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### Spider-Man: Into the Realm of Heroes

Responsibility: a word Spider-Man and every human is familiar with. Spider-Man is a Marvel character created in 1962 by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, and he stands as one of the few grounded and relatable characters in the comic book and superhero genre. This relatability arises from the fact that Spider-Man is a teenager who struggles with school, romance, and all that comes with being an adolescent, while also being a superhero who wants to save people and do the right thing. It is universally acknowledged that Spider-Man and his stories are metaphorical for adolescence, puberty, and becoming a young adult. One of the more recent and the only animated Spider-Man feature film that tackles similar themes is *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018), albeit in a different way. The movie follows Miles Morales's journey of becoming Spider-Man and saving the world along with Spider-People from other dimensions. Miles's journey to become a hero mirrors his journey to become a responsible young adult as he navigates a whole new world influenced by the many mentor figures in his life. The movie is about how being a hero, and a generally good person, requires knowing that we are imperfect, but making tough choices and taking accountability for the consequences of those choices; a theme which is shown in the movie through its plot, character foils, comparisons and contrasts in imagery, visuals, and symbolism.

The movie's plot follows Miles's personal and superhero journeys and how he must rise to the occasion to save the world and his fellow Spider-People. The movie has a somewhat achronological storyline, with multiple backstories and first-person narration sequences. The film mostly follows Miles Morales, a high school student in Brooklyn who reluctantly starts his first day at a new school. Miles has a strained relationship with his father and finds joy and solace with his uncle, Aaron. The inciting force of the movie is a radioactive spider that bites Miles, who finds out the next day that he is a Spider-Man. The conflict of the film occurs when the Spider-Man of Miles's world is unable to stop the main antagonist, Kingpin's, plans to activate a Super-Collider to open up a portal to other dimensions in hopes of seeing his dead family again. Miles hesitates to help and Kingpin kills Spider-Man, but not before he entrusts his job to Miles. Miles later meets Spider-People from other universes who were brought to Miles's world by the Super-Collider and Peter B. Parker becomes a mentor figure to him. Kingpin then ambushes the Spider-People and a chase between Miles in a Spider-Man costume and one of his henchmen, Prowler, commences. Prowler spares Miles after they find out each other's identities and it is revealed that Prowler is Aaron. Kingpin kills Aaron for not doing his job and Miles, distraught over the death of his uncle, seeks revenge. He is motivated to stop the activation of the Super-Collider at all costs, but he is unable to participate in the fight as he cannot control his powers. After some encouraging words from his father, Miles joins the fight against Kingpin and helps his friends return to their respective dimensions. The climax of the film occurs when Miles fights Kingpin on his own and manages to shut down the Super-Collider. In the falling action, Miles talks to his father about Aaron's death and resolves things with him. In the resolution of

the movie, Miles narrates his successful ventures as both Spider-Man and Miles and the lessons he has learnt throughout his journey.

The film portrays accepting imperfection and the courage behind sticking to one's decisions as the essence of being a hero by comparing and contrasting the characters of Miles's mentors through imagery and characterization. Miles's role models for his journey to become Spider-Man are his universe's Spider-Man (hereon referred to as Peter A) and Peter B. Parker (hereon referred to as Peter B), both of whom are drastically different and foils of each other. Peter A is presented as the ideal and epitomical Spider-Man, someone who loves his job and has no problem managing his personal and superhero lives. Peter B is the sadder, more realistic Spider-Man, someone who has seen more defeats than victories and divorces his wife because of his overwhelming superhero responsibilities. Peter A's narrative sequence features him in front of bright blue and white (very pure and optimistic) coloured lights and shows him saving New York accompanied by many glamour shots where he is haloed by light, almost like a saviour. Peter B's narrative sequence features brown and beige (more grounded and mundane) colours and contains shots of his "defeats": burying his aunt, divorcing his wife, and moving into a dingy apartment. At first glance, we see that Peter A is the ideal and Peter B the cautionary tale, however, we soon learn that this is not the case when the theme of choice is applied to them. Peter A is a somewhat flat character who only exists as a hero and actively tells Miles that neither of them have a choice in being Spider-Man. This is why the film kills him off early as he can only exist as an ideal, not a real person. Peter B is a rounded character who has made several bad choices and grows by suffering their consequences. He chose to make shady investments, not have children, and divorce Mary Jane. However, through the course of the film, necessity

forces him to make tough choices, like staying behind to close the Super-Collider as Miles is incapable of doing so. Through his teacher-student relationship with Miles, he finds joy in being Spider-Man again and chooses to give his relationship with Mary Jane another try, realizing that he wants kids. Miles and the audience realizes that Peter B is indeed the more realistic and grounded role model that they should strive towards, someone who is imperfect, yet able to be a hero because he has the courage to make active choices and endures their consequences.

It is only fitting then, that the Spider-Men's antagonist, from a thematic point of view, is someone who avoids the consequences of his active choices and refuses to accept accountability for his actions. The antagonist of the film is Kingpin, and as aforementioned, he wants to activate the Super-Collider to reunite with his wife and son from another dimension. In a flashback, it is revealed that Kingpin's wife and son ran away from him when they saw him try to kill Peter A. They died in a car accident while running away and Kingpin blamed Peter A for their deaths instead of taking accountability for his indirect actions. During the climax of the film when Miles fights Kingpin alone, Kingpin briefly sees his wife and son from another dimension, but when they see him attack another Spider-Man, they run away again. Kingpin cannot accept the reality that his criminal actions will always drive his family away from him and he tries to reverse fate rather than accept it. Meanwhile Miles has the level of introspection to realize that his hesitation to help Peter A at the beginning of the movie played a factor in his death. When he is presented with the opportunity again, Miles chooses to jump into action, even though he cannot control his powers. Kingpin is the antagonist of the film because he cannot take accountability for his own actions and blames the Spider-Men for taking his family away from him, which from a

thematic point of view, if our definition of a hero is someone who accepts the responsibility for their actions, would definitely make Kingpin a villain.

The film further symbolizes Miles's internal conflicts of choice and consequences by drawing thematic and visual similarities to the film's integral concept of quantum mechanics and the multiverse theory and their manifestation in the Super-Collider. The external conflict of the film revolves around deactivating the Super-Collider, a device that can open up portals to other, different dimensions or "multiverses." According to the multiverse interpretation of quantum mechanics, whenever someone makes a choice, there exists a world in which we they didn't make that choice or made a different choice. This leads to multiple, and eventually infinite choices one can make, each one of which will lead one down a path that is unique from the others. This concept is seen in the film with the existence of multiverses in which each Spider-Person walked a different and unique path from the others. This symbol of quantum mechanics and multiple universes is explicitly shown in Miles's decision not to tie his shoelaces. In the beginning of the film, Miles's father and Peter A tell him to tie his shoelaces, with one of his classmates even asking him if he knows his shoelaces are untied, to which he replies "It's a choice." Right after Peter A's death, Miles decides to try out his new superpowers but ends up tripping over his shoelaces, falling, and breaking the override drive to the Super-Collider entrusted to him by Peter A. Miles's active choice to not tie his shoelaces led to him breaking the drive and searching for the information to make a new one, which in turn led to him forming a better relationship with Peter B and meeting the other Spider-People. Much like how the Super-Collider and the film's use of quantum mechanics entails multiple universes with different paths, Miles's choices lead him down different paths, each of which is unique and leads to

different outcomes. The film also develops visual similarities between the Super-Collider and Miles. Each character in the film has their own, unique art style with Miles's being mostly pop-art and graffiti inspired and he is seen graffitiing walls, making pop-art doodles, and even spray painting his Spider-Man costume with bright, neon colours. When the Super-Collider is activated, it emits rays of neon yellow, green, and pink light and the background is covered in neon dots and triangles, similar to Miles's art designs. This way, the film visually and thematically links its internal and external conflicts of choice and the paths those choices lead to.

The theme of *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018) is expected of a Spider-Man movie, but it goes into more depth. The film portrays responsibility and reaching adolescence as accepting one's imperfections, having the courage to make difficult decisions, and having the strength to face the positive and negative consequences of those choices. This theme is reinforced throughout the film through its contrast of Miles's mentors in their characterization and imagery, the antagonist according to the film's thematic structure, and Miles's inner conflict symbolized by scientific concepts integral to the film. The film's rejection of perfection and emphasis on accountability is what makes it a superhero film. In a real world with no perfect role models or great powers, the most one can do is take responsibility for their own actions in order to be heroes or even just generally good people – there is little distinction between the two as Miles says, “Anyone can wear the mask. You could wear the mask. If you didn't know that before, I hope you do now. ‘Cause I'm Spider-Man and I'm not the only one.”

Works Cited

*Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. Directed by Peter Ramsey, Bob Persichetti, and Rodney Rothman, performances by Shameik Moore, Jake Johnson, Hailee Steinfeld, and Mahershala Ali, Columbia Pictures, Sony Pictures Animation, Marvel Entertainment, Sony Pictures Releasing, 2018.