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April 30, 2017

Rian Johnson's 2005 film *Brick* has cemented its place in the film canon as a cult film that takes both the coming of age film and film noir and fuses them together in a unique neo noir melting pot. The film centers on a narrative that distinctly takes influence from the classic hardboiled detective story. The film follows a high school student named Brendan Frye as he unravels the tale of drugs, murder, and conspiracy all revolving around his ex-girlfriend Emily, who he finds dead in a storm drain. Throughout his investigation, Brendan meets consistent obstacles found in switchblade-wielding thugs, drug dealers, and other ex-girlfriends and tempting women. The film's narrative content and structure, as well as dialogue, musical score, and stylization is distinctly referential to film noir of the 40s and 50s, all cleverly weaved into a high school coming-of-age story.

The film's narrative content and structure is very distinctly an adaptation of classic film noir. The film's plot itself, of a primarily lone and independent detective taking it upon himself to investigate a murder, in this case, one close to him, is very much like the Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe characters of film noir canon. Brendan could also easily qualify for the role of the anti-hero, a common trope of film noir stories and movies. The anti-hero is a protagonist who is amoral: willing to fight, kill, and steal to complete his or her mission. In the film, Brendan intentionally avoids involving the police, works his way into the drug mafia underground, and doesn't shy away from a violent and often destructive fight. Brendan is mostly looking out for his own best interests, his drive to discover Emily's murderer most likely an act of revenge and disillusionment. The film continues its high school twists on film noir tropes with the character of Laura, who acts as the classic film noir femme fatale. The femme fatale in film noir is flirtatious, sexual, and dangerous, often manipulating the protagonist into his or her demise. In *Brick*,

Laura doesn't manipulate Brendan into a trap, but rather conceals the fact that she was involved with the circumstances that led to Emily's death. Throughout the film, Laura leads Brendan through his investigation, mostly trying to tempt him and distract him with the promise of sex. When they do finally sleep together, it happens to be one of the key moments in Brendan's investigation, as her cigarette matches the one found at the beginning of the film. Laura is cunning and sexual, but is not the ultimate villain, mostly being deceptive instead of leading Brendan into some kind of undoing. She does however, reveal the most devastating part of the story with her telling Brendan that Emily was pregnant with a baby that is most likely his. Instead of the femme fatale leading him into ruin, he instead leaves her to the consequences of her actions with his problems now solved. The film's narrative content even references film noir within its details. Much like a typical film noir, cigarettes are not only very prominent, but actually act as a small plot point, with Laura's specially marked cigarettes helping Brendan fully realize her involvement with Emily's disappearance. Guns and gangsters also find their way into prominent roles in the film. Murder is few and far between, but it mostly takes place at the end of a revolver, a very noir choice of weapon. While drugs didn't often make it into films noir, the search for a missing object, in this case a brick of heroin, is also very common in film noir, with the falcon in *The Maltese Falcon* most likely being the biggest influence.

Structurally, the film operates within some of the techniques used by film noir. Most significantly, *Brick* uses the extended flashback, a storytelling device often used in film noir at the very beginning of the film. The film begins by revealing the murder of Emily, and then builds the previous two days in the subsequent scenes. Additionally, the film plays out in a piece by piece unfolding of an investigation, with clues leading the protagonist through different worlds and new characters, all culminating in a final firefight and ultimate confrontation. Brendan's confrontation of Laura on the football field is much like Sam Spade's confrontation of Brigid

O'Shaughnessy at the end of *The Maltese Falcon*, both films showing the protagonist angrily choosing to give up the woman to punish her for manipulating him.

Stylistically, the film also recalls the tropes of noir very heavily. The film's dialogue in particular, seems to reference the dense, terse, and fast, hardboiled vernacular of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and the like. Brendan speaks quickly, sharply, and with clever metaphors. The musical score similarly seems to call to the days of jazz and blues soundtracking the crime-busting, bourbon-drinking, hardboiled detective and his movements. The score was composed by Nathan Johnson, cousin of director Rian Johnson, and was supposedly influenced by the Angelo Badalamenti score for another neo-noir about the murder of a small town teenager, David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*.

The film's cinematography is equally reminiscent of film noir. *Brick* was shot on 35mm film and often recalls the night-for-night shooting of classic films noir. While not much of the film takes place outside at night, the exterior shots show little color correction, and feel in line with the film noir trope of shooting the environment as it is. The interior shots also adapt film noir's typical chiaroscuro lighting techniques. Many of the shots, especially in the Pin's lair, use few light sources for an emphasized high-contrast effect.

Rian Johnson's film *Brick* is unique in that it not only embraces film noir tropes and conventions, but does so without satirizing, parodying, or mocking them. It is a true neo-noir, and it proves its influences present in its narrative content and structure, as well as its stylistic choices in dialogue, score, and cinematography. The film, having been produced on a low budget in physical locations and with relatively young actors, only further evokes the spirit of the films noir of the 40s and 50s, bringing the most significant and unique qualities of the form to a new kind of story, and in doing so, has created one of the most reviled neo-noir films.