

The French film, "Amélie", directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet and released in 2001, is a beautifully painted tale bursting with vivid colors and characters. You are drawn in and allowed to lose yourself in every perfect detail for a few hours, attempting to absorb all you can. You are savoring a wonderful treat as you enjoy the talented performances of Audrey Tautou as Amélie, Mathieu Kassovitz as Nino Quincampoix, Serge Merlin as the "Glass Man", Dominique Pinon as Joseph, and Rufus as Amélie's father and drink in the wonderful cinematography done by Bruno Delbonnel. At the onset of the film it is unclear where scriptwriters, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Guillaume Laurant, are headed with the random facts we are given, such as that Amélie's father does not like to urinate next to another man. It is soon evident; however, that every article of clothing, phrase and camera angle has been given as much thought and care as even the smallest detail in a Renoir masterpiece. This is an outstanding movie that does not lose any of its magic when viewed again and again. "Amélie" more than deserves the rating of four stars as it had a goal to more than entertain, but also to inspire.

Amélie grew up the only child of an ex-army doctor and a schoolteacher. Because of her father's conviction that she had a heart murmur, Amélie was taught by her mother at home and kept company only by her own active imagination. When she left home as an adult, she became a waitress in a café, continuing to live her solitary life; taking pleasure in skipping stones on the water, and making up questions about the world around her. When she discovers a small box full of a child's treasures, she becomes set on a course of finding the owner of this box. The discovery of this box serves as a catalyst for change in Amélie's life as she becomes determined to help people find a little bit of happiness by doing secret acts of kindness for them. With each good deed she

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performs for another, she comes closer to getting the strength to leave her safe, lonely world and pursue her own happiness, which lies ultimately with Nino. Nino and Amélie are kindred spirits, both possessing a shy, but adventurous nature. At first afraid to approach Nino directly, Amélie entices him with phone calls, pictures, and notes.

Finally, with the encouragement of her painter neighbor, "The Glass Man", she pushes aside the last of her fears, opens her apartment door to go in search of Nino, only to find herself face to face with him. Only when Amélie became the strong person she was

meant to be was she able to be with her prince and bring to a close this chapter of her fairy tale.

Often films about love can have too much beauty and this can potentially overpower the viewer, while one with not enough beauty may lose one's interest.

"Amélie" has a wonderful balance of light and shadow, and bright and dull colors which results in very appealing visual images. The shadows, such as Amélie's profile as she slips the video under her neighbor's doormat, add an element of beauty to the film, that the viewer would probably not even miss were it not there, but gains so much by it being there. The bright colors in every scene make you feel as if you are watching a vibrant painting in motion where even a normally dull shade of brown is full of richness. Red is the color with the most dominant presence, usually accompanied by varying shades of green. It may not be possible for someone to fall in love with a film simply because of its visual appeal, but I must admit that I have come close.

Perhaps the director, Jeunet, meant for the visual aspects of the film to be demonstrative of Amélie's own imaginative nature and view of the world. Amélie's creative and colorful aspect of her personality is evident in the way she goes about

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helping those around her. Being a person of an unimposing character, she draws no attention to herself with her somewhat saintly acts, but remains anonymous. She realizes that surprises and mysteries are what bring joy to what can sometimes be gray, dull lives. The complex way in which she goes about helping others is revealing of what a complex person she is inside. She is not merely a shy, young lady, but she is also a sensual and adventurous woman. It is her unselfishness that endears her to the audience, but which also brings her to fear that she will allow life to completely pass her by if she spends it in an attempt to only make others happy. If she uses all her energy toward promoting the happiness of others, then she will have none left to see to her own. While you want her happiness as well, you are left wondering what delightful surprise she would have planned for you if only you resided in the same world as she.

Every main character in this film learns a lesson of one kind or another. They are all lessons of love in some form or another, whether it is the grocer needing to learn to show common courtesy to others or Joseph, the obsessed café patron, learning to fall in love with someone new. It could further be said that every character in this film has their own personal obsession; Amélie with helping others, Nino with collecting photo-booth pictures, Amélie's father with his dead wife's shrine, the "Glass Man" with his Renoir reproductions, and Madeleine, the concierge, with the love letters from her dead husband. Ultimately these people must learn to not let their obsessions become the only thing that defines who they are. While some of them are on their way towards escaping such a fate, we may never know if Joseph will be able to allow any woman he is involved with be free for one moment of his scrutinizing glare or if Madeleine will ever stop polishing the glass covering the picture of her dead husband.

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Bringing to life such eclectic and complicated characters as Amélie and Nino truly must have been challenging for the actors. They succeeded so greatly; however, that I never saw an actor pretending to be someone else on the screen, but saw only Amélie, Nino, Georgette, or the simple-minded grocer's assistant. The voice of the narrator also brings us further into the film, allowing us to be privilege to information that otherwise we would be without. The actors' dialogue is delivered without any awkwardness and flows as smoothly as lines of poetry. When Amélie is quickly guiding the blind man through the streets of Paris, the rhythm of her speech matches her steps and almost has a musical quality to it. At other times she speaks with a subdued voice, but in her quietness the cliché holds true, as her eyes truly do the speaking for her and no words are necessary.

This film is at its very roots, the well-worn fairy tale where the princess gets her prince in the end. The archetype of the fairy tale is something that people may never grow tired of, but if Jeunet had approached this from that perspective alone, we would never have had the pleasure of experiencing such a colorful and enjoyable film. He succeeded in delivering the viewer that happily-ever-after fantasy, but packaged it in such a way that left me feeling like I was experiencing a delicious bite of a chocolate for the very first time. What more could a director desire than to have his work give incredible pleasure and the inspiration for creativity and adventure?

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