

# The Celebration of Life and Death in Mexico: A Book of Life Review.

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### Why We Want Fictional Characters to Get Hitched

3/2/2017

By Perri Chastulik



Love-doctor Albert "Hitch" Hitchhins helps his protege Albert Brenneman win Allegra Cole. In the process, he falls for himself in Hitch, a film which serves as a representation of human relationships and the phenomenon

From conventions to fanfiction, fans of any TV, movie, or book series can engage in practices that “outsiders” may find puzzling. One such practice is “shipping,” or wanting two characters who are not romantically involved (or sometimes not even from the same universe) to become a couple (Kircher, 2017). As Abby Norman’s enlightening article from The Mary Sue points out, online fan forums like Tumblr proves even fans ask themselves if shipping makes them “weird” (Norman, 2015). However, there are psychological reasons for the phenomenon, which the

(Tennant, 2005) explores.

Some films, another example of which is *The Wedding Planner* (Shankman, 2001), are love-shippers of sorts whose job it is to bring characters together. *Hitch* has a love-doer who works to help awkward men like Albert Brennaman's dates go well. Alex "The Heartbreaker" has a heart that was broken at a young age, and he pities guys who are never given a chance. He helps confident men get in the way or cold women refuse to look at them. He explains the merits of his job to his skeptical love interest Sarah, as shown below.

Hitch's brand of empathy, Norman argues, is essential to the human ability to connect, and therefore ship fictional characters (Norman, 2015). She also distinguishes between *empathy* and *sympathy*. The latter relates to fictional characters and is less developed in children, which is why they are to be constantly reminded actors are "only pretending" (Norman, 2015). However, we can suspend our disbelief and let ourselves connect with characters, wanting to find the right person.

Raman Passion offers an even simpler reason for shipping in his article *Why Do We Ship?*. At the basic level, people love love (Passion)! Although comedies like *Hitch* are in a bit of a downturn as far as success lately, they are still

and love works its way into nearly every story. As Passion states, people have a need to be with one another and a biological need to continue the species, so they appreciate stories and create their own (Passion, 2017).

Romantic buildup and subtext are two of the main elements of what make a story worthy.” Hitch has both of these in spades. It made the wise choice to focus on the doctor’s attempts to help Albert win Allegra Cole, the girl of his dreams. In the process, he meets and woos Sarah Melas despite her original misgivings. The film shows how these two relationships, and viewers “ship” them all the way to the end. Some viewers turn Albert and Hitch’s “bromance” (a term for an endearing and nearly romantic friendship between two males) into a full relationship based on its growth.

Besides being an entertaining watch, Hitch is like a case study into how people connect with characters and each other. A love-doctor is a fitting metaphor for a shipper. Other films may have a more rabid fan base and more loyal devotion to particular couples, but the phenomenon of shipping itself is at the base level biological, and, at the story level, the character relationships are well-developed.

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## Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: Lifting Art Into the Real World

2/24/2017

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□By Emmanuel Gundran

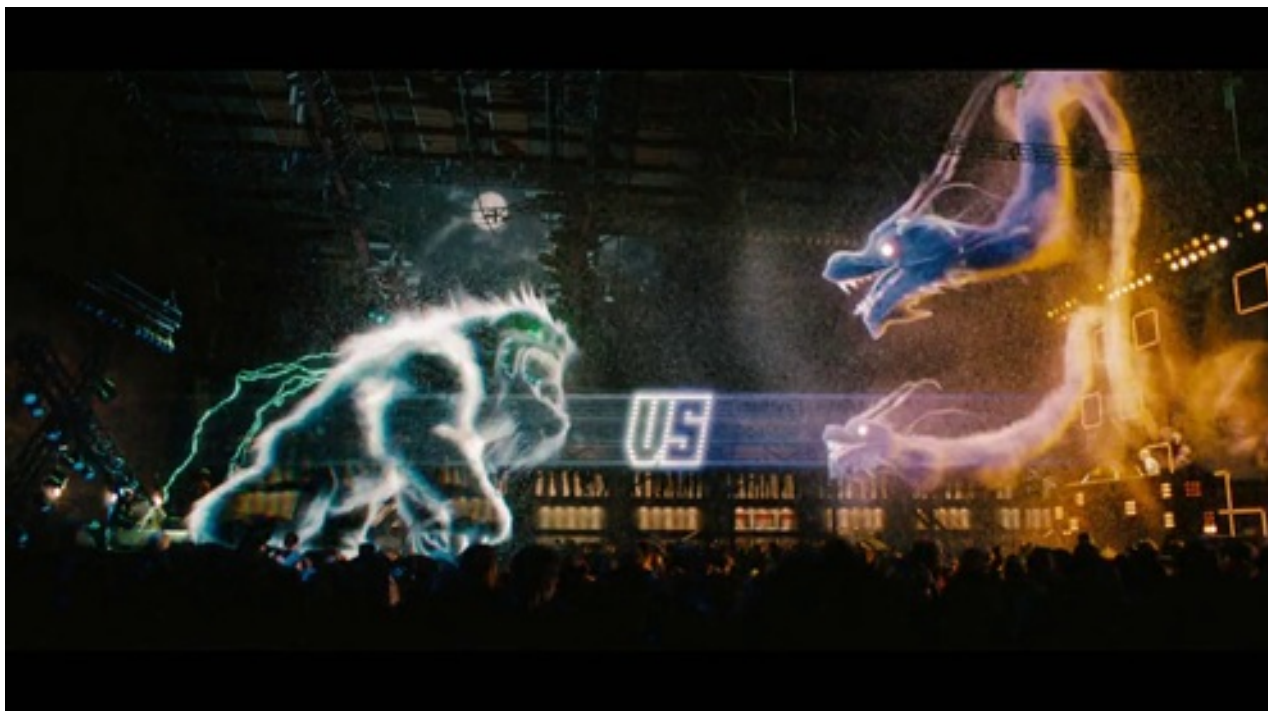
*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (Wright, 2010) is the film adaptation of Bryan Lee O'Malley's award-winning graphic novel. The story follows the story of Scott Pilgrim (Michael Cera), a twenty-three-year-old who needs to get his life together. He lives in a small, dirty apartment across the street from his parents' house, and is dating a seventeen-year-old girl named Ellen Wong (Ellen Wong). Meanwhile, Scott encounters a girl from his dreams named Ramona Flowers (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio), and he instantly falls in love with her. However, before Scott can date Ramona, he needs to fight Ramona's seven exes. This begins Scott's journey to defeat all seven exes while learning to confront himself and his past actions.





Scott Pilgrim's awkward first time meeting Ramona after seeing her in a dream.

A major way in which the film tries to adapt the graphic novel is through replicating its stylized, cartoonish scenes between two characters talking on the phone become like panels in a comic book, and a character's face is covered up with a black bar over their mouth that even Scott can see. During action scenes, characters are drawn in a similar style as characters in modern Japanese manga. One scene has Scott and his band playing against the Katayanagi Twins (Saitou and Ken Katayanagi (Shota Saito), twin Japanese DJ's who dated Ramona at the same time. Scott's band wins the battle of the bands. Scott's band conjures a giant yeti while the Katayanagi's conjure a giant dragon. The abundance of stylization and flair makes the film seem more like an animated film than a live-action film.



Scott Pilgrim vs. the Katayanagi Twins

While the cartoon-style fights and jokes feel more natural for the graphic novel's already Japanese-inspired setting, the same fights and jokes do not mesh quite as well with the film's live action setting. Within the Scott Pilgrim vs. the World, seeing Ramona with brightly-colored hair or Knives having the color of her hair literally punched out of her head.

in a cartoon world. In the live-action Scott Pilgrim film, these same elements don't translate as well from page to a three-dimensional world.

One could argue that, because of the film's overall comedic tone, it would not matter if the animated visual style of the film looks silly compared to the live action elements. However, the film's themes and subject matter make it seem like it is too comedic. Putting aside the numerous video game references and flashy fight scenes, the essential story of *Scott Pilgrim* is about confronting one's past mistakes and maturing as a result. The film, as a result of taking more of a comedic tone, seems to downplay this theme compared to the graphic novel, which spends more time developing Scott's problems with confronting his past and his failed relationships. □



Scott running away from himself

So, accommodate for the change of visual medium would , it would make sense to condense some of

elements of the original source material. On the other hand, would condensing these elements too much lose the spirit of the source material? In the case of *Scott Pilgrim*, much of what makes the series' style so unique is its use of video games and comic books through its visuals. Making a more grounded *Scott Pilgrim* film would risk losing the series' tone. So the alternate solution to this predicament would be to create an animated *Scott Pilgrim* film.

One potential problem with that would be alienating younger audiences because of dealing with more mature themes. *Scott Pilgrim* graphic novels and the live action film deal with sexual relationships and emotional maturity. In the past time, it seemed like animated films were more family-friendly. Then, *Sausage Party* (Tiernan and Vernon 2016) recently released. According to the LA Times, Sony Pictures estimated that the film would make a modest \$20 million on a \$10 million budget. However, opening weekend came and the film made twice its budget with over \$34 million. According to IMDb, made over \$97 million by October 2016. Not only was it financially successful, it also received a mixed response from critics. Nick De Semlyen from Empire Online wrote of the film as "the dumbest movie I've ever seen, but actually smart, subversive and packed with famous voices saying wonderfully unspeakable things." Sony's distribution chief, theorized about the film's success saying that, "[people] long for fresh material that is creative and innovative, something different. But that's if you get it right." (Anderson 2016) □



*Sausage Party*, despite its cartoon-like appearance, is a raunchy adult comedy

With *Sausage Party* and its implications about American film audiences, it seems like an animated *Scott Pilgrim* would have worked if done right, but does this mean that the film should never have been live action to begin with? Despite its initial failure, it has attained a noticeable cult status online. MTV News noted that despite its critical failure, review sites like IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes and its Blu-Ray release, it still fared poorly in the box office. However, some critics have come to praise the film as "a stunning, frenetic, walloping fist of a film that mixes comic books, rock music, and youthful angst into a wonderfully ADD assault on the senses." (Cargill 2016) Even the film's director, Eric Roth, has positive memories of it, as he tweeted on August 12, 2016 that the film aired on Channel 4 in the UK. The film also featured the voices of Edie Whitman and Brie Larson for their involvement in it (Nordine 2016).

Though one can argue that *Scott Pilgrim* could have done better as an animated film, the film that was made did find an audience despite its financial failure.



Scott Pilgrim vs. The World is still beloved by many for its high-energy action and video game-like

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## **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: Confusion Abundant**

2/23/2017

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Martin Freeman as Arthur Dent watches as the Earth comes to its end.

By Nathan Simms

“So long, and thanks for all the fish!” sing a pod of dolphins as they depart planet Earth in the beginning of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Jennings, 2005). The dolphins' departure signals the imminent destruction of the planet, marking the start of a space adventure. The film revolves around Arthur Dent, a rather plain Englishman whose house is destroyed in order to build a bypass. At the same time, an intergalactic government run by the Vogons (slimy, jowled caricatures of bureaucrats and politicians) has marked the Earth for destruction to build a bypass. Dent is rescued from imminent doom, as the Earth is destroyed, by his best friend, Ford Prefect, and Dent catches a ride with the spaceship *Heart of Gold*, a craft under command by the self-kidnapper Zaphod, an egotist searching for the planet Magrathea. Accompanying the President is Trillian, a woman with a short relationship with Dent before she disappeared from Earth. The film follows the group's journey as they search for the planet Magrathea and the supercomputer who contains the ultimate question to life, the universe, and everything. Like most book-to-film adaptations, the film departs from the written text in some ways.

maintains the endearing characters and improbable technology from its textual source; however, the film's Sci-Fi base as it switches to more of a Hollywood-esque romantic comedy in its concluding minutes.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Jennings, 2005) is based on the 1979 novel of the same name. Adams, the book features mostly the same characters and plot structure. While most films depart from their textual counterparts, Adams wrote both the source material and the film, contributing to less of a discrepancy between the two works. However, there are a few departures from the novel. For instance, in the film Trillian, played by Zooey Deschanel, is kidnapped by the Vogons and becomes the focus for Dent to rescue. The Arthur Dent then comes to her aid in a valiant attempt that includes waiting in line to appropriate the correct form for her release. In the novel, the kidnapping and rescue simply happen. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy was also adapted into a radio and TV show prior to the film, and Adams' interviews with them with slightly different plot elements leading to some self-contradiction between the adaptations. In an interview with David Letterman, Adams admitted that the story creates a sense of bafflement and confusion, and he shares that confusion with the readers ("Douglas Adams on David Letterman (14 February 1985)").

The film also includes a large amount of technology and concepts that are confusing. To arrive at Maza Zaphod utilizes the improbability drive on the Heart of Gold. The improbability drive is a completely random drive that transports the ship through every possible location and time until it arrives somewhere in space. The film utilizes an animated Hitchhiker's Guide to show what the improbability drive does. This tool is employed in the film to visualize other impossible technologies such as a point-view-gun, the Babel Fish, and the supercomputer that came up with the answer to "The Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything" (of course, being 42).





After the party finds Deep Thought on Magrathea, they're told that the answer to the ultimate question is 42, but the Earth was originally built as a second supercomputer whose job was to find the Ultimate Question. Arthur is taken to the newly constructed replacement earth that the Magratheans graciously built for the protagonist. When Arthur arrives in his new, old house, the Magratheans try to remove his brain from his body because they believe it is part of the Ultimate Question from the old Earth. Arthur fights back, realizing that the only true question is about whether or not Trillian was the one for him. Here, the film trends into more of a romantic comedy. Arthur and Trillian embrace, kiss, and the hero has won the girl.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy is an absurdly funny film that uses fantastical technology and encourages the audience to think deeply about their lives. The main characters of the film spend the majority of the film chasing a question so preposterously large and insignificant that it cannot possibly be found. Instead, they find meaning in his interpersonal relationship with another human being. And although the film reverts to a romantic comedy, Adams infuses a comedic touch into a fantastic intergalactic adventure.

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## Sing Street's Soul Is In Its Sound

2/20/2017

By Perri Chastulik



"Drive It Like You Stole It," one of the many great songs in *Sing Street*, is a high-powered dance number that metaphor for the film's commentary on living life to the fullest.

Romantic comedies are often criticized for being soulless stories about illogical people doing ridiculous things to each other over. Enter *Sing Street* (John Carney, 2016), the story of an Irish teenager named Cosmo who goes to a school full of bullies and restrictive teachers. He meets a model named Raphina and asks her to be in a (at first fictional) band. He goes on a journey to find other members, create music, grow as a person, and win the girl. It is the music of this film that provides its heart. The characters remain in deeply and profoundly difficult situations and find hope during a bleak period of Ireland's history.

Every film has "music" in the literal sense, i.e. sound elements like dialogue and sound effects. However, music has a particular power to elicit emotion and heighten the power of an image. It increases moments of drama and comedy. *Sing Street* has all of these elements and uses its score effectively to punctuate them. For example, the song "Riddle of the Model" is lighthearted and warm, played in a major key. It plays as Cosmo records the song with his band and listens to the tape of it, smiling. *Sing Street* manages to work against its own cliché in this moment, showing that the boy's life is now about the music; he is fulfilled by playing music as well.

Scott D. Lipscomb and David E. Tolchinsky included an insightful Suzanne K. Langer quote in their paper *Communications*. She says "music has all the earmarks of a true symbolism, except one: the existence of a specific connotation." Viewers can take the songs of *Sing Street* (or any film, for that matter) to mean anything they want. "Riddle of the Model," for instance, is fittingly enigmatic. What it "means" is up to each individual, and its precise function is not essential to the plot or enjoyment of the film. *Sing Street* does not try to create a specific meaning for everyone. Instead, it remembers that dialogue, visuals, and music have to work in harmony. It does so better than many modern romantic comedies, harkening back to the days of *Grease* when every song was used in the moment it was needed.

What distinguishes *Sing Street* from other films is its ability to use music not just to heighten the mood of the genre (romance and comedy, in this case) but also to make every moment feel that much more powerful. Moments like Brendan's breakdown have a fitting backing track. Songs like "Drive It Like You Stole It" or "Up to the Mountains and Back Again" give a feeling of falling in love. The film effectively uses the two main functions of film music; signifying emotion and providing continuity.



*Sing Street* is like its own song in a way, and not just a song of love. As Lucy Boynton, the actress who ] in an interview for The Movie Times, “it is a love story but it’s children so it’s more about growing up everything.” This is the sort of journey with plenty of emotions tied up in it, the kind that there are 1 express. Sometimes only a song can say what is needed in a film.



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## La La Land: Singing its Praises

2/2/2017

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Seb (Ryan Gosling) and Mia (Emma Stone) hold hands during the dreamlike end of *La La Land*, Chazelle, 2016)



by Megan Hess

In 2014, Damien Chazelle dazzled the world with his debut feature, *Whiplash*, the story of a young jazz pianist's power struggle with a sadistic band director. This year, he treated audiences to his sophomore film, *La La Land* (2016) – a movie as different from *Whiplash* as one can possibly imagine. Besides a difference in tone, the film's key elements are music, J.K. Simmons (who has a significantly smaller role this time around – a delightful cameo as the pianist's one-night boss), and the theme.

If there is one thing Chazelle is trying to say in the movies that he has made so far, it is that art is hard and that artistic successes do not just happen by coincidence. I believe this is one reason why the artistic community is so vibrant. *Whiplash* and *La La Land* both orbit around characters whose upward creative paths are blocked by various barriers. For Andrew (Miles Teller), the *Whiplash* protagonist, it is Fletcher's (J.K. Simmons) aggression that quickly turns into emotional and verbal abuse. Conversely, in *La La Land*, Mia (Emma Stone) and Seb (Ryan Gosling) blame their failures on a specific person. Mia desires a full-time acting career, but never gets any further.



and so must continue working as a barista on a Hollywood lot instead of performing in the movies film to open his own jazz club, but has to settle for artistically unfulfilling piano gigs to make money. Fortunately, the film dips its toes into their misery instead of wallowing in it, kicking off with the high-powered techno “Another Day of Sun” before heading off the freeway (where the song takes place, with cast members in cars) and into the real world.



Off to a party, Mia and her roommates hope "someone in the crowd" will help them out of obscurity :  
(*La La Land*, Chazelle, 2016)

Mia and Sebastian have an extended “meet cute,” and go from loathing to love in only a few scenes. Chemistry carries the movie. I cannot imagine two actors more perfectly suited to the roles they play for themselves – “persistent ingenue” and “passionately stubborn artist” are not anything new, but Stone and Gosling bring them with a freshness. Furthermore, the archetypal nature of their roles is part of the charm. For a film that promises to be a musical, however, it does not have nearly enough singing. “Another Day of Sun,” “Someone in the Crowd,” and “City of Stars” promise an experience that the film does not deliver to the end. Although it starts out strongly with show tunes for jazzy instrumentals. While the soundtrack is strong, with several Academy Award nominations, it does not feel quite strong enough. If only they had picked either show tunes in the traditional style or instrumental jazz, or at least made it more even. Deciding on a classic musical score may have meant losing Stone and



while they are both fine vocalists, they could never carry an entire musical between the two of them. *La La Land* is the only film actually well-suited for a Broadway adaptation; perhaps it will happen someday. For any part in the soundtrack, the other elements compensate for it, working together to create the current mood while also upholding the film's overarching positive vibe and reinforcing its message: even when things don't go as expected, know things will be all right in the end.

*La La Land* is the movie from 2016 that everyone should see, simply because everyone can appreciate it as artistic without being inaccessible. If nothing else, it establishes Damien Chazelle as a legitimate filmmaker. His first two features are promising; we will have to see what comes in the future.

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## 50 Years of Martin Scorsese, 40 Years of Taxi Driver

1/13/2017



Scorsese and Cast of *Taxi Driver* (1976) 40 years later.



One will never forget their first Scorsese film. Mine was *Goodfellas*, (the opening sequence both terrified me and drew me in. The violence was striking and the depiction of the criminal underpinnings of New York city in the 1960s are disturbing, and all too realistic. Yet through the moral exploration of violence and crime that has defined Scorsese's career I saw something new to me in the film.



By Mark Young

Scorsese's masterpiece *Taxi Driver* (1976) was greeted with boos when it was first released at the Cannes Film Festival. Although the audience and critical reception was indeed mixed, the film still earned Scorsese the Palme d'Or honor in filmmaking. The cast was recently reunited for the 40th anniversary at the Tribeca Film Festival screening of the film with a panel discussion immediately following.

*Taxi Driver* is the pivotal film in Scorsese's career, where Scorsese moves into making the films that are more about the experience of a young boy growing up in Queens. In *Mean Streets* (1973) Scorsese began to define himself as an auteur. In *Taxi Driver* he had fully come into his own as an auteur. In *Taxi Driver* you see the careful, mindful, and passionate control Scorsese has over his work. An auteur leaves part of themselves in a film. They truly put their soul into it so that it bears such a distinct piece of them that even the most casual moviegoer can recognize the director's "style" is actually the craftsmanship of an auteur.

Counter to Woody Allen's approach where he spends his time romanticizing New York City in *Manhattan* and other New York City films, Scorsese seemed to relish in tearing this image down. New York City is the backdrop for Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. Through Travis Bickle's journey, everything about the city is torn down. We are presented with a barrage of decadence, darkness, and debauchery. Even the images of the city during the day time, the pornographic theaters, or Travis' apartment which is small and disorganized, much like his broken mind.



We see the city through the eyes of this man Travis who we know nothing about. Everyone knows that with him. Albeit the extent of his psychosis is only slowly revealed throughout the film. He begins as trying to recover from the war and descends into questioning if he actually ever was a soldier.

Travis views himself as a soldier, someone on a mission. He sees the city and desires to do something significantly in the few relationships he has, namely the two women Betsy and Iris. Betsy and Iris are inaction. His interactions with these two women, one a young girl, give him the outlet for his frustration in the city.

□

Travis awkward interaction in a cab ride with Senator Palantine sets the stage for his murder plot. Travis sees Palantine as the next president, due in part to his relationship with Betsy. Yet, after Travis has a chance to talk to Palantine, he learns that Palantine is just another suit. A man who will talk about the problems, but seems unwilling to change that Travis deems needed. This interaction proves Palantine is part of the problem. He is part of the system that uses people to suit their own purposes.

Iris is the converse of the problem in the city. She is a victim of the underbelly that is holding her down. Sport's purposes. Where Palantine is a subversive problem Sport is overt. He is a pimp. He is a scum. He knows it. He doesn't really care for Iris, although he may have convinced her he does. Sport is the cancerous cell. Palantine is the cancerous cell.

Travis has convinced himself that his goals are noble. He hopes to save these women from their traps and fix the city. In the end, Travis accomplishes only one of his murderous plots. And in so doing he is hailed as a hero. The pieces of the story together as best they can and decide that instead of the story we have just seen unfold, Travis is a hero. He killed three lowlife degenerates caught up in a child prostitution ring. This megalomaniacal driver, who planned to murder politicians and pimps alike, is hailed a hero simply for the sensationalism that will sell papers. It gives people hope in the midst of this madness. So the narrative the media creates before the jury would convict him if brought to trial.

This speaks to larger problems with the society as a whole. If you take the life of someone deemed scum, it's a problem. If Travis had killed Palantine he would have been considered a villain. He would have taken out someone who is a part of the problem and yet our society has decided it is willing to live with certain kinds of villains and look the other way on others. We ARE the people. WE are the people. The problem with the buttons is not that they are broken but that they speak too much truth. By emphasizing the "We" it shows exactly where the responsibility for the problems lie. By emphasizing the "Are" it makes the people feel as if they have taken action. In reality, they are caught in an incredible cycle of inaction.

The headlights at the end show us a sea of people going about their lives in the city. We lose track of Travis. We wonder if Travis is okay. Who knows if his need for violence is over, or simply satiated for the time being. With no hope, we are left questioning if anything has actually changed.

During the panel discussion at the Tribeca Film Festival, Al Pacino and Al Pacino's brother, Al Pacino, DeNiro jested about being approached daily with his

now infamous line of, “You talking to me?” They all knew at the time that they were making a great film but DeNiro never could have predicted that this line would follow him through four decades.



The film has recently gone through a 4K restoration, effectively bringing this classic into the modern era of filmmaking. Scorsese stated that the film drove him. He could not state explicitly what about the film connected with him he simply knew that, “It had to be made.” This pull controlled the production process. It inspired each actor to take in depth looks into their characters. DeNiro even drove a cab at night for ten days.

Still Jodi Foster revealed that her young age at the time almost cost the film its most iconic shot. She was old and her social worker and mother held firm that her work day could not be extended. Scorsese was on the occasion and captured the ending sequence in a mere two takes. No room was left for error. Scorsese proved his master craftsmanship behind the camera and displayed the violence in a single tracking shot.

Scorsese implied that it was the hardest movie he ever made. The darkness, the grit, and the subject matter pushed him to simply film on video so he could get this film off his chest. “Even though you’re born right in it you don’t feel isolated... and I think we all connected to that,” said DeNiro. The idea that a person is isolated, and struggle with communication in a city of millions is one that still resonates through the years. Everyone can see their self in Travis Bickle.

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## **Amanda Knox: Tragedy Abroad**

1/6/2017

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Amanda Knox pleads her case in this Netflix Documentary (*Amanda Knox*, Blackhurst, McGinn 2016)



By Mark Young

“Foxy Knoxy” read the headlines. The now infamous story of an American girl in Italy is given new light in a beautiful documentary. *Amanda Knox* (Blackhurst, McGinn, 2016) follows the modern wave of crime documentaries that uses the Italian landscape to create a beautiful contrast of the story told. Just like the girl for which *Amanda Knox* will draw you into a story and leave you surprised at every turn. As soon as you think you have figured out you are left to question if this film really is pro-Knox.

The compelling beginning asks the questions that are at the core of human nature. We all like to see a murderer and want to believe that we cannot be the evil that is in the world. However, the filmmakers pose the question in her own words, “Either I’m a psychopath in sheep’s clothing, or I am you.” We are left to find the answer in the story. Can anyone potentially be a murderer, is Amanda Knox innocent, or are we to allow one young



ease our conscience?

Amanda tells the story in her own words. She is not a subject filmed in jail or from afar. Her voice shares her struggles with the investigation, trial, and prison experience. She looks into the camera and pleads for you to know Amanda as a person. We join her in her fear, and eventual joys. As soon as you are willing to take a chance and acquit her, you realize your guard is too low and the ghost of Meredith Kercher calls from the grave.

Rod Blackhurst's cinematography makes this film dazzling to watch. He uses image from high angles and slow zooms to create an atmosphere similar to the feeling the media allegedly had when they became the Amanda Knox. Rod uses the juxtaposition of the Foxy Knoxy label and expertly weaves the beautiful narrative. Although at risk of putting on a misogynistic display, the filmmakers keep the story grounded and humanize Knox. From her point of view, she has undergone persecution and vilification by news media and government alike. The psychological abuse she was allegedly put through, and the way her diaries were used to critique is a level of violation few have undergone, or so she would have you think.

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Journalistic integrity takes a hard hit in this film, Nick Pisa describes the process and his rise to fame because of the Amanda Knox case. Pisa is so ravenous for the next big story that he seems to ignore ethics when devising headlines. More enlightening to the modern problem with journalism is Pisa's unwavering culpability for any role in public perception. More enlightening still are the American journalists who followed the Italian justice system like they didn't know what they were doing. The American's took on the attitude of a citizen abroad regardless of the initial evidence looking unfavorable for young Amanda Knox.

*Amanda Knox* is a compelling story that may not convince you of guilt or innocence. It is a film that shows both sides of the story, Amanda Knox's side. I highly recommend this film for its powerful cinematography. It twists traditional documentary narrative. Even knowing the end, I was surprised at each turn. *Amanda Knox* leaves you satisfied but it will leave you intrigued and talking for days.

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## Disney's New Hercules: A Review of Moana

12/3/2016

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By Emmanuel Gundran



Last week saw the release of Disney's newest animated film *Moana* (Musker and Clements 2016), another addition to Disney's non-Pixar animated films alongside *Zootopia* (Howard and Moore 2016) and *Frozen* (Buck and

The titular character Moana (Auli'i Carvalho) is the daughter of a chief of a Polynesian tribe, who is destined to become the tribe's next leader. However, she has always had a taste for adventure and wants to explore beyond the island's shore. Then, when the island is being eaten away by a mysterious, shadowed force that depletes the resources, Moana takes her chance to travel beyond her island to seek the help of Maui (Dwayne Johnson), a demigod. Together, they go on a journey to bring the heart of Te Fiti, a green gem capable of creating new islands, back to its owner to restore the islands' prosperity.



Maui messing with Moana while she is trying to convince him to go on a journey with her

Polynesian culture and mythology is an unusual but original topic for a kids' film, and it is a way to introduce audiences to another culture. For research purposes, the directors John Musker and Ron Clements traveled to the Pacific Islands (Robinson 2016). They would consult with a group of experts, including anthropologists, linguists, and choreographers on the Polynesian Cultural Center as the Oceanic trust. One of the most significant changes that the directors had to make was to Maui's design. Originally, Maui was shorter and less imposing. Trust members, Hinano Murphy, pushed against this design saying, "Maui is really important" (Robinson 2016). Thus, the Maui shown in the film has a head of long curly hair that, while it was difficult to animate, elicited a humorous reaction from the Trust.



Earlier sketches of Maui that featured a shorter version of the character with short hair

Lin-Manuel Miranda, writer and former star of *Hamilton: An American Musical* (2015), wrote and performed songs that make *Moana* an enjoyable ride. Like *Hercules* (1997) which Musker and Clements also composed musical-style songs to retell a mythological story. Auli'i Carvalho, the voice of Moana, makes her musical performance with "Where You Are" alongside *Hamilton* veterans Christopher Jackson and Philippa Soo and proves to be a Disney and Hollywood's newest star. *Hamilton* fans may recognize the upbeat tune and quick rhymes in "Your Side" in Maui's opening theme "You're Welcome" from *Moana*. Miranda's fast-paced lyrics and cocky performance combine to show the demigod Maui's arrogance and power.





Lin-Manuel Miranda with Moana stars Auli'i Carvalho and Dwayne Johnson

The film's main protagonists character arc that shows that the film writing them. Moana and Maui are bot respective purpose in the world. Mo her to be the village's next chieftain wl by the gods to have immense po adventures, they both learn to use the to save Moana's village and the rest o consuming shadows. In the end, they are lies in their infallible purpose at abilities. *Moana* is an original and enjoy plenty of love and care put into it, ar Disney animation for 2016.

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**Film Review: Café Society**

11/26/2016

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by Megan Hess

If you watch enough films, you will quickly learn one thing about the medium: often, titles deceive. For the scenes in Woody Allen's *Café Society* (Allen, 2016) actually take place in a café – so discard any image of coffee in a cozy little spot. In fact, the less expectations you have for *Café Society*, the better. As with going into *Café Society* without preconceived notions will help you to enjoy the film more.

One of the most important things to know – *Café Society* is not another iteration of *Midnight in Paris* (Allen) events of the two films take place only a decade apart, it is easy to assume they would be similar, but distance between them show. Out of the most recent batch of Woody Allen films, *Midnight in Paris* innovative, witty, and charming, with the kind of cast less-established directors dream of getting for the shares almost nothing with *Midnight in Paris*, and, as a result, isn't anything close to the same experience. *Café Society* dreamy, fluid, time and characters who draw viewers in, it marches along on a strict track, and the

audience at a distance. It has the ability to be many things all at once: Allen's take on the trope of movie covering "Old Hollywood," a rags-to-riches narrative, a Philip Roth novel that Philip Roth never cluttered, know that *Café Society* is anything but. In contrast, it is a simplistic coming-of-age, self-discovery, *Café Society* is almost too simple, like Allen exerted only the minimal effort to make it. Overall, pleasant.



Bobby Dorfmann (Jesse Eisenberg) talks to his uncle's friends at a Hollywood party (*Café Society*, Allen, 2016).

Despite its perceived narrative shortcomings, *Café Society* succeeds in other areas. It has a strong aesthetic that echoes the theme of minimalist restraint in the production: intriguing, but balanced – never a spectacle or a crowd scene at parties. I found the costumes particularly noteworthy, especially in the party and night scenes where they embrace luxury and decadence without going overboard. Although *Café Society* is primarily a serious drama, it has some humorous moments, which are some of its highlights. Two worth mentioning: a *Catcher in the Rye*-esque scene when protagonist Bobby Dorfmann (Jesse Eisenberg) hires a prostitute, and a running gag with Bobby's brother Ben (Corey Stoll) murdering his enemies and encasing their corpses in concrete. These elements are necessary and appreciated in a deceptively light film like *Café Society*.

For all its supposed glamour, *Café Society* is really a reflection on lost love. Bobby does not expect to find more than a job with his uncle, Phil Stern, a successful movie producer (Steve Carell) when he leaves the Bronx. Instead, he ends up meeting Vonnie (Kristen Stewart), a woman who captivates him from their first meeting. Bobby, aside from his desire for her, even after she leaves him to marry another man (a predictable twist, but engaging due to its familiarity), and he returns to New York, but fate keeps stirring up the ashes of their romance. All



convention at the end of the film, refusing to bring the lovers apart – a decision I respect. It makes for a depressing ending, but letting them end up together would just be pandering to convention.



Bobby and his wife Veronica (Blake Lively) celebrate New Year's Eve at the nightclub he owns (*Café Soci*

In short, *Café Society* is a good unconventional love story. For those who want to see Jesse Eisenberg suited to than Lex Luthor in *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Snyder, 2016) but have already watch (Fincher, 2010) and *The End of the Tour* (Ponsoldt, 2015) I would recommend *Café Society*. Neither a consuming thinkpiece, it makes an ideal movie night choice because of how inoffensive it is. *Café Soci* deep questions; on the contrary, like Bobby and the nightclub he ends up running, it just wants to ente

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[□ Second and Third-Wave Feminist Values and Culture in "The Stepford Wive](#)

11/22/2016

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by Megan Hess

At first, Ira Levin's novel *The Stepford Wives* seems made for the screen. His other most recognized works, *Brazil* and *Rosemary's Baby* – both became successful films featuring big-name stars of the day: Gregory Peck in *Brazil* (Schaffner, 1978) and Mia Farrow, in *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski, 1968). *The Stepford Wives* has been adapted several times now, but, like F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* – another slim, power-packed volume that has inspired many retellings (Clayton, 1974 and Lurhmann, 2013, respectively) – filmmakers just cannot seem to get it right only because of *Stepford Wives*' exquisitely subtle satire. In his afterword to the perennial edition, Straub states that the book is frequently misread because of its physical brevity, meaning many readers miss its "Olympian humor" (Straub). The first *Stepford Wives* film (Forbes, 1975) is too serious, while the 21st-century adaptation (2004) sidesteps the seriousness entirely, hitting viewers over the head with humor.





One particularly unsubtle moment in the 2004 *Stepford Wives* (Oz).

As unsuccessfully as these films communicate the essence of Levin's manuscript, they are not bad film finds, adapting an excellent novel for the screen is a challenging task. In my mind, no big-screen experience can match reading Levin's crystalline prose and experiencing the giftedness for plot that causes Stephen King to call him "the watchmaker of the suspense novel" instead of having it filtered through a screenwriter. However, one element only found in the cinematic adaptations is their portrayals of second and third wave feminist values. The majority of gender studies scholars classify the modern feminist movement into three waves, each with distinctive flavors and concerns. In this piece, I will focus on second and third wave feminism, which took root in the 1960s'-70s', and the 1990s-present, respectively.

Both *The Stepford Wives* novel and the first movie came about during the second wave, so it stands to reason that themes of second-wave feminism would appear in the film – and they do. For example, protagonist Joanna Ross (Julia Roberts) and her friends Bobbie Markowe (Paula Prentiss) and Charmaine Wimperis (Tina Louise) attend a "consciousness-raising" session. This was a popular activity for late-20th century feminists, where women gathered and discussed personal, political, and social issues. However, well-intentioned Joanna, Bobbie, and Charmaine, along with other Stepford wives, foil the meeting by monopolizing the discussion with cleaning tips. While Levin's novel suggests what leads the men of Stepford to begin killing their wives and replacing them with animatronic dummies, the film interprets this as a dramatic fear reaction to the second-wave feminist movement. Many women were resistant to hold the same sociocultural roles they always had – roles which benefitted men. Their efforts to gain equality in domestic and professional spaces threatened men's status as the dominant group. Levin's novel and the first film both reflect a cultural anxiety, as expressed by televangelist Pat Robertson's infamous quote – "The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women."

socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill the witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians” (Bentz, 1) – but his statement accurately describes and women were feeling as the second wave rose up and continued to flourish. The 1975 *Stepford Wives* whitewashed quality of second-wave feminism. Late in Levin’s novel, after most of her other friends have become robots, Joanna befriends Ruthanne Henry, a new resident and the first African-American woman in *Stepford Wives*. The 2004 *Stepford Wives* movie removes her from the plot entirely. While the 2004 version of *The Stepford Wives* has more color, it is, for the most part, equally white-centric, one of the only qualities it shares with its predecessor.



The women of Stepford, all dressed up for their morning aerobics class (Oz, 2004).

Instead of successfully bringing the chilling cautionary tale of Stepford into the new millennium, the movie received a poor critical reception because it was “heavily re-edited and re-written following test screenings and other scenes shot and others deleted. The attempts to cater to audience tastes backfired as the new edits introduced continuity errors and major story problems” (IMDB). The most significant rewrite – besides the reveal that Claire Wellington (Glenn Close) is behind the swap – is a new ending, where Joanna escapes being turned into a housewife, and things end happily for most everyone involved. The 2004 *Stepford Wives* is unquestionably inaccurate with the original manuscript, but spot-on in the way it captures the tenets and traditions of third-wave feminism. Part of the reason the Stepford women seem so odd and backward is because they do not jive with her vision of “women:



However, the high value third-wave feminism puts upon freedom of choice also explains why she seriously question the Stepford status quo until much later. 2004 *Stepford Wives* is much more sex-*Stepford Wives* film, which speaks to the sex-positivity of third-wave feminism, and even has two Step half of the town's (and the movie's) only gay couple[1], as well as Claire's husband, Mike (Christop keeps her maiden name because that is more commonly seen today than it was in the 1970s,' although than women taking their spouses' name.

As I have displayed here, film adaptations of *The Stepford Wives* take on qualities of the dominant femi that this is inescapable, due to the nature of the source material, which was so heavily steeped in a ti movement flourished. Even if another filmmaker were to attempt to remake the film and be as accur possible during the creative process, I believe that modern values and attitudes would still be present.

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[1]Whether this is a gesture of inclusivity or tokenism is up to individual interpretation.

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