

Jaime Fitter - Academic Film Review, PRIDE.

I have chosen to do my film review on the light-hearted, comedic retelling of the gay rights movement PRIDE. I chose to write my review on this film because of my own queerness, and the more lighthearted nature of the film as compared to the other choices. I was also more interested in the timeline and topics being discussed in the film, given the impact that they had on my community and people like me in this country. The reason for this being placed at the start of this review is to explain why there may be certain biases and opinions expressed, given my emotional views and experiences from watching this film and the topics that it deals with.

In this review of PRIDE, I want to examine two of the core themes of the film, and some of the smaller, branching themes of the film. These themes are those of Gay Rights, and the Unity of the Oppressed - both of which are expressed throughout the film. To begin with, I want first to state that I enjoyed this film, and its use of humour to lighten the mood on what were dark periods in British history is masterful, removing the bluntness and bleakness that a lot of people associate with this time, especially those who lived through it. The humour shown throughout the film could serve another purpose, however - and that is to take the edge off, so to speak, of the message in the film. As already stated, the main messages or themes of this film are that of gay rights and the unity of oppressed peoples against their oppressors. In this case, the oppressed peoples are those of the LGSM (Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners) and the miners of the Southern Welsh mining village of Onllwyn (see 0:25:50 in PRIDE). Historically, both groups in the time the film is set in, 1984, were facing increasing persecution and oppression by the British government under Margaret Thatcher. Evidence of this can be seen throughout the film, and both characters and objects within the film can be seen to express and inform on this. Two of the best examples of this are the final scene of the film, with a combined



march of the miners and gay rights activists marching for more freedom and equal rights, and during the opening scene of the film, where newsreels from the time can be seen, showing the massed police response to the ongoing miners strike. As to why this is seen as a darker period within British history, both the crackdowns on the miners using their

constitutional rights to strike, and the debilitating effects of the AIDS epidemic on the queer community, as well as the passing of bills such as Section 23, which prohibited any sort of queer education, and even media, within schools, all compound into a dark period for British democracy and freedom of speech. This film takes place before AIDS was seen not as a disease that could be transmitted through touch, and the huge stigma that surrounded the queer community was still making it difficult for any progress to be made. It is also worth bearing in mind that the support of the miners allowed for greater understanding of the AIDS disease to become more readily available, because a united front of workers and normal people showed that the AIDS disease was not stopping queer people from being themselves and getting their voices heard in official ways and forums.

The two examples mentioned above are important in showing that solidarity between oppressed groups allows for greater support for actions, but also for a more united front against oppression and political repression. The first, the triumphant end to the film, is a beautiful culmination of both storytelling and a brilliant reenactment of historical fact - the trucks unloading the miners in the park were really there, and the mining unions arriving were the ones who were really there. The march over London Bridge, right next to Parliament, is an almost shot-for-shot remake of the real life event. The image provided was taken from the Labour Party's official website, from an article written by the first out MP, Angela Eagle, which was in turn sourced from LGSM themselves in 2014, almost 30 years exactly since the picture was taken - a rather poignant choice of an image. The second theme analysed in the above paragraph is the way that a united front of workers, the miners, and other oppressed groups, the LGBTQ+ community, and LGSM especially, was able to overcome the adversity that was placed in their way by the government, and more violently, the Police forces that broke up peaceful demonstrations by mining communities. This can be seen in the next example that I want to talk about - the almost paramilitary use of the Police forces by the government.

The director of this film, Matthew Warchus, is an interesting choice for a film director. His experience lies mostly in musical theatre, something that can be clearly seen in the use of music throughout this film, and has received both an Olivier and Tony award, and currently leads the Old Vic Theatre in London. He has worked on few other films though, with *PRIDE* being his most notable feature film, for which he was nominated for Best Director at the BIFA (British Independent Film Awards) in 2014. His other works, notably "Matilda the Musical" and "Simpatico" have both earned him nominations for other awards as well, and his experience in musical and traditional theatre have definitely had an effect on the tone and execution of this film, with its lighthearted presentation and use of character emotions and acting - even some of the choices for actors, some of whom, like Dominic West, who plays Jonathan Blake, has a vast repertoire of both theatrical and drama acting under his belt. The choice by Warchus to use actors of this calibre is of no surprise given his experience with theatre and previous films that he worked on. The resulting film is one that is very

entertaining, but also remains true to most of its source material and doesn't degrade or downplay it.

The next example I want to examine is the opening shot of the film, and the choice by the filmmakers to show real footage of the Police response to the miners' strike, and how violent that response could be at times. The Police response could, at times, be better referred to as a paramilitary operation, due to the high levels of organisation and coordination between regional and national Police forces. This was heavily influenced by the extra-governmental institute of the ACPO, the Association of Chief Police Officers, which was only disbanded in 2015 and made into the new NPCC, National Police Chiefs Council, which fulfils many of the same obligations as the ACPO. However, the NPCC and ACPO vary in the legality of their authority, as the NPCC is a government run and supported organisation, whereas the ACPO was an extra-governmental non-profit group. The ACPO, as a result, was more able to recommend more violent responses to the miners strike, in an attempt to break up and minimise the effects of the almost year long strike on the British economy. That doesn't, however, excuse the brutal and unnecessary use of force by the Police forces throughout the whole of the miners strike, with events such as the Battle of Orgreave being a gross misuse of Police power and resources. The consolidation of Police resources by the ACPO across regional Police forces allowed for much greater responses to the strike, and gave the separate forces a feeling of support, and presumably, more confidence in their actions. This is represented within the film in both the opening shots and clips of the film, where newsreel footage of the Police response can be seen. It helps to set a theme for how the authorities in the UK will respond to any threat within the film, and by showing actual footage from the mid 1980's, it helps to ground the film and provide a way for the audience to fully grasp what the characters are going up against. Throughout the rest of the film, whenever Police officers are seen, they are providing an "official" presence from the government, as a sort of "strongarm" paramilitary force. Most times that they are on screen, characters in the film are seen to be engaging in violent altercations with them, or in some sort of conflict. The only times that the Police are not seen to be involved in physical or verbal conflict is right at the end of the film, where Police from several different forces arrive to oversee the miners participation in the Pride march. With the knowledge that we have of the ACPO and their ability to coordinate across regional Police lines, we can assume that some of these officers may have come from as far as Wales, given that they arrive with the miners in their own vehicles.

A third point I want to examine from the film is the message that people are stronger together. I have alluded to this throughout my review so far, but I want to examine it in further detail, as I feel that the film does represent it very well. A quote from the film that illustrates this brilliantly is when one of the characters, around the middle of the film (0:32:00), is telling the story of a banner that they use in their push for greater workers rights. "You support me, I support you... that's what the labour movement should be". This is a theme that rings throughout the entire rest of the

film, with the breakaway lesbian group rejoining LGSM at the end of the film, shortly before the march across London bridge takes place, with the final shot of the film being a close up zoom in on the banner being described in the previous quote. This is further reinforced by the character Joe, who shortly before the lesbian group rejoins the greater LGSM group, says "Whether we march with banners or march without, the important thing is that we march together, all of us". The quote is a perfect way for his development as a character to end - he has changed from a quiet, accidental new member of LGSM into a more confident, and intelligent, young man. The point is yet again reinforced by the arrival of the miners to the march's staging ground, a moment which is one, if not the, most jubilant moment in the film.

I want to conclude this review by reiterating a point I chose to make at the start - this film was an incredibly moving watch for me, and on my second and third rewatches remained so. I have tried to keep my biases in check while writing this piece, but it was incredibly difficult and I can only apologise for any breaches of that. However, I think that only goes to show how important a piece of media this is for queer youth, and more so for the queer community in general. I had heard for many years of the deep connections that my community had to the mining communities in Wales, but this film has served to deepen my appreciation and understanding of the incredibly brave and thoughtful sacrifices made by both LGSM, the community of Onllwyn and other small mining villages in Wales. I also want to return to the central point of the film - and that is of the unity of the workers for a greater cause, especially in the face of adversity. In this case, the adversity they face is the total lack of support from the government, as can be seen in the use of the Police to symbolise the authoritarian reach of Thatcher's government. It also bears worth keeping in our minds that the struggle for both workers and queer rights is still ongoing - in my short lifetime, gay marriage has only been recently legalized in 2014, and in Northern Ireland only in 2020 - but in other, less progressive regions of the world, still remains punishable by death or lengthy periods of imprisonment, where queer people suffer awful conditions or are themselves beaten and killed. The ongoing rolling strike in the United Kingdom are an example of how much further we have to go to ensure fair workers rights and the freedom to strike - we all know how destructive recent legislation has been on the right to strike - and is something that we all have to stand up for, and in the most relevant quote from the film "You support me, I support you."

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