

“The Wrong Trousers”

Critique/Analysis Short Animation

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“The Wrong Trousers” is an animated short film produced in 1995 by director and animator Nick Park. The film is the second episodic film of a series under the title “Wallace and Gromit. The story centers around an eccentric inventor Wallace and his intelligent dog Gromit. As a birthday gift to Gromit, Wallace reveals the techno-trousers: robotic trouser legs once used by NASA but now re-purposes to walk dogs. Eventually Wallace admits they will need to rent out a room to help pay for their current debts. A mysterious Penguin very quickly becomes the tenant, taking over Gromit’s bedroom and brown-nosing with Wallace. Gromit very quickly develops a grievous jealousy and very quickly decides to leave his good friend forever. Coincidentally Gromit eventually spots and follows the mysterious Penguin who scouts out a diamond exhibit for a planned heist. The next morning the Penguin drops Wallace right into the techno-trousers, puppeteering the robotic monstrosity by remote control and adding a claw device in the form of a helmet placed on Wallace’s head as a tool to grab the diamond. The Penguin eventually uses a sleeping Wallace in the techno-trousers to steal the diamond only to accidentally trick the exhibits alarm system. The film culminates to an incredible train track chase sequence back at Wallace’s house as Gromit comes to the rescue to stop the Penguin and save his best friend. Eventually through a train crash they capture and turn over the Penguin to authorities. The loving friendship of two inventors is once again restored as the techno-trousers walk comedically off unnoticed into the sunset.

The stories themes are sort of film/noir thriller mystery about friendship and deception. Gromit’s friendship and dedication to his fellow inventor and friend are all expressed simple eyebrow motions. The Penguin in the film has even less animate-able features with black beady eyes and orange beak. Wallace on the other hand has a very wide mouth and articulates speaking with heavy exaggerated gestures.

The plot structure is broken down into three acts. The setup is Wallace and Gromit having breakfast with Wallace introducing their new toy contraption: the techno-trousers. The main catalyst is the introduction of a very mysterious lodger Penguin. Two turning points occur in the second act Gromit leaving Wallace out of jealousy of the Penguin and Gromit realizing the diabolical plan the Penguin is devising. The climax is the Penguin stealing the prized diamond from the gallery and trying to get away with the theft. The final confrontation is an amazing model train chase back at Wallace's home. Eventually they capture the Penguin in a bottle and restore their loving friendship over some crackers and cheese.

The actual animation was done by using traditional stop-action animation. Each character has to be modeled in clay and matched to proportions for different shots as the models themselves have to be replaced from wear and dirt over time. Some of the train sequences had to be shot with a moving rig and a long shutter speed to simulate the smeared look of motion blur. The process was tedious and sometimes needed repeating from mistakes. The entire process took about 18 months to complete and the film eventually won the academy award for best animated short in 1995.

There are many examples in the film demonstrating a few of the principles of animation. Just before the heist, the Penguin tries on a red rubber glove and strokes it like styled hair. The rubber glove snaps back and forth as it is released from the Penguin's stroke demonstrating the principle of follow-through. Later in the film Wallace is trapped in the trousers and waving his hands frantically for help as he is run down the street uncontrollably. This is an example of exaggeration. Finally, when Gromit finally corners the Penguin at home, he stands beating a rolling pin. This gives the audience a sense of anticipation that the Gromit is going to give the Penguin a beatdown.

My personal feelings for this film stem back to my childhood and teenage years with my Dad who first introduced me to the Wallace and Gromit series. We would sit around and laugh together sarcastically at this incredible achievement. The tactile realism of organic and non-computer animated art truly ages well. The characters feel so real because you are looking at a real object brought to life by an amazing team of animators. Personally and sadly, I found many of Aardman Animations have lost their special touch and patient dry humor as they progressed technologically. Limitations have ironically shown to produce a more memorable work of animation when it comes to the “Wallace and Gromit” series. Aardman eventually switched over to computer graphics on some of their works which completely pulled away from the wonder and unique feel of classic stop-action animation. It was good to see them recently return to traditional photographic techniques but by then the series was too pressed to create action and movement for the sake of excitement and not story. Hopefully, we can learn to embrace limitation and take from what we do not have and fill it with great story instead.