-E tries to hold EVE’s hand. Hands, handholding, and the etymological connection to manual (*manus*, “hand”) labor is not just a cinematic choice but one that drives the story. Love, affection, humanity, and labor are all conveyed through WALL-E’s use of his own hands.

And yet, as Yates points out, WALL-E's labor is utterly pointless: there are no humans left on earth, and there haven't been for 700 years.³² WALL-E, accordingly, has completely internalised the dominance of labor in a capitalist society: he labors, because that is what he was built for. WALL-E's purposeless labor is in stark contrast to the lack of labor on board the AXIOM. Here, in a supposed utopic Garden of Eden where every want and need are taken care of by hard-working, laborious robots, humans have done so little physical manual labor that they are portrayed as large, overweight infants, incapable of doing even the slightest movement or physical activity without (robotic) aid. Stanton has given some insight into why he chose to portray humans as "big babies," stating that it resulted from a discussion with a "NASA guy" that, due to the long-term effects of gravity, "atrophy kicks in and you begin to lose your muscle tone."³³

When Stanton first began to devise how to illustrate these atrophied humans he explains that they originally took form as "big blobs of Jell-O" but it was so bizarre, so non-human like, that instead he opted for "big babies" to make them more identifiable.³⁴ Atrophy has reduced their muscle mass to such an extent that the humans are unable to walk, let alone labor. Indeed, the work performed by the robots, as with the tireless labor of WALL-E on earth, is far more of an identifiably human undertaking. Stanton explains, on the film's induction to the Criterion Collection, that depicting the humanness of the humans was far harder than conveying a sense of humanity or anthropomorphism inherent within the robots: graphically, his decision to design the humans as overweight babies was far easier than getting them technically accurate.³⁵ Ironically, it was much easier to design the robots in a human way. When you first see WALL-E appear on the garbage-laden earth "you were associated closer to how we look as humans than how a cartoon human would look."³⁶ The anthropomorphic robots onboard the AXIOM are full of personality, allowing the audience to relate to WALL-E's desire to feel and be loved.³⁷ As Kimberley Yost writes, "an anthropomorphic robot displays the spiritual

transcendence of humans” and it is this human/robot relationship that is such a powerful dynamic.³⁸ The state of atrophy that has resulted from nearly a millennium of inaction was a crucial plot-point for Stanton, and required some fine-tuning. For Stanton, “the biggest evolution the film took was the state of humanity” and he at one point said he decided the film was mirroring *Planet of the Apes* (1968), whereby “humans didn’t find out they were human until the end of the film, where they find out they’re descendants of the earth.”³⁹ By contrasting the life of aimless atrophied leisure with that of WALL-E’s laborious directive, Stanton was able to “put humanity in a state where it would only help WALL-E look like he’s the only person or the only thing truly living in the universe” who can guide humanity to authenticity.⁴⁰

This idea of “evolution” with regards to the “big babies” on board is an interesting one. Owen Gleiberman, writing for *Entertainment Weekly*, echoes Stanton’s use of the word “evolution” writing that humans “‘evolved’ into hilariously infantile technology-junkie couch potatoes,” yet it is more of a devolution that we see on-screen.⁴¹ They are, clearly, human, yet they are also removed from our own notion of humanity, regressing rather than progressing. Comparatively, a central plot point for WALL-E is that he readily experiences and expresses emotion, indeed, he is only on the ship because he is madly in love with EVE and chose to do something about it. That humanity has in fact devolved, rather than evolved, onboard the AXIOM is reinforced when comparing their emotionless, non-expressive personalities with those of the robots. Expressed emotions, according to Charles Darwin, are evidence of evolution, not limited to humans.⁴² The robots, WALL-E in particular, align more closely with our own notions of an evolved humanity through their expressive actions and reactions. It is in WALL-E’s facial expressions that we, as viewer, find much of his humanity—thus his expressions convey not just an evolutionary progression but a neurobiological function too, helping the viewer engage and identify with the central character.⁴³

The supposed failure of *WALL-E*'s Edenic recovery narrative lies in the lack of any kind of perceived substantive redemption: humans return to Earth to start again, but that starting point is consumerist at its very foundation. Yet, as emphasised here, this is not the only narrative that can be explored in the film, and, considering Stanton's intention to produce a film about love rather than environmental sustainability, it is with and through love that WALL-E truly redeems himself and those around him. When Lawrence compares WALL-E to Adam, he does so etymologically, in that just as Adam is tied to the ground through *Adamah* so too is the robot WALL-E linked to the earth through his acronym: "Waste Allocation Load Lifter - Earth Class."⁴⁴ Interestingly, Lawrence does not here make the connection from Old to New Testament, to Christ as second Adam, which not only represents his relationship to earth but to his very ontological and teleological purpose: *Load Lifter*. Christ, incarnated to save humanity, is the ultimate *Load Lifter* of sin, shouldering and burdening mankind just as WALL-E performs his duties, per Matthew 11:28: "come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Combined with the BnL catchphrase, "working to dig you out," it is manifest that WALL-E's purpose is to ease, even to ultimately relieve, humanity's burden—a salvific, Christological undertaking. WALL-E, ultimately, and albeit unintentionally, is there not to redeem himself, but to redeem humankind. Humanity's sin was the destruction of Earth; its punishment, to orbit in space for 700 years, seemingly piloted by the ship's human captain but secretly overridden by its autopilot who has no intention of returning. WALL-E, who only finds himself onboard the AXIOM due to his love for EVE, almost inadvertently saves humanity through his accidental and at times humorous collisions with the humans onboard. WALL-E is not alone in his redemptive efforts: EVE redeems her namesake, for so long a heavily gendered symbol of betrayal, lust, and sin. In EVE's case, she is there to protect the first new sign of hope (the plant). Rather than being blamed for the "Fall of Humanity" and

exclusion from the Garden of Eden, *WALL-E's* EVE, through her saving of the plant and her relationship with WALL-E, helps to inaugurate a new Eden on earth.

Returning to themes of intentionality, there is, of course, a glaringly obvious difference when comparing WALL-E's redemptive efforts to those of Christ: those of the robot are entirely accidental. WALL-E follows EVE onto the ship because he is somewhat obsessed with her, but, as von Mossner observes, the AXIOM's return to earth is not on the robot's radar, so that WALL-E's liberation of humanity and earth "is at best something of a side effect."⁴⁵ WALL-E doesn't die, he doesn't sacrifice himself for humanity's return, and indeed, he only gains from the experience as we see him return along with his beloved EVE and the humans onboard. There is no one specific act of atonement; instead, WALL-E's actions can be viewed as restorative, per Irenaeus' Recapitulation theory, bringing balance back to a postlapsarian state of humanity. The focus on love, not the romantic love between WALL-E and EVE but between humanity, nature, and the other robots, is also reminiscent of Peter Abelard's so-called "Moral Influence" Theory, with WALL-E embodying the transformative actions of Christ and His love bestowed on humanity. Thus, the lack of any one act of redemptive sacrifice does not necessarily disallow the viewer to be reminded of Christ when watching WALL-E onscreen. Rather, his complicated relationship with humans, and the "humanity" or human-like emotions and characteristics he exhibits, his anthropomorphism, only heightens these allusions to the salvific work of Christ.

WALL-E's relatability, his anthropomorphism, lies in his longing, almost desperation, to be loved by EVE. If EVE is to be a more suitable companion for WALL-E than Hal the cockroach (the only other living being we are introduced to in the opening scenes of the movie), WALL-E really has to work for reciprocity, often forming comic relief for the viewer. The relationship between the two has been compared by Lawrence to that of Dante and Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy*.⁴⁶ EVE accordingly awakens WALL-E, and WALL-E, like Dante, follows

EVE to the very outer depths of the Cosmos, to the very edge of the known universe. Indeed, it is this journey, early on in the film, that received so much acclaim not just for its technical mastery as a piece of animation but for its beautiful simplicity. Just as Beatrice's beauty increases the closer she gets to the Empyrean, WALL-E seems to fall more and more in love with EVE as they approach the AXIOM. Lawrence writes that "WALL-E, like Dante, is both smitten and rightly terrified by this heavenly intrusion into his world," but both are compelled to follow it through.⁴⁷ It is through EVE that WALL-E finally realises who he is: EVE's arrival inaugurates the (comically disastrous) trials and tribulations onboard the ship but also, eventually, it is only through these mishaps that humanity returns to Earth. This ascent to the heavens cannot happen without EVE, and it is here WALL-E recognises not only EVE's beauty but the beauty of the universe at large. Just like Dante, the humans on board the AXIOM are in an almost purgatorial state, with nowhere to go and with every passing century losing more and more of their humanity. Whilst Dante and Beatrice sail up towards the Empyrean realm, their Pixar counterparts float futilely through the heavens, with no particular end in sight—until their return to Earth.

The cosmic beauty of the universe, set against the recurring use of the song, "It Only Takes a Moment" from *Hello Dolly!* emphasises the vastness and magnitude of space and Creation. The beauty of space is contrasted with the destruction of the planet, and in an interview with *Entertainment Weekly* Stanton retells a conversation he had with Michael Crawford, the actor who played Cornelius in the 1969 film, whom WALL-E desperately emulates. Crawford congratulated Stanton on depicting the meaning of the song so perfectly, explaining how Gene Kelly (the director of *Hello Dolly!*) told him to "sing this like it means more than the world. This is bigger than the universe, just think of the stars."⁴⁸ Thus when Crawford, some forty years later, watched the opening scenes of *WALL-E*, with its field of stars set against the 1969 score, "it just blew his mind."⁴⁹ Herruth comments on the inclusion of

Hello Dolly! too, noting that the relationship between Dolly and Horace, facing aging and death, and WALL-E's fascination with the movie, reflect human emotions of awe and love.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Interviews with Andrew Stanton clarify that he did not intend to make an “environmental” movie any more or any less than he did a “Christian” one. Rather, he intended to make a film about love, and it is love that has been explored here through a theological and Christological lens, through its relation to labor and humanity. WALL-E's labor is not one that is a critique of the capitalist labor market but one that fundamentally ties him to humanity, his connection to the Earth through the very ground he treads, and the work he carries out with his hands. The focus on hands, and handholding, is an expression of this humanity, engrained in the robot through his fascination with *Hello Dolly!* Where some religious comparisons are overt—EVE, Eden, and the AXIOM/ark—some of which Stanton himself describes as a “happy accident,” others are more intentional yet subtle. WALL-E's very name—Load Lifter—recalls Christ's salvific eschatology, but it is the questioning of humanity, the blurred lines between human and robot that is the pinnacle achievement of the film, a critique of the nature of humanity through two Christianised elements: *labor* and *love*. Redemption is thus a large focus of the film. Humanity does not redeem WALL-E but rather WALL-E redeems humanity, returning to a “new Eden” that is at once pre- and postlapsarian. EVE is also redeemed, or rather redeems herself. No longer blamed for the Fall, she protects and saves humanity along with WALL-E, and the Original Sin and subsequent punishment—humanity's labor—is celebrated rather than mourned. There is no “failure” in this return to Eden, because there is no failure in *WALL-E*'s vision of humanity. Instead, humans return to their original nature, disrupted by their time onboard the AXIOM, with the help of WALL-E and EVE—and their return to labor is a return to Earth, figuratively and literally.

Notes

¹ Because WALL-E is both the name of the film and the name of the titular character, when referring to the film I will use the italicised *WALL-E*, and when referring to the robot himself I will use WALL-E. For a review representative of the public reception of the film, see David Smith, “Wall-E is Hollywood’s new star, so why is he causing an eco-row?,” *The Guardian*, July 6, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/jul/06/news.features>.

² “Wall-E,” *The Criterion Collection*, accessed November 1, 2024, <https://www.criterion.com/films/33246-wall-e>. *WALL-E* has grossed over \$500 million dollars since its release, see “Wall-E”, *Box Office Mojo*, accessed November 1, 2024, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl3615065601/>.

³ Kevin Tash, “Disney’s Long History of Fumbling Sci-Fi,” *Collider*, December 12, 2022, <https://collider.com/disney-sci-fi-movies-strange-world/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20earliest%20examples,completely%20satisfied%20with%20the%20directi>
[on](https://collider.com/disney-sci-fi-movies-strange-world/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20earliest%20examples,completely%20satisfied%20with%20the%20directi).

⁴ Kevin Dolak, “This Is How Much Disney Has Made Off of the Star Wars and Marvel Franchises,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 14, 2024, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/disney-star-wars-marvel-profits-nelson-peltz-1235852695/>.

⁵ See J.P. Telotte, “Disney in Science Fiction Land,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 33, no. 1 (2005): 12-19. See also, Telotte, “Science Fiction as “True-Life Adventure”: Disney and the Case of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*,” *Film & History* 40, no. 2 (2010): 66-79 and Telotte, *Animating Space: From Mickey to Wall-E* (University Press of Kentucky, 2010). Despite WALL-E appearing in the title, the film is only mentioned once in the book.

⁶ See, for example, “The Best Disney Science Fiction Movies of all Time,” *Ranker*, updated January 1, 2024, <https://www.ranker.com/list/best-disney-science-fiction-movies/ranker-film>; Mike Shutt, “Disney’s Animated Science Fiction Movies Ranked,” *Slash Film*, June 16, 2022, <https://www.slashfilm.com/898825/disneys-animated-science-fiction-movies-ranked/>. For Stanton’s love of SF, see “Andrew Stanton Gives up the Goods on WALL-E and JOHN CARPENTER to Capone!,” June 24, 2008, <https://legacy.aintitcool.com/node/37209>.

⁷ Martha Lane, “‘WALL-E’ at 15 – Review,” *The Film Magazine*, June 27, 2023, <https://www.thefilmmagazine.com/wall-e-15-review/>.

⁸ Shannen W. Coffin, “WALL-E, No thanks,” *National Review*, June 30, 2008, <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/wall-e-no-thanks-shannen-w-coffin/>.

⁹ Joseph Laycock, “WALL-E,” *Journal of Religion & Film* 13, no. 1 (2009): article 24.

¹⁰ Mark Moring, “The Little Robot That Could,” *Christianity Today*, June 24, 2008, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2008/06/andrewstanton/>.

¹¹ Moring, “Robot That Could.”

¹² See Christopher Todd Anderson, “Post-Apocalyptic Nostalgia: WALL-E, Garbage, and American Ambivalence toward Manufactured Goods,” *Literature Interpretation Theory* 22, no. 3 (2012): 267-82 looks at the relationship exhibited in the film between nostalgia and the objects of WALL-E’s interest, leftover from humans, concluding that “this is the paradox of *WALL-E*. The film offers a powerful and touching environmental lesson, but the nostalgia for manufactured goods is at odds with the film’s overt cultural criticism” (p. 279). Hugh McNaughton, “Distinctive Consumption and Popular Anti-consumerism: The Case of WALL-E,” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 26, no. 5 (2012): 753-66, explores how WALL-E is humanized through the “aesthetic attachments” he has with those same objects of humanity (p. 762) Michelle Yates, “Labor as “Nature,” Nature as Labor: “Stay the Course” of Capitalism in WALL-E’s Edenic Recovery Narrative,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 22, no. 3 (2015): 525-43, argues that far from offering a critique of a capitalist society and mega-corporations, “the film ultimately embraces, even naturalizes, two of the fundamental social categories that constitute capitalist society: labour and the commodity

form” (p. 527). See also Maria Bose, “Immaterial Thoughts: Brand Value, Environmental Sustainability, and WALL-E,” *Criticism* 59, no. 2 (2017): 247-77 for more on Disney’s brand management and WALL-E’s connection to Apple.

¹³ Ann F. Howey, “Going Beyond Our Directive: *Wall-E* and the Limits of Social Commentary,” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 2, no1 (2010): 45.

¹⁴ Howey, “Going Beyond,” 59-62.

¹⁵ Howey, “Going Beyond,” 56. Stanton himself is uneasy with the immediate reading of the film’s environmental message, saying in a *New York Times* interview “as it was getting finished, the environmental talk started to freak me out. I don’t have much of a political bent, and the last thing I want to do it preach,” see Katrina Onstad, “Pixar Gambles on a Robot in Love,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 2008, 13, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A180431528/STND?u=bgc&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=d1e7e8e4_

¹⁶ Smith, “Hollywood’s new star.”

¹⁷ Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, 2nd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 120.

¹⁸ Giroux, 120.

¹⁹ Howey, “Going Beyond,” 66.

²⁰ Bose, “Immaterial Thoughts,” 258. “Company News; Disney To Start Its Own Cruise Line by 1998,” *The New York Times*, May 4, 1994, https://link-gale-com.bishopg.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A174430784/STND?u=bgc&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=1775fb4c_

²¹ Bose, “Immaterial Thoughts,” 264.

²² Yates, “Labor as Nature,” 527.

²³ Yates, “Labor as Nature,” 530.

²⁴ Moring, “Robot That Could.” See also “Stanton Gives up the Goods.”

²⁵ Alissa Wilkinson, “Now is the time to revisit Wall-E, perhaps the finest environmental film of the past decade,” *Vox*, June 3, 2017, https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/6/3/15728220/wall-e-pixar-environmentalist-movie-of-week-paris-accord_

²⁶ von Mossner, “Times of Ecocide,” 175.

²⁷ Moring, “Robot that Could.”

²⁸ John C. Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 29; Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory. A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, [1984] 2003), 149, reminds us that “the essence and meaning of a literary work do not belong to the text, but to the process in which textual structures and the reader’s ideation interact.”

²⁹ Moring, “Robot that Could.”

³⁰ Moring, “Robot that Could.”

³¹ Veronike-Nicole Ban, “Nuancing the Post-Apocalyptic Recovery Narrative: Religious Symbolism in Disney Pixar’s Wall-E,” *Folio* 18, January 7, 2023, <https://foliojournal.wordpress.com/2023/01/07/nuancing-the-post-apocalyptic-recovery-narrative-religious-symbolism-in-disney-pixars-wall-e-by-veronike-nicole-ban/>.

³² Yates, “Labor as Nature,” 531.

³³ Moring, “Robot that Could.”

³⁴ Moring, “Robot that Could.”

³⁵ Drew Taylor, “‘Wall-E’ Direction Andrew Stanton Explains How Pixar’s Sci-Fi Darling Joined the Criterion Collection,” *The Wrap*, November 29, 2022, <https://www.thewrap.com/how-wall-e-got-into-criterion-collection-andrew-stanton/>, “we can’t pull off that sort of look that we can now get with humans that well. We couldn’t achieve that then.”

³⁶ Taylor, “Sci-Fi Darling.”

³⁷ In the promotional material for the film, the personality exhibited by the robots was described as a “glitch,” see Alexa Weik von Mossner, “Love in the Times of Ecocide: Environmental Trauma and Comic Relief in Andrew Stanton’s *WALL-E*,” in *Eco-Trauma Cinema*, ed. Anil Narine (Routledge, 2015) 164-179, at 169.

³⁸ Kimberly Yost, “Star-Crossed: Imagining Leadership in Science Fiction Narratives,” in *The Routledge Companion to Leadership*, ed. John Storey, Jean Hartley, Jean-Louis Denis, and Paul’t Hart (Routledge, 2017), 437-49, at 447.

³⁹ “Stanton Gives up the Goods.” Actually, Taylor (Charlton Heston) finds out he has been on Earth all along; the mute descendants of today’s humans have no such idea.

⁴⁰ “Stanton Gives up the Goods.”

⁴¹ Owen Gleiberman, “Wall-E,” *Entertainment Weekly*, December 19, 2010, <https://ew.com/article/2008/07/04/wall-e-4/>.

⁴² Ursula Hess and Pascal Thibault, “Darwin and Emotion Expression,” *American Psychologist* 64, no. 2 (2009): 120-128. Wall-E’s Darwinian evolution is discussed in a blogpost by Cortex, “WALL-E and Darwin,” *ScienceBlogs*, July 14, 2008, <https://scienceblogs.com/cortex/2008/07/14/walle-and-darwin>.

⁴³ Brent S. Plate, *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-creation of the World*, 2nd ed., (Columbia University Press, 2017) chapter 5 (pp. 122-150) discusses the importance of faces in cinema.

⁴⁴ Timothy Lawrence, “The Christian Cosmos of Pixar’s Wall-E,” *Anselm Society*, September 5, 2023, <https://www.anselmsociety.org/blog/2023/9/5/the-christian-cosmos-of-pixars-walle>.

⁴⁵ von Mesner, “Times of Ecocide,” 173.

⁴⁶ Lawrence, “Christian Cosmos.”

⁴⁷ Lawrence, “Christian Cosmos.”

⁴⁸ Maureen Lee Lenker, “*WALL-E* turns 10: Andrew Stanton Explains the film’s *Hello, Dolly* Connection,” *Entertainment Weekly*, June 27, 2018, <https://ew.com/movies/2018/06/27/wall-e-anniversary-andrew-stanton-hello-dolly/>.

⁴⁹ Lenker, “*Hello, Dolly* Connection.”

⁵⁰ Herruth, “Life, Love, and Programming,” 57.

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