The Decline of the Hard Bodied Action Hero —or, Peter Parker as a Contemporary Action Hero in Marvel's *Spider-Man Far From Home (2019)*

Sasza Hinton

Bachelor of Arts in Film Studies

hinton.82002@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, action cinema has become more technologically and narratively complex, allowing for more extraordinary on-screen spectacles that leave audiences at the edge of their seats. However, throughout all these transformations, one aspect of the action film has always remained consistent: the emphasis on the strapping male hero. The fearless male heroes we know today, like Rambo and John McClane, were developed during the 1980s and 1990s pure action cycle, where heroes had to embody idealized qualities of masculinity, such as physical strength, courage, and determination. These hard-bodied heroes established a generic standard for decades, creating an unattainable and disconnected standard of masculinity. Contemporary action films, like *Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019),* have begun countering these exaggerated portrayals of masculinity, presenting new action heroes who deviate from the generic convention to embody more nuanced representations of masculinity.

Introduction

While action cinema has undergone substantial narrative and technological advancements over the last few decades, the emphasis on male heroism remains a dominant convention in the genre. Since the early 20th century, male action stars like Robert Taylor, John Wayne, and Christopher Reeve have portrayed heroes who embody the idealized masculine qualities of "physical strength and endurance, self-reliance, courage, social authority, and the freedom to explore novel experiences out of the domestic" (Tasker, Action and Adventure 26). As action sequences grew in complexity and spectacle throughout the 1980s and 1990s, pure action film heroes became hyper-masculine figures who amplified the idealized qualities of their predecessors. Hard-bodied heroes such as John McClane (*Die Hard, 1988*) and Rambo (*First Blood, 1982*) exemplify the well-built, emotionally reserved, sardonic, and seemingly invincible male heroes of the pure action genre. As pure action films grew in popularity, hard-bodied heroes became the standard for male action characters, and even today, remnants of this convention are visible through male action stars like Jason Momoa, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, and Vin Diesel. However, through the contemporary genre hybridization of action, comedy, and melodrama (Gallagher *46),* the male hero has shed his muscle in favor of a more grounded representation of the "every man." One contemporary action film that utilizes this hybridization is Jon Watts's 2019 film *Spider-Man: Far From Home*, starring Tom Holland as Peter Parker, the spider-bitten teenager turned superhero. After the blip—the five-year period where half of all life in the universe was wiped out before being brought back by the Avengers—Peter wants to enjoy a "normal" life during the end-of-year science trip to Europe, where he plans to hang out with his friends and, most importantly, confess his feelings to MJ. However, he is pulled back into his heroic responsibilities when Quentin Beck (aka Mysterio) appears, battling fake elemental monsters created by projection drones. Misled by his grief, Peter transfers his inherited Stark

Citation: Sasza H. (2025) "The Decline of the Hard Bodied Action Hero —or, Peter Parker as a Contemporary Action Hero in Marvel's Spider-Man Far From Home (2019). *Spectrum* Issue No. 14

doi: 10.29173/spectrum259

Received: March 2024

Accepted: October 2024

Published: March 2025

technology to the new "hero," which Beck intends to use to maintain his façade, regardless of how many casualties occur. Unlike the typical hard-bodied hero, Peter Parker is a complex masculine figure who experiences long-lasting pain and engages in intentional comedic exchanges through witty remarks and self-deprecating comments. He also displays a wide range of emotions, including romance and grief. This depth of character distinguishes him from the hard-bodied heroes, giving him more humanistic qualities that make him relatable to contemporary audiences.

The Rise of the Hard-Body Action Hero: A Historical and Social Overview

To fully understand the significance of Peter Parker and his complex representation of masculinity, it is important to consider the historical context that shaped the heroes who came before him. This context sheds light on the societal values and cultural moments that influenced the exaggerated portrayals of masculinity during the pure action cycle. In Chris Dart's article "From Racquetball to Jazzercize: A Look at Iconic '80s Fitness Trends," he discusses the rapid expansion of the fitness industry during the 1980s. "Before 1980, gyms and health clubs were mostly for bodybuilders and serious athletes" (Dart). However, as physical appearance and self-improvement became more important throughout the decade, these spaces became public, allowing anyone to participate in workout classes. Baby Boomers were particularly interested in the emerging fitness culture, as it helped them "fight off impending middle age" (Dart). Many, however, found it daunting to attend a public class, fearing they would perform the routine incorrectly. To combat this growing anxiety, instructional tapes and aerobics television programs became widely available, allowing viewers to engage in high-impact aerobics from the comfort of their homes (Dart). The energetic bodies that decorated the screens starkly contrasted with the frail figures published in the newspapers as the AIDS epidemic emerged in the United States. Fear of sickness was rampant as it took years for researchers to identify the cause of the disease and even longer still to introduce a treatment (History of AIDS). In her book Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era, Susan Jeffords describes the 1980s as an era of bodies (256), as the media continuously focused on stories of health and disease. According to Jeffords, one body became a collective symbol of strength, labor, determination, loyalty, and courage—the fortieth president of the United States, Ronald Reagan.

Not only did Reagan stand tall at his presidential podium during conferences and speeches, but he was a modern-day cowboy who worked tirelessly at his ranch, "chopping wood and riding horses on the trail" (Jeffords 257). In the Reagan imagination, he was the "depiction of the indefatigable, muscular, and invincible masculine body" (Jeffords 257). In other words, he was a hard-bodied man who was "not subject to disease, fatigue, or aging" (Jeffords 257). By 1982, the idea of the hard-bodied hero had transferred from the imagination of the Reagan agenda (Jeffords 257) to the theater screens in films like *First Blood*. With his top-heavy figure (Tasker, Tough Guys 73), Sylvester Stallone was an ideal representation of power and strength. His bulging muscles immediately translated his strength to the audience, especially compared to the "soft body" antagonists, who represented laziness, aging, and weakness (Jeffords 257). Just as Reagan represented the ideals of strength, youth, and invincibility, the bodybuilder figure became the ideal filmic American hard body.

Softening the hard body: the evolution of physicality in action heroes

While many Hollywood stars still conform to this physical ideal of the hard body, it would be an exaggeration to state that Tom Holland is a bodybuilder. Of course, he exercises to get lean for his role as Peter Parker, but he does not build excessive muscle mass like the action stars of the 1980s. Since his comic introduction in 1962, Peter Parker has been written to be one, if not the most relatable character in the Marvel Universe. Creator Stan Lee notes that anyone should be able to look at Spider-Man, whether in comic or film form, and imagine themselves in the suit (Matter). Peter Parker must resemble and behave like the average person to foster this relatability between the audience and the character. While Holland's physique moves away from the aesthetics of the bodybuilder, his lean body is reminiscent of martial artists like Bruce Lee, who build their bodies to skillfully perform quick movements and intricate combat sequences (Tasker, Tough Guys 73). Not only does this physique make him look more like an average man, especially when he is in his character's baggy clothes and superhero suit, but without the excessive muscle mass, the actor can focus on the physicality of the character, which is essential to portraying the wall-clinging, web-swinging hero.

This softer, "every man" physique is also reflected in the long-lasting effects of Peter's physical injuries. Though he can heal quicker than most action heroes due to his superpowers, this does not make him immune to injury or fatigue. Peter's injuries have long-term effects that fluctuate throughout the film. For example, after becoming disoriented and lured onto

doi: 10.29173/spectrum259

train tracks by the villain Quentin Beck, Peter is hit by a train at full speed. Due to his powers, this hit is not fatal, but he struggles to carry his weight as he climbs the side of the train before boarding it. Between each breath that he takes, Peter harshly coughs as he limps to an empty seat, blood staining his hands and his cheek (*Spider-Man: Far From Home,* 01:21:58-01:22:46). Peter's body diverges from the rules of the hard-bodied hero as the pain that the impact of the train causes him does not easily go away. Many of the cuts, especially those across his face, continually reopen, streaming blood down his face throughout the final fight scene with Mysterio. His limp also refuses to go away and follows him throughout Europe. As Peter puts weight on his leg, he winces at the pain and begins limping like he had previously on the train. Peter slowly makes his way through the small town of Broek Op Langedijk and walks through a field of flowers to get to one of the Stark Enterprise jets; his hand grasps at his injured leg—the pain worsening the longer he walks (*Spider-Man: Far From Home,* 01:23:24-01:25:28). Peter's limp begins to fade as he travels to London to destroy Quentin's projection technology. However, this relief is short-lived as his limp fully re-emerges after he is thrown into cars and buildings while battling Beck. The wounds Beck incurs are much like Peter's, with bloody cuts decorating his face as he is thrown around by the explosions of the projection drones and hit with glass. A fatal blow from one of the drones secures Peter's victory against the villain, and after shutting down Beck's operation, Peter again grasps his injured leg, limping across the Tower Bridge to find MJ (*Spider-Man: Far From Home*, 01:43:11-01:49:08).

By contrast, in *First Blood*, Rambo is largely unaffected by his injuries, and the fast-moving narrative quickly sweeps them aside. His muscular body may bleed and bruise, and the initial impact may cause a visible or audible reaction, but the injury does not have a lasting effect on the character. The hero's body is thus superior to that of the antagonist, as their "soft bodies" retain injuries from previous fights or, in more severe cases, lead to their deaths (Jeffords 265). After Rambo escapes from the Sheriff's department and flees into the nearby woods, he is cornered on a high cliff. When Chief Deputy Galt opens fire, Rambo is forced to take a leap of faith to a nearby tree and tumbles through its branches. As he lands on the mossy ground, he wails out in pain and cradles his bloody bicep (*First Blood*, 00:25:11-00:28:35). However, merely one minute after the fall, Rambo begins using his injured arm as if nothing happened. He easily picks up rifles, stabilizes himself on rocks, and even lifts bodies without as much as a grunt. The last time the audience's attention is drawn to the injury itself is when Rambo hastily patches it up, hardly reacting as the curved needle repeatedly penetrates his skin to secure each stitch (*First Blood*, 00:29:39-00:31:45). This injury does not impact him even slightly as he continues to run through the woods and fight Sheriff Teasle's men. Rambo's hard body is contrasted by the soft bodies of his enemies, who experience lasting effects from their injuries. Chief Deputy Galt's injuries, for example, are highlighted by the damage inflicted on his right eye. During Rambo's escape from the Sheriff's Department, he hits, throws, and kicks several officers. Galt is hit in the face several times, which leaves small red marks along his eye socket. These marks develop into a deep purple bruise, and later during his last moments in the film, his eye is drenched in blood after he falls from a helicopter during his raged pursuit of Rambo—a synecdoche of the fatal impact he has suffered (*First Blood*, 00:16:08-00:29:58).

Peter does not heal and move on like Rambo. Nor is his body immune to the harm caused by his rival. Instead, he is equally matched to his villain, and his pain fluctuates and has lasting visible effects, much like Chief Deputy Galt's injuries. Peter recognizes that he is in pain, as we see during the scene where Happy, a Stark Enterprise employee, stitches up the cuts on Peter's shoulder. Peter's face contorts in discomfort as the needle passes through his skin. "I thought you had super strength?" Happy questions as he continues to patch up Peter's injuries. "It still hurts," Peter states before letting out another pained groan (*Spider-Man: Far From Home,* 01:25:45-01:25:57). While hard-bodied heroes like Rambo remove the effects of pain and injury to create an image of an unstoppable man who can continue to fight under any circumstance, Peter is shown to be a hero who will fight for what is right even when it is damaging him. Peter's pain not only humanizes him by showing the audience that, much like us, he is not invincible, but it also amplifies his heroic behavior as he continues to fight even when it could very well lead to his demise.

Humour and Heroism: The Role of Comedy in Defining Masculinity

Intersections of comedic situations within action films are common within the genre. Take, for instance, the historical adventure films of Tyrone Power, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and Burt Lancaster from the mid-1950s. While these films put violence and conflict at the forefront, allowing the male heroes to showcase their extraordinary athletic abilities, they also featured comedic scenes to enhance the audience's entertainment. This comedy could derive from the hero humiliating the antagonist of the film, general clumsiness in battle, and, in the case of Lancaster's character, Captain Vallo in The Crimson Pirate (1952), from the hero dressing in drag (Tasker, Action and Adventure 32). However, as pure

doi: 10.29173/spectrum259

action cinema took over the genre in the 1980s, comedy was placed on the back burner as it undermined the hard-bodied action hero (Tasker, Tough Guys 90). As a result, early pure action films like *First Blood* featured heavier, darker narratives and amplified depictions of on-screen violence through practical and digital effects. In the late 1980s and 1990s, comedy began reintegrating into the spectacle-heavy action genre though the jokes were more tongue-in-cheek than those of the 1950s, allowing the hard-bodied action hero to be funny and witty without undercutting the gravity of his character or situation (Tasker, Action and Adventure 43).

When *Die Hard* was released in 1988, Bruce Willis' character John McClane gained notoriety not solely for his mental and physical strength but also for his continuous foul-mouthed wisecracks, which became some of the most renowned quotes from the film (Tasker, Tough Guys 74). In one scene, while crawling through an air vent to escape the goons chasing him, McClane begins quoting his wife's invitation to the Christmas party that has gone awry, "Come out to the coast. We'll get together, have a few laughs" (*Die Hard*, 00:48:22-00:51:06). While this scene is humorous as it contrasts what the night was supposed to be and what it became, it is a deliberate bit of comedy that does not overshadow the gravity of the situation. Most of the comedy in *Die Hard* follows this format, where McClane uses sardonic wit to reflect and discuss the hostage situation at Nakatomi Towers. After making his way to the roof to get a clear message through to the police, the police radio operator answers as if John McClane were a prank caller. "Attention, whoever you are, this channel's reserved for emergency calls only," the police telephone operator answers sternly. "No fuckin' shit, lady! Does it sound like I'm ordering a pizza?" John yells through the radio, deeply frustrated that he is not being taken seriously when people's lives are at stake (*Die Hard*, 00:44:17-00:44:45). Later, McClane is forced to take severe measures to get the attention of a police officer who is trying to leave the scene. Throwing a dead body down from the tower onto the police car, John yells, "Welcome to the party, pal!" (*Die Hard*, 00:55:15-00:57:20). John McClane is not humorous for the sake of being humorous; all his jokes lead us back to the action unfolding within the film. They constantly reflect the hostage situation, often as a setup or reaction to violence occurring, and remind the audience how brave and strong John McClane is for standing up against his antagonists in such a dangerous situation.

In contrast, the situational comedy in *Spider-Man: Far From* Home reminds audiences of odd things happening in Peter's life. The characters' physical gags, amplified reactions, and verbal jokes are down to earth and do not primarily reflect Peter's bravery and strength; in fact, much of the comedy is at his own expense. For example, during one of the first fight sequences in the film, Peter tries to shoot a web at one of the elemental monsters. The web immediately dissolves as it hits the water-born being, leaving Peter dumbfounded. Unsure of what else to do, Peter focuses on moving people away from the monster, continuing to shoot useless webs at it. When Quentin Beck arrives and seems to know how to fight the monster, Peter offers his service to the new "hero." "Excuse me, sir! I... I can help. Let me help. I'm really strong, and I'm sticky!" he yells from the side of a building. However, being sticky does not seem to entirely work in Peter's favour—as he is attached to the bell tower that the monster has destroyed, Peter hits his head twice on the bell (*Spider-Man: Far From Home*, 00:20:05-00:25:07). This scene illustrates Peter's physical and self-deprecating comedic tactics, which make fun of his shortcomings as a new hero. Unlike the hard-bodied action hero, Peter is a young, awkward kid trying to find his footing as a hero. He makes many mistakes, and as audience members, we are invited to laugh with him as he learns about his powers, how to be a hero, and how to survive high school.

Boys Don't Cry: Narrative Use of Melodrama

Produced by male directors for male audiences, action films historically repressed formal elements of melodrama that would create strong and/or complex emotional bonds, such as romance and grief. Hard-bodied action heroes had to establish their identities through physical actions (Gallagher 45) and verbal communication. The hero's characterization thus stems from the comparison between him and the enemy. This comparative characterization was used several times throughout *Die Hard* to establish the German Hans Gruber as the direct opposite of the all-American hero, John McClane. During the hostage situation, one of the hostages pretends to be a long-time friend of John McClane and convinces Gruber that he can persuade McClane to stop interfering with his heist. In the ensuing radio exchange, McClane realizes the ruse, loses his composure, and begins yelling through the walkie-talkie in an effort to save the hostage, with whom he genuinely has no prior connection. A single gunshot breaks the static silence of the walkie-talkies, and Gruber threatens to kill the other hostages if McClane does not turn over the detonators he has taken (*Die Hard*, 01:20:45-01:25:14). It thus becomes clear that Gruber does not respect or value the lives of others. He is a selfish man who is willing to sacrifice the hostages and his own men to get what he wants from the police, McClane, and the Nakatomi vault. By contrast,

doi: 10.29173/spectrum259

McClane is selfless in his actions as he does everything in his power to keep the hostages and the police safe from the attacks of Gruber's men. This mode of characterization produces simple, idealized male figures who all fit within the mold of the era's Reagan imagination. They are strong, loyal, courageous, and determined (Jeffords 257), and their main goal is to take down a designated enemy who represents inferior masculine traits. Hard-bodied action heroes are thus lacking in complexity due to their reliance on the masculine ideal and the genre's fear of incorporating the traditionally feminine genre of melodrama.

In contrast to the pure action films of the 1980s and 1990s, *Spider-Man: Far From Home* taps into a new contemporary action cinema that "formally and narratively follows patterns developed in popular media geared towards women rather than men" (Gallagher 46). This signifies a reduction of violent spectacle within the film, especially compared to films like *First Blood* and *Terminator* (1984), allowing for a broader reception among growing female audiences. However, men did not find *Spider-Man: Far From Home* any less appealing than these action classics; box-office revenue reveals that it is the second highest-grossing Spider-Man film in the US (Carollo). Along with the reduced violence, the film utilizes romantic and social melodramatic modes of address (Gallagher 46), which allow the male action hero, Peter Parker, to be more complex than those who came before him.

The Romantic Mode of Address

Spider-Man: Far From Home diverges from the typical superhero trope of the love interest catalyzing heroic feats. Most commonly, when a love interest is introduced, a villain emerges to take them prisoner or fatally harm them (Kent 29). These villainous acts force the superhero into action, leading to the violent spectacles of hand-to-hand combat, explosions, gunplay, and the display of superpowers. We see this at work in a previous Spider-Man adaptation, *The Amazing Spider-Man (2014)*, when Peter's love interest, Gwen, is kidnapped by the Green Goblin, and Peter leaps into action in an effort to save her. By contrast, in *Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019),* Peter's love interest, MJ, is no more in danger than anyone else on the school trip. She is seldom singled out as a target, and as a result, she is not the catalyst for Peter's heroic acts.

Before leaving on their school trip to Europe, Peter devises a six-step plan to ask out MJ. The day before the class departs, Peter shares his plan with his best friend Ned, detailing each step clearly:

> "First, I'm gonna sit next to MJ on the flight. Second, I'm gonna buy a dual headphone adapter and watch movies with her the whole time. Third, when we go to Venice, Venice is super famous for making stuff out of glass, right? So I'm gonna buy her a black Dahlia necklace because her favorite flower is the black Dahlia because of, well... the murder. Fourth, when we go to Paris, I'm gonna take her to the top of the Eiffel Tower, give her the necklace, and then fifth, I'm gonna tell her how I feel. And then, sixth, hopefully, she tells me she feels the same way" (*Spider-Man: Far From Home,* 00:04:10-00:04:40).

As Quentin Beck's presence continually meddles with his detailed plan to ask out MJ, Peter attempts to adapt his plan so that he can spend more time around her, clutching onto the black dahlia necklace he has bought her throughout the entirety of their trip. When MJ finally receives the necklace—in London, not Paris as Peter had planned— some of the glass petals have broken off. Peter cups her hand, holding the broken necklace, and apologizes that things did not go according to his plan. However, MJ kisses him, stopping him in his tracks. "I don't really have much luck when it comes to getting close to people. Um... So I lied. I wasn't just watching you because I thought you were Spider-Man," MJ admits awkwardly (*Spider-Man: Far From Home*, 01:49:52-01:50:30). The relationship between Peter and MJ resembles a coming-of-age romance as they begin to explore their growing romantic feelings for each other after being friends throughout high school. Their interactions are awkward and full of nerves, presenting two teenagers who have minimal experience with the significant emotions they are feeling. The softness and sincerity of this romance narrative would rarely be seen within the pure action films of the 1980s and 1990s, as Peter's emotions would be considered too feminized for an action hero.

This is not to say that hard-bodied heroes entirely lacked romance narratives, though they rarely extended past the savior-hero trope. The romance between the hero and his significant other is often incredibly underdeveloped, emotionally dim, or nonexistent until he rescues her from certain death. Take, for example, the romance between Mr. and Mrs. McClane in *Die Hard*. It is quickly stated that the couple rarely spends quality time together, as Holly lives in Los Angeles with the children, and John lives in New York City. Coming to visit for the holidays, any friendly advances shared between them are short-lived as they bicker about Holly choosing to use her maiden name at the office, money, and the strain of living apart (*Die Hard*, 00:14:20-00:16:50). Their romantic feelings for one another are rarely visible to the audience and are only truly discussed at the end of the film when Gruber threatens Holly's life in a final

doi: 10.29173/spectrum259

attempt to get John McClane to back off. Pretending to give himself up, John reaches for the gun taped onto his back so he can shoot Gruber. Gruber falls back along with Holly, John diving to pull her out of the German man's grip. As he pulls his wife to safety, they share an adrenaline-fueled embrace as Gruber falls from the Nakatomi Tower. They kiss once more as they travel away from the scene of the crime, their safety ensured as the credits begin to roll. These two moments of affection are the only romantic moments they share on screen (*Die Hard*, 02:00:30-02:07:30). John, as a hard-bodied hero, cannot allow his romantic feelings to steal focus away from his bravery and strength. Thus, any romance that does appear on screen must be justified by his rescue of the woman from direct peril and the assurance that he has saved the day.

The Social Melodramatic Mode of Address

Peter's grief over his mentor and head of the Avengers, Tony Stark (Iron Man), is reminiscent of the melodrama storylines of the family structure (Gallagher 49). With Tony gone, everyone expects Peter to take over, but he finds it difficult to accept this responsibility. Not only does Peter want a break from being Spider-Man during his summer trip, but he also does not see himself in the role of authority. Peter's grief blinds him as he hands Tony's technology over to Quentin Beck. To beat Quentin, Peter must vocalize his feelings so they are not weighing on him anymore. Peter breaks down in front of Happy, and the two discuss how scared Peter is to fill Tony's shoes. "Everywhere I go... I see his face. And the whole world is asking who's gonna be the next Iron Man, and I don't know if that's me, Happy. I'm not Iron Man." Happy reassures him that even if he did not believe in himself, Tony did. "The one thing he did that he didn't second-guess was picking you" (*Spider-Man: Far From Home*, 01:26:33-01:27:10). Peter does not use grief as fuel for revenge or anger, but rather it personifies him, allowing the audience to engage with him more closely than they did with action heroes in the 1980s and 1990s.

The pure action film *First Blood* also dealt with grief, as John Rambo was the sole living member of his battalion, but his grief served a different purpose narratively than Peter's. After learning that his friend died of cancer, a displaced Rambo travels to Hope, Washington. The Vietnam War veteran is met with great disdain by the Sheriff, who offers him a ride out of town and suggests he shower. When Rambo tries to return, he is arrested by the Sheriff for vagrancy and possession of a concealed weapon. During his take-in, deputies take turns verbally and physically abusing Rambo until he snaps when a straight razor is brought near his neck (*First Blood*, 00:00:00-00:16:10). The build-up of trauma and grief within Rambo becomes a source of his fury, which allows him to fight a one-man war against the town. Rather than allowing processing, understanding, and growing from grief like Peter Parker does, hard-bodied action heroes turn their grief into fury, leaving no room for heroes like Rambo or McClane to experience the wide range of human emotions.

Conclusion

Peter Parker is not a hard-bodied hero. He does not have large muscles or a perfectly sculpted body to display as a figure of idealized masculinity. Nor is he immune to injury, as his encounters leave him battered, bruised, and barely breathing. He is an emotionally complex, comedic hero that audience members of all ages, genders, and races can sympathize with and relate to. Unlike the 1980s and 1990s action heroes, Peter Parker would not come out of a battle against a group of enemies unscathed, but he would have put in his best effort to win the match; if he came up short, he would learn from his mistakes to grow not only as a person but as a hero. While traditional action heroes demand praise for their feats of bravery and strength, Spider-Man, the friendly neighborhood hero, invites audiences to laugh along with his shortcomings. Peter Parker is part of an important evolution in male representations in cinema, providing audiences with an "every man" superhero who can save the day, form strong emotional bonds, and express vulnerability. Rambo's grief thus animates his hard-bodied heroism, while Peter's reminds the audience of his humanity and emotional complexity.

doi: 10.29173/spectrum259

References

Amazing Spider-Man 2, The. Directed by Marc Webb, performances by Andrew Garfield and Emma Stone, Sony Pictures; Marvel Entertainment, 2014. *Disney+*, https://www.disneyplus.com/browse/entity-c21c733a-18f4-4cdc-b1e8-1ff6b996c0a3.

Carollo, Laura. "Highest Grossing Spider-Man Movies Worldwide 2024, by box office revenue." *Statista*, 8 Nov. 2024, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1388739/highest-grossing-spider-man-movie-worldwide-box-office/#:~:text=In%20second%20and%20third%20positions,of%20894.86%20million%20dollars%20respectively.

Dart, Chris. "From Racquetball to Jazzercize: A Look at Iconic '80s Fitness Trends | CBC Life." *CBCnews,* CBC/Radio Canada, 10 July 2018, www.cbc.ca/life/backintimefordinner/from-racquetball-to-jazzercise-a-look-at-iconic-80s-fitness-trends-1.4713251.

Die Hard. Directed by John McTiernan, performances by Bruce Willis and Alan Rickman, Gordon Company; Silver Pictures, 1988, *Disney+*, https://www.disneyplus.com/browse/entity-62d622f0-64bc-433e-b7e4-dcc69341f829.

First Blood. Directed by Ted Kotcheff, performances by Sylvester Stallone and Richard Crenna, Carolco Pictures; The Wallis Interactive; Anabasis Investments N.V, 1982. *Netflix*, https://www.netflix.com/search?q=rambo&jbv=70017963.

Gallagher, M. "I Married Rambo': Action, Spectacle, and Melodrama." *Action Figures: Men, Action Films, and Contemporary Adventure Narratives*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 45-80. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ualberta/detail.action?docID=307561.

"History of AIDS— Epidemic, Timeline & HIV." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 21 Feb, 2021, www.history.com/topics/1980s/history-of-aids#section_3.

Jeffords, Susan. "Hollywood's Hard Bodies: The Stars Who Made the Action Film Famous." *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era.* Rutgers university Press, 1994.

Kent, Miriam. "You Have a Knack for Saving My Life!': Wives, Girlfriends and Women in Refrigerators in Marvel Films." *Women in Marvel Films*, Edinburgh University Press, 2021, pp. 29-46. *JSTOR,* http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv1hm8hmv.6.

Matter, Brittany. "Stan Lee on What Made Spider-Man so Special." *Marvel*, Marvel Entertainment, 13 Nov. 2018, www.marvel.com/articles/comics/stan-lee-on-what-made-spider-man-so-special#.

Spider-Man: Far From Home. Directed by Jon Watts, performances by Tom Holland and Jake Gyllenhaal, Marvel Studies; Columbia Pictures; Pascal Pictures, 2019. *Netflix*, https://www.netflix.com/search?

doi: 10.29173/spectrum259

q=Spiderman%20far%20&jbv=81055822.

Tasker, Yvonne. "Action and Adventure: Historical and Cultural Overview." *The Hollywood Action and Adventure Film,* John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2015, pp. 23-44. *ProQuest Ebook Central,* https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib.ualberta/detail.action?docID=7104343.

—. "Tough Guys and Wise-Guys: Masculinities and Star Images in the Action Cinema" *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. Routledge, 1993, pp. 73-90. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ualberta/detail.action?docID=179873.

doi: 10.29173/spectrum259