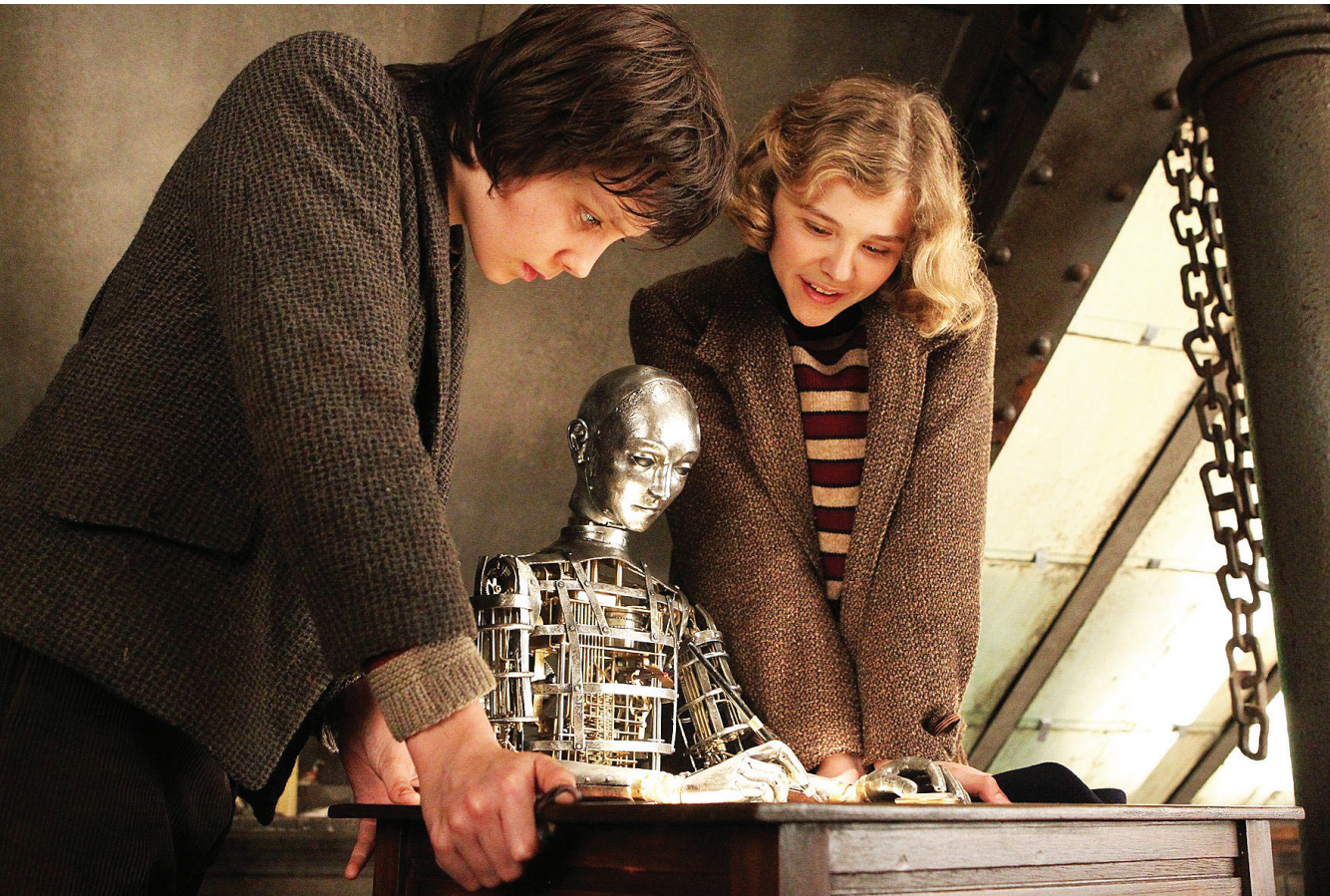


F i l m

# The magic of creation

It may be his first family movie, but life's most fundamental questions are at the heart of Martin Scorsese's visually arresting new film, writes **Alex Baker**



**U**NUSUAL combinations are not new to movies, but when it was announced that one of America's most adult auteurs of the past generation would make a film for children, eyebrows were raised. Martin Scorsese directing a kids' movie? Will Quentin Tarantino be doing an episode of *Teletubbies* next? Are we to see Al Pacino pull a gun on Peppa Pig? Now there's a thought.

Instead of falling prey to the potential laziness which kids' movies seem to bring to otherwise level-headed directors, Scorsese allows the built-in wonder of youth to infuse what is otherwise one big love letter to movies themselves.

*Hugo* revolves around a young boy who lives in the walls of the Montparnasse station in Paris. Alone, his only connection to his past is a clockwork automaton which refuses to start operating. He passes his time by maintaining all the station clocks, while stealing parts from the station's toy shop, hoping they can make the metal figure work. The shop's owner, a wise but sad Ben Kingsley, catches him in the act one day, setting in motion a series of events which, much like the spinning cogs and wheels

which constantly surround Hugo, change people's lives.

Yes, there are typical kids' movie elements. Hugo's constant nemesis is a Clouseau-esque policeman played with pantomime glee by Sasha Baron Cohen (of *Ali G*, *Borat* and *Bruno* fame) who spends most of the time trying to catch him. Certainly for the first half of the film there are enough of these moments to satisfy the younger members of the audience.

But then you come to realise it's still a Scorsese story. The second half is as introspective and melancholy as one of his classic films. There is an insight into broken dreams and failed ambitions which kids simply won't grasp. This is the reason adults will stay to watch.

What stops Scorsese from going full adult, so to speak, is his determination to re-capture our child-like wonder at the magic of cinema. He deliberately chose 3D because of its wow-factor. It most closely re-creates that sense of awe which led the first audiences to see 'moving pictures' to flee the cinema from a short clip of oncoming train.

The clockwork figure at the heart of Hugo's life is a symbol of the brokenness which he, as well as other characters, experience. It is clear something is missing,

that it lacks what Hugo calls a purpose. And everyone, he believes, is only ever truly happy when they fulfil their purpose. In the case of the automaton, there is a literal hole which needs filling before its purpose can be realised.

For those like us who believe in the creator God, this is a recognisable concept. To be created is to be made for a reason – even if that reason, at its most fundamental, is simply to love other people. We understand the need which exists in the soul – the God-shaped hole which atheists mock so readily. And we know how it should be met, whether feeding the homeless, campaigning for justice or evangelising to a friend. We're never more alive than when we fulfil our purpose.

Scorsese knows this. But he also makes it clear that a machine is still just a machine, however well it works. The magic comes from the act of creation.

*Hugo* is a rare thing – a movie for parents and kids alike. The kids will come for the dog-chases, pratfalls and 3D. The parents will stay for Ben Kingsley and for cinephile Martin Scorsese's ode to the men and women, and their dreams, of the early history of film.

● *Hugo* is on general release, certificate U

## THE FINAL WORD

PAUL SHEPPY

### Stifling the Spirit?

**L**ARGER-than-life characters attract more stories to themselves than can all be true. This is as true of the figures of history as it is of our contemporary celebrities.

One such person is the Victorian preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. There are thousands of stories which are told of Spurgeon. Sorting out the true from the fanciful is not always easy, so I cannot guarantee the total veracity of what follows. However, like all the best tales, it bears repeating because the point it makes is important.

So here is the story.

Spurgeon was talking with his students about sermon preparation. He urged the importance of study, which included reading the commentaries. One bold student – you would have had to be bold to challenge Spurgeon – said that he just read the scriptural text and waited for the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth. Our bold student couldn't see why he should read what others had said when he could simply wait for direct inspiration.

There was a silence and then Spurgeon asked the young man, 'Why should the Holy Spirit have to repeat himself just for you when he has spoken already?'

It's just a bit too knock-down a remark to feel completely genuine. After all, if the commentators differ, how do we discern the inspired utterance? Moreover, even if the Spirit has spoken has she said all that there is to say to the commentators I have at my disposal?

However, there is an important lesson to be learnt. Trying to discover everything without learning what is already known is folly. If this applies in the preparation of the sermon, it also applies to the preparation of worship as a whole.

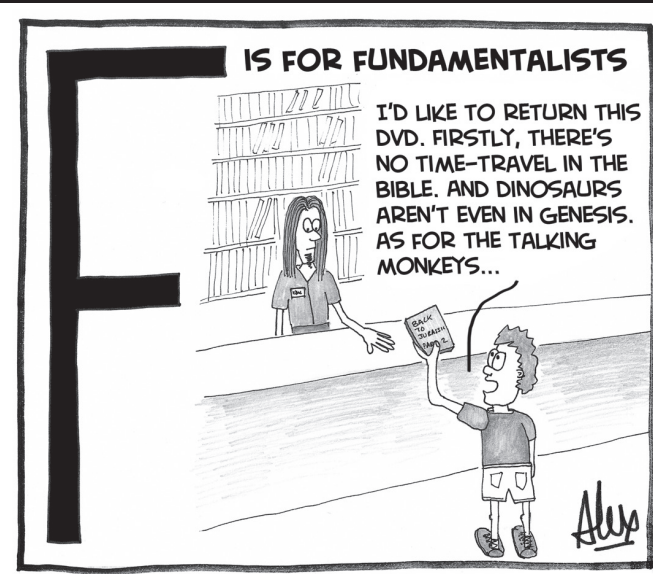
Making it up as you go along rather than following a prepared and rehearsed order may sound spontaneous and therefore more open to the spirit. However, the first appearance of the Spirit in scripture is as a mighty breath or wind turning chaos into order.

Extemporisation demands huge experience and practice. The apparently unstructured nature of 'free' jazz demands of the players an intimate knowledge of how music goes together. Otherwise, it's just noise. Picasso's paintings may have looked strange – even disorganised – to his first viewers. However, if you study Picasso's journey, you discover an underlying skill honed in traditional disciplines.

Dust off those liturgy textbooks – you may learn something...

## CAKE OR DEATH

by alex baker



THE A-Z OF BEING A MODERN CHRISTIAN

See more cartoons at <http://cakeordeathcartoon.wordpress.com/>

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