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Fainting Spells

William L. Blizek

University of Nebraska at Omaha, wblizek@unomaha.edu

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Abstract

This is a review of the Sundance short film, *Fainting Spells* (2019), directed by Sky Hopinka.

Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



Fainting Spells (2019), dir. Sky Hopinka

This is a fascinating, challenging, and beautiful film.

Sky Hopinka is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation and a descendant of the Pechanga Band of Luisno Indians. His experimental short film takes us on a journey through the spirit world. It is a meditation on Ho-Chunk traditions, of revival and Sacred History, inspired by the Xawiska. Xawiska is the Ho-Chunk name for the Indian Pipe Plant.

Since this is an experimental film, Hopinka uses landscapes and colors to move us through the spirit world, although the landscapes are not always pleasant, as when we see the burning remnants of a forest fire. But there is also the written word that crosses the screen with the landscapes and colors in the background. There is a conversation going on between the story teller and Xawiska. The latter faints, and faints again, but the story teller revives Xawiska with the smoke from the flower the story teller has plucked from the shoulder of Xawiska and set on fire.

You might spend a good deal of time and effort asking: “what does the movie mean?” But I think it is best to simply experience the film—and there is much to experience, even though it is a short film. Yet, if you must attribute meaning to the film, you may find it in the song that plays at the end:

We evaporate
Without condensation
Heaven is still
Your only expectation