

TOY STORY TIME

The first film in the Toy Story series deals with the joy available to those toys which are willing to dedicate themselves to a particular child's happiness. For Buzz, in discovering he is not unique and autonomous there is, first, despair. Then follows the realization that serving something larger than himself is more satisfying than wallowing in self-pity.

In the second film we are confronted with toys that are 50 years old but in fine shape. Woody's Round-Up Gang is not the diversion of a child but the obsession of a greedy toy collector. As a contrast we are introduced to Wheezy, a squeaker penguin who is relegated to a yard sale when he stops working. Woody, reminded of his admonition from the first film (that being loved by a child is the highest purpose of a toy), makes the important point that when the kid grows up, there is nothing left.

And, it is implied, since toys are immortal to some extent (if they aren't abused they are suspended in time [like the Buzz Lightyears at Al's Toy Barn], or wait for something to happen [Stinky Pete warned Woody that "We have an eternity to spend together in the museum"]), they are punished, sentenced to a living death of abandonment and perpetual despair, like Jessie, whose Emily dismissed her long ago as donation fodder.

Buzz's feeling is that all the toys have is today. Moreover, Woody is falling into the same trap as Buzz did in the first film—Buzz despaired when he found out he wasn't unique, and Woody becomes an egomaniac when he learns that he *is*.

In the third film a great deal of time has passed. Andy has stopped playing with his toys and he is about to go to college—this is the very thing Stinky Pete warned Woody about.

Though Woody and his gang are still in good shape it's not a very fulfilling life. Their predicament recalls an old Russian folk tale in which a man achieves such mastery over Death, thwarting and tricking the destroyer with his cunning, that the man, when he finally tires of life, cannot die; for now Death is afraid and refuses to seize him, and thus he is forced to wander the earth forever.

After trials at daycare and the landfill, Woody and his friends are granted a reprieve and a new chance—a little girl makes them a new home. Lotso, the trilogy's ultimate villain (following Sid and Stinky Pete), embraced evil when he was inadvertently left behind by his owner, long ago. He refuses to accept that a child can be the center of a toy's existence (taking Jessie's *Toy Story 2* attitude to its extreme by refusing to believe he was *ever* loved), and he says something very telling, when trying one last time to coax Woody back to Sunnyside: "We're all just trash waiting to be thrown away."

Isn't Bonnie going to grow up, too? Could there really be a second reprieve from the final consuming fire?

The story here is not really one about toys, but people in the guise of toys. Ultimately these movies reflect two very important truths. One, we are immortal. Though our existence will be drastically altered, we will remain the same conscious beings for all eternity. We are dust, created by God to serve His ends. In Job 41:11, God explains why He does not have to answer Job's questions, why He does not have to relieve Job's suffering or explain why he's

been punished: "Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine."

God makes man, and man makes toys.

Two, there is no joy in serving ourselves or finding an identity in our own uniqueness, skills, or interests. Our existence only makes sense and only has significance in the context of God. Andy and Bonnie are God to the toys. In these two kind and generous people the toys have a purpose and identity. But if they will not live for these kids they will not be happy.

At the end of *Toy Story 2*, Woody tells Buzz that he takes comfort knowing that when their time as playthings comes to an end they'll be together: "...When it all ends, I'll have ol' Buzz Lightyear to keep me company—for infinity and beyond." So even if Andy does forget them, they'll have each other. This just reinforces the theme, for this is not God abandoning His creation—we are being shown how toys, like animals, are not privileged like humans. The three films speak metaphorically, but at a certain point the analogies stop, and we, the audience, find ourselves in contradistinction to the toys. We can be with God forever; we never have to just resign ourselves to an empty hope that fellowship with our fellow man (the blind leading the blind, humanism) will make it all right. What did the toys have left when they were facing the incinerator's heat? They held hands, resigned to death. All they had was each other.

But that's no answer for us. It's a powerful moment, watching these undeniably *human* characters, with all their hopes and longings, taking comfort in each other, ready to accept the inevitability of death with dignity and comradeship.

But if we hold hands on the way to Hell, we're still going to end up in Hell. There is no relying on each other. There could be a Lotso to speed us on our way, and there could be a three-eyed rubber alien to snatch us out of Death's grip at the last moment. Our fellow man can change our lives while we remain in this world, but he can neither help us nor hurt us in the hereafter.

Man makes toys to serve his ends. And God makes man to serve His ends, as well. But we are more than mere toys. We are made in the image of God, with all the privileges and responsibilities pertaining thereto. Though we are dust, we are not consigned to the trash.

The end will come someday, both for these toys and for us. But when it ends for us, it's only the beginning.