

could define such a unit. but NASA and Heaven know it has not been defined. What would we want "half as near" mean? It could be twice as far or half as far?

For that matter, we might wonder what is meant when people use a phrase such as "three times bigger." I know what "my house is three times as big as yours" means, but not what "three times bigger than yours" means. Is that three times as big or four times as big?

I have actually heard a local weather person say today it will be "twice as hot" as yesterday.

Well, I have dwelled on this subject three times longer than it deserves. [-mrl]

WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: Emily Dickinson is usually portrayed as a sort of holy recluse who composed her poetry while living a life of quiet solitude. This semi-serious account of her private life suggests that there is little evidence to corroborate or contradict that interpretation of her emotional life. The film is kept on a speculative and frequently whimsical plane. This is just a light speculative biography that may have narrow appeal. Directed by: Madeleine Olnek; written by: Madeleine Olnek. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

My college undergraduate days I attended the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. There was something about the English department that it held itself in awe and respect for Emily Dickinson, the patron saint of local poetry, the mysterious poet who choose to be a recluse, living in her attic alone and devoting herself to writing very much admired poetry. I wondered as I watched the film what sort of reaction this film would get from the teaching staff of the English department. On one hand it is not often that one has a film devoted to their icon. On the other hand, this film interprets Dickinson's life and poetry in a somewhat irreverent interpretation very different from the usual images of Dickinson.

It is the premise of WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY that Dickinson did have sexual relationships, though not with men. The film shows her close relation with her sister-in-law in conversations constituted of poetry each wrote for the other. Emily's emotional life is portrayed with the choice of certain poems. Emily's brother Austin married Susan Huntington Gilbert and she then became Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson. The two Dickinson women, Emily and Susan, became fast friends and next-door neighbors. However much more than just friends they became is a speculation. Writer/director Madeleine Olnek speculates on Dickinson's relationship is a sort of satire on literary expose's in general.

It would be easy to view this film as just a comedy. Early on the viewers' impression of Dickinson and her friends is just a little too precious for the good of the film. Later it gets down to business, looking at the deep inner woman who was not so eccentric as she appeared. We never really get a good feeling for how Dickinson's gender formed the poet.

In the end one has to ask whether it really matters so much whether a poem was written to a man or a woman, gay or straight. If a poem is attuned to a particular emotion and a certain truth to it does it suddenly need to be reconsidered if it discovered it was written to or for a male or a woman or to a man? In fact, it apparently mattered to Dickinson's contemporaries. In her life the poet sold less than a dozen poems, mostly to the local newspaper. She is known to have written at least 1700.

Dickinson kept the content of her poems very private. Her use of language was very nearly a code to hide what many of the poems actually said, encrypted in obscure use of language. If she had much of any social life, she expressed her thoughts about it in verse. Emily does have some whimsical view of her own writing style. She points out where she avoids rhymes and that her meter is such so her poems can be sung to "Yellow Rose of Texas".

I rate WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY aa low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10.

Release date was April 12, 2019.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5176580/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wild_nights_with_emily

[-mrl]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The lists of Hugo and Retro Hugo finalists were announced last week. In the last few years, they were announced on the Saturday of Easter weekend to coincide with major conventions in England and the United States, and as a result got only minimal coverage in the mainstream media. This year, the announcement was on a Tuesday, and there was much more coverage, not to mention an additional two weeks for the voters to read/view the finalists. (They are no longer called

nominees, because some unscrupulous people would claim they had been nominated for a Hugo on the basis of one or two nominating votes. "Finalists" is less open to ambiguity.) Those extra two weeks will be appreciated, because the ballot has been expanded to six finalists per category rather than five.

I hope to read and comment on all the Retro Hugo fiction and dramatic presentation categories, and possibly the short fiction categories of the current year's ballot. But--quelle surprise!--I have some general comments.

I am pretty sure this is the first time someone has been a finalist both in a fiction category and in an art category (Antoine de Saint-Exupery). It is also the first time a father and son appeared on the same ballot--well, sort of. Fritz Leiber, Jr., is a finalist for three works of fiction; Fritz Leiber, Sr., (the actor) appeared as Franz Liszt in PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1943), a Dramatic Presentation (Long Form) finalist.

C. L. Moore is a four-fiction-work finalist; I believe this is a record for a woman. (Robert A. Heinlein had four nominations for a couple of the years for Retro Hugos.) Seanan McGuire/Mira Grant had five nominations in 2013, but not all were in fiction categories.

Hermann Hesse's THE GLASS BEAD GAME (a.k.a. MAGISTER LUDI) would never have been nominated in 1944, since it was not translated into English until six years later (1949). (Needless to say, MUNCHHAUSEN would not have been nominated either; we were at war with Germany and would not have been looked on favorably even if it had been available, which it wasn't.)

The Dramatic Presentation split makes more sense than a couple of years ago, with the division now being between 84 minutes and 92 minutes. This still puts four feature-length films in with two short cartoons, but it makes more sense than having a Short Form finalist longer than some of the Long Form finalists!

Val Lewton has two finalists in the Long Form category, as does Curt Siodmak. Strangely, one of the finalists (A GUY NAMED JOE) was re-made with the name of one of the other finalists (HEAVEN CAN WAIT); the two 1943 films have nothing in common.

It would be ironic if MUNCHHAUSEN and "Der Fuhrer's Face" both won, but extremely unlikely.

EARTH'S LAST CITADEL makes the novel category by being within the 5% rule, since it seems to be about 38,500 words.

As far as the "current" fiction categories, there is far more diversity than on ballots of even a decade ago. I cannot give you an accurate gender or ethnic breakdown without looking up many of the authors (which probably means I'm losing touch with current science fiction), but from the ones I recognize, it does seem as though things have changed since the times when no one commented on having a ballot that was 90% white males.

As for the Best Series category, well, I have no idea how they expect voters to make an informed choice. The nominees are:

- The Centenal Cycle, by Malka Older (3 novels)
- The Laundry Files, by Charles Stross (9 novels plus short fiction)
- Machineries of Empire, by Yoon Ha Lee (3 novels)
- The October Daye Series, by Seanan McGuire (12 novels plus short fiction)
- The Universe of Xuya, by Aliette de Bodard (7 novels, 3 novellas, and 27 short stories)
- Wayfarers, by Becky Chambers (3 novels)

I defy anyone even to find all the de Bodard stories in time unless they are all included in the packet. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

I think part of the appeal of mathematical logic is
that the formulas look mysterious - You write backward
Es!

--Hilary Putnam

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