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Brian and Charles

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Brian and Charles

Abstract

This is a film review of *Brian and Charles* (2021), directed by Jim Archer.

Keywords

Robots, Artificial Intelligence, Comedy, Parody

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Author Notes

John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska Omaha. He has been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



Brian and Charles (2021), dir. Jim Archer

Brian lives alone in a farmhouse in the countryside of Wales, quietly inventing useless things that don't work, like a flying cuckoo clock. He uses whatever is at hand or what he finds in junk piles to construct his spontaneous and not very practical creations—and when a found manikin head inspires him to build a robot, he uses an old washing machine and various spare parts to make one.

Of course, it doesn't work; that is, until a thunderstorm mysteriously brings the robot to life, Frankenstein style. But while Victor Frankenstein has horrified by his creation in Mary Shelley's novel, Brian discovers the joys of fatherhood as Charles (as his creation names himself) becomes a playmate and companion. They share a love of cabbage, pillow fights, darts, and dancing.

But like any child, Charles soon develops the surly and willful nature of a teenager, wanting his independence and listening to loud rock music in his room. At the same time, Brian begins a tentative romance with neighbor Hazel, thanks in part to the encouragement of Charles. Having been the isolated eccentric inventor, Brian has now invented his way into something like family life. This idyllic portrait is interrupted by the classic town bully, who steals Charles and threatens to destroy him; this inspires Brian and Hazel to stage a daring rescue, complete with self-designed weapons, and there is a happy ending for this unconventional family even as Brian has to let Charles grow up and go his own way.

The charm of his comedy lies in the talents of its stars David Earl and Chris Hayward, who also co-wrote it. The faux documentary style and quirky dialogue create a most unusual robot story with a most unusual robot, hilariously loveable as much for his ridiculously bulky torso as for his flat mechanical voice. We are reminded that friendship, love, and family can come in unconventional forms, and that communities do and should include all kinds.