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Film Review: *Amélie Poulain; the Silent Heroine on a Quest to bring Happiness into the World.*

Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain is the enchanting story of one woman whose quest is to lighten up the lives of those around her. With a terrific central performance by Audrey Tautou, the film undoubtedly captures the audience instantly. She is wide-eyed and witty; a genius in pursuing happiness and a lover of the unseen world. If you meet Amélie on the road, there is no doubt that her wide charismatic smile would make your whole day lighten up. Her happiness and high spirits make us wonder whether she has never encountered any difficulties in life. Eventually we see her trapped in turmoil, chasing strangers in the streets of Montmartre, trying to find owners of long-lost precious ornaments and a childhood which is shaken by strange coincidences. Despite all her struggles, she musters her warm smile and enlivens the audience with her enthusiasm to help others.

The film is full of magical moments; casting a phantasmagoric effect on its viewers with the bright colors popping out of the screen and the characters busying themselves in their own personal ways. The film begins with the fluttering of the wings of a blue fly, marbles falling on the floor, a man named Eugene Colere who has “erased the name of his best friend Emile Maignot from his address book” (Jeunet), the coins rolling on the floor and little Amélie eating strawberries off her fingertips in swift movements. All these events stand alone as individual stories creating vivid pictures of normal lives. Amélie’s little innocent face comes up on the screen with her wide black eyes which look like two shining beads looking at the world in astonishment. Her childhood is memorable and evidently has a huge effect on the woman she later becomes. A list of things the characters like and don’t like are followed with the voice of the narrator surfacing over the voices of the characters. Characterization is solely encompassed

in the depiction of likes and dislikes. One's habits define oneself seems to be the ideology producer Jean Pierre Jeunet has. This technique of developing characters through a quick peek at their preferences and dislikes evokes humor but also sheds light on each character making them appear highly realistic. As the camera moves and lands on each person on screen, there is a story to tell. From the failed writer sitting at the café to Gina's stalker who eyes her jealously to the air hostess who comes in swiftly in her dashing attire and to her cat, the background voice has a story to tell. The narrator's voice is the predominant narrative technique blending perfectly the visual narrative with words which are carefully and economically chosen. The film achieves movement and creates a mind-bending fascination towards the art of cinematography in creating these little stories about each person on screen.

Amélie's childhood carries a memorable incident when two cars crash in front of her while her little mind is absorbed in the task of capturing the sights above her with her small camera. A neighbor steps out and tells her that it was her fault that the two cars crashed and little Amélie is petrified. She believes what he says and plans to take her revenge by cutting off the television connection of the neighbor at very crucial moments of a football match he is watching. The entire situation is hilarious with little Amélie's stubborn pouting face and mischievous eyes enjoying the results of her revenge. The audience learns that underneath the humor more light is shed on her character. She is stubborn and is determined to get what she wants. She does not like other people making her sad, and in reciprocation she will also make sure that she will not be the cause for someone else's sadness: instead she will make other lives better and happier. One final incident triggers everlasting sorrow in her soul: her mother's unexpected death. The incident is strange, humorous in a very surprising manner and shocking. She dies while leaving the cathedral after having prayed for another child. Ironically, her life ends at the threshold of the

place where she entered wishing for another new life. Even though the first few scenes carry incidents where the characters meet death, there are no actual mourning scenes. The audience does not see Amélie or her father wallowing in tears and in loud mourning, Instead the projection of their sorrow and isolation after the death is hidden in the scene where Amélie is seen pushing the swing with a teddy bear sitting on it and her father building a shrine for the mother. Silence reigns between the two of them and their disconnected father-daughter relationship continuous. Although the characters and the incidents seem to be outlined within a sphere of magic and strangeness, Jeunet adds realism by depicting the heroine as a normal person with normal human obsessions such as cracking crème brulee with a spoon and skipping stones at the St. Martins Canal. Amélie shares this secret of skipping stones with one of the old tenants of her building to equate her with him saying that they both have obsessions.

There are many instances where sounds mix with the scenes on screen blending a fusion between unspoken words and the natural surroundings of each character. Amélie is seen skipping stones at the St. Martins Canal, the noise of the water flowing below her mixes with her silent figure standing on a bridge. The foliage from the trees above throw shadows on the water and bring out a tranquil image. The nature around her seems to be inserted in her own soul, as Amélie finds tranquility in this act of throwing stones at the silent water. The song emitting from the blind man's stereo lying on his lap at the station acts as a medium which surpasses the overwhelming tedium in those who walk on the platform, including Amélie. The scene which shows the childhood of Dominique Bretodeau, the man Amélie helps to be reconciled with his past is related with less words and more sounds. The sound of marbles rolling on the floor creates a spell bounding effect with the tinkling noises of the glass hitting the floor. The marbles are scattered everywhere, and so is Dominique's life. The parallels that are drawn between the

characters and the world around them are at the peak of cinematic artistry.

The people whom she meets to get information about Bretodeau are also stricken with grief and living in sadness. The woman in her building who tells her about the day she received news about her unfaithful husband who “[dies] in a car crash in South America” (Jeunet) The painter Raymond Dufayel who takes pleasure in painting “The Rower’s Lunch” every year. He leads a secluded life and to him art provides refreshment. Sometimes he sees as if the “[the faces] change their moods on purpose when [he is] not looking” (Jeunet).

Amélie encounters the event that will change her destiny on the day Princess Diana meets with an accident. A day the world will remember for many centuries to come, Amélie stoops to pick up the lid of her perfume which rolls on the floor. Her eyes land on the box of which the contents will compel her to restore it to its original owner. Best of cinema can be tricky at times, ranging from direct conclusions to many indirect interpretations, opening up new horizons for the intellectuality of the viewer. The audience can conclude that on the day when a person who made a huge impact on humanity by helping those in need passes away, the heroine of the film gets the chance to embark on her own journey of helping humanity as if an unknown power bestowed this chance on Amélie by taking it away from the famous Princess Diana.

Amélie first encounters Nino groping under the photo booth. He lifts his eyes at Amélie and suddenly runs away. The scene is highly dramatic and Nino becomes one character that will bring happiness to Amélie at the end of the film. Amélie is seen ticking off names in a book while she is trying to find the owner of the old box. She seems to be engrossed in this small hunting trip to install happiness in a man whom she has never known before. She says that she is busy to the lady who invites her to drink tea while checking for Dominique. Her small mission is all that is keeping her happy and away from her isolation. She searches for Dominique Bretodeau

ceaselessly and once humorously walks into a coffin leaving a house where a man by the same name is lying inside. Jeunet employs small moments of humor to keep the audience enthralled, evoking curiosity.

After she tactfully delivers the box to Dominique she also gets to listen to his story. He will reconcile with his past and forgive his daughter. Amélie is overwhelmed and she in a complete daze fuelled with happiness guides a blind man through the streets telling him all the things he is passing. She becomes an angel in human form who gives him vision through her words.

Personally I found the ending to be overly optimistic. Amélie is seen riding through the streets behind Nino on his bike. Happiness has evidently reached her and she has learnt to walk out of the limitations she has put up by reaching out to the society. The saccharine ending seems to be disconnected with the previous events. Of course, everybody loves a happy ending, but in the film, this scene seems to stand alone, away from the more mind blowing scenes the film is full of; the childhood of Amélie, her loneliness and the wise strategies she took to step out into the world.

The film ends in the same way as it was started. A man is seen on the screen who has just found out that “the links in his brains are more than the atoms of the universe.” (Jeunet) The failed poet whom we meet at the beginning of the film is seen walking through the streets, passing a brick wall with a poem by him written on it. The temperature, humidity and the atmospheric pressure are stated by the narrator giving smoothness to the ending. These small incidents show that the world will move on divided among happiness, failures and sadness of all those who live and struggle to overcome their weaknesses. Amélie’s story is not something the entire world will know of; she is a silent heroine, who had the strength to lighten up the lives of

those around her. But her story will definitely be one of the most memorable stories about humanity's quest for happiness.

Work cited

Jeunet, Jean-Pierre, director. *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* UGC-Fox Distribution. 2001.