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# Itchy, Tasty:

## Resident Evil's Forays Into Film

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In 1997, George A. Romero directed a Japan-only commercial for Biohazard 2, known internationally as Resident Evil 2. The brief commercial depicted live-action renditions of the game's protagonists, Claire Redfield and Leon Kennedy, in battle with zombies in the primary setting of the game, the Raccoon City Police Station. This commercial marked an important turn in the series' direction, while also increasing the scale at which the series was moving in its evolution. During the franchise's fledgling years, cinematic ambitions were clear from the start. The classic run of Resident Evil 1 through 3 all featured the use of fixed camera angles, giving the games a cinematic flair that helped them stand apart from their contemporaries, and allowing for a level of directorial control that wouldn't be possible with a player-controlled camera. Beyond the camera angles, Cinema's influence on Resident Evil was evident. Horror is often iterative, always building on what came before, and Resident Evil has never been an exception. Resident Evil has always played to genre tropes of zombies and monsters, corporations and conspiracies. This tapestry of influence works well within these early games, as these games are not only foundational within their franchise, but to games as an art form in general, being foundational titles as games were attaining a greater focus on narrative and storytelling. As Resident Evil grew in scope and popularity, the idea of taking these cinematic ambitions and following all the way through on them towards actual cinema became a reality.

In 2002, after 5 years of fraught development including an early script by George A. Romero himself, *Resident Evil* was finally released. Directed by Paul W.S. Anderson and starring Milla Jovovich, the film was critically panned but financially performed very well, leading to what amounted to a 6 film franchise, each sequel getting further and further away from the relatively quaint roots of the first film.

This first film is rooted in many influences, and captures different moments in the pop culture of the time. On one hand, the film is absolutely steeped in what many people have coined "nu-metal cinema", marked not only by the nu-metal stylings of the soundtrack, but by the fast-paced editing and slick, cold, and sterile sets that combined Y2K futurism with industrial grime. On the other hand, the film resonates within the zeitgeist of Resident Evil in its contemporary era. By 2002, the series was in a transitional period. The formula the series was following was slowly becoming stale and tired to many, and despite releasing an utterly fantastic remake of the first game that same year, it became clear change was needed. Change, however, was on the horizon. As the series continued to embrace the shift from survival horror to horror-tinged action, the Resident Evil movie was caught in the middle, at once trying to invoke the desperate horror of the original games with overwhelming odds against the protagonists, while also featuring a scene where Alice (Milla Jovovich in what has become her signature role) does a wall run into kicking a zombie dog mid-air in slow motion. This contrast captures the absurdities of Resident Evil, where at once the protagonists are backflipping acrobats performing suplexes on zombies, but will also be royally screwed if they run out of ammo for their handguns. For its part, the film is successful in balancing these two worlds, creating a unique atmosphere that puts it right alongside its game counterparts. The film also proved influential within the franchise itself, with one of the film's best setpieces, the laser hallway, being directly adapted 3 years later by Resident Evil 4. Narratively, the film follows an entirely new story, not adapting any of the games directly save for a few choice elements such as a mansion harboring an underground experimental laboratory, a pharmaceutical company known as Umbrella owning and operating said laboratory, and a virus causing the outbreak of zombies, the T-Virus. The characters are wholly original, portrayed by a good cast, with great turns from Milla Jovovich and Anderson-regular Colin Salmon being my personal highlights. The film, like much of Anderson's work from around this era, is quite the treat visually. Paul WS Anderson has always had an eye for cinematography, evident in not only this film but his other work, such as the first *Alien Vs. Predator* film, and the woefully underrated *Event Horizon*. Here, Anderson emphasizes the cold hostility of the facility, and when the action ramps up, Anderson's eye for action and devotion to the rule of cool shines through. Overall, the film proves to be a solid encapsulation of the *vibe* of Resident Evil, adapting its essence rather than its individual narratives.

Following the success of Resident Evil's first jump to the silver screen, five sequels were released over the course of 14 years, culminating with *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter*, a film made as an ending to a series that, as it went on and became increasingly bizarre and over the top, had no clear conclusion. By the end, Alice was still the lead, but she was sharing the space with odd interpretations of the game's central cast, following the film's own unique canon while still trying to incorporate franchise icons like Leon Kennedy and Ada Wong, almost entirely because of their icon status, relevancy to the plot be damned. Beyond this, several CGI-animated direct-to-video films were released, intended to be canon supplements to the games, with varying scales of quality. In 2021, *Resident Evil: Welcome To Raccoon City* was released. Initially promised as a love letter adaption of Resident Evil 1 and 2, the film failed in this regard, as its biggest failing (of many) is trying to balance two extremely different stories with different intentions and scales. The first Resident Evil game was all about the claustrophobic tension of being trapped in a maze of a mansion, never quite knowing what was around the corner, and Resident Evil 2 upped the ante by bringing the conflict to the gritty streets of Raccoon City, leading to a more sprawling adventure that goes from a police station all the way to a truly behemoth laboratory. As one can imagine, these two stories do not mix well, particularly while still trying to maintain a 90-minute runtime and tight budget. For what it's worth, there's some occasional good set design, and the film has



a good cast, a cast deserving of a much better movie.

Despite this run of bad luck cinematically for Resident Evil, the future seems bright. As the game series has gone through a tonal reboot starting with Resident Evil 7: Biohazard that has since reinvigorated the franchise, a new film has been in development from Zach Cregger of *Barbarian* and *Weapons* fame. Beyond Resident Evil, video game adaptations have turned a new leaf from the days of Uwe Boll, with series' like The Last of Us and Fallout proving to not only be fan favorites but genuine mainstream successes as well. Perhaps this newfound public appreciation and recognition of video game adaptations, combined with the directorial guidance of one the hottest working directors in horror, can lead to a Resident Evil film that captures not only the vibe and essence of the series, but the true heart of the franchise that keeps people coming back time and time again, because like a zombie, Resident Evil just can't stay down for long.

# Romance in School Uniforms:

## The Ethnography of the Japanese Romantic Comedy in Shōjo Manga Adaptations

### by Brian Ly



Adapting the comic book medium to live-action film has always been a naturally challenging endeavor, as it's always been about trying to capture the heightened sensibility and particular language of the medium through visual storytelling in a real-world space, which has historically been an exercise in special effects and a tonal balancing act between camp and earnestness. In particular in Japan, it's hard to say that the manga that defines most of the global public consciousness, typically within the male target demographic shōnen, has had any true successful live-action film adaptations, at least in terms of critical awareness and mainstream penetration outside the domestic market, due to this specific challenge of capturing the grand scale in the admittedly lower budget space of contemporary Japanese mainstream film. The area that has been successful, however, is with shōjo manga, targeted toward girls.

Though the defining works of shōjo tend to be in the magical girl and fantasy genres, which act as a parallel to the battle shōnen genre, most of the works actually tend to be more grounded high school romances, which map quite nicely to the romantic comedy genre in film. The language of romance in Japanese film is a less straightforward one than in Hollywood, where classical Japanese cinema tended to focus more on family melodramas. The origins of what would define the modern rom-com in Japanese cinema would probably come to fruition in the 1980s, typically considered a lost decade of Japanese cinema, yet it very much had its own rich cinematic tradition with films centered on the youth experience in high school settings, typically fronted by female Japanese idols of the era. It is not until the 2000s that we begin to see the development of a proper romantic comedy genre emerge with shōjo adaptations, centered on the female perspective and their emotions and approach to love, allowing for a codification of the tropes and language of the genre in the film medium.

## Establishing Tropes: The Anatomy of a Shōjo Adaptation

The 2000s in shōjo mark a distinct stylistic and tonal evolution, parallel to similar developments in teen rom-com films of the late 90s to early 00s in Hollywood, defined by a vibrant, color-forward approach to fashion, with layered outfits, blending traditional elements of femininity in frills with more sporty and punk elements to create a defining streetwear look, as well as long, dyed hair with wispy, sweeping bangs in men, a rather dated but era-defining style. Likewise, the approach to romance trended toward the contrast of qualities, traits, and positions within the dynamics of the high school setting. In *Lovely Complex* (2006), this juxtaposition is made quite literal, centered around the clumsy, tall Risa and the short, energetic Otani, where they naturally have to reconcile their personal feelings and connection toward one another through a shared experience of not conforming to the traditional standards of beauty with the ridicule they face by others due to their seemingly contrasting and visually incompatible look as a couple.

Perhaps the more traditional contrast tends to center around the unpopular girl and popular boy, reflecting a certain insecurity particular to the female perspective, which can be observed in various forms in *From Me to You* (2010), *High School Debut* (2011), and *Say 'I Love You'* (2014). With many visual motifs that recall Ring, *From Me to You* focuses on shy high school freshman Sawako, nicknamed Sadako for her long black hair that often obscures her face, leading to her naturally being ostracized from those around her out of fear. Consequently, she had always had trouble expressing herself, which led to an inability to make friends or explain herself. Contrary to her appearance, she is actually a rather sweet and considerate girl, and the friendly, radiant Kazehaya sees her for who she is as he invites her into his world. *High School Debut* is a classical execution of the teen rom-com genre trope of the makeover, where a formerly tomboyish girl, Haruna, is attempting to make her eponymous high school debut by falling in love, enlisting the assistance of the popular Yoh to coach her. To no surprise, it's a typical enemies-to-friends type of scenario, where the reluctant cool Yoh, who sets the sole rule of his tutelage being that she is to never fall in love with him, inevitably falls into her pace, but this doesn't come without the challenges of his exes, her suitors, and the usual forces that be that aim to tear the couple apart. Whereas the previous *From Me to You* evokes a more modern sensibility as a contemporary adaptation with more standard black hair and school uniforms, *High School Debut* echoes the wild styles of Lovely Complex, even sharing the insert song of Puffy's *Ai no Shirushi* as a recurring motif evocative of the turn of the millennium. *Say 'I Love You'* is more of the same, where the brash, standoffish Mei finds herself in the grasp of the playboyish Yamato, who kisses her to save her from a stalker, which begins their whirlwind relationship and all the problems associated with a boorish girl dating the popular guy with a past. A twist on the more typical high school setting occurs in *L♡DK* (2014), which absolutely echoes the usual contrast between the male and female leads, but we instead see the space shift to the home when, following a heated confrontation at school, Aoi finds Shusei, who had turned down her friend, to be her neighbor, and after she inadvertently causes an accident that causes his unit to be destroyed, they end up having to share a room together, a natural environment for the ever-classic enemies-to-lovers scenario.

One of the strongest prevailing recurring motifs in the genre is the terminal illness trope, which is defined by films that focus on the ephemerality of love operating on limited time. Based on a spinoff of a now less-popular incest romance manga, *I Give My First Love to You* (2009) focuses on the romance between Takuma, who has suffered from a chronic heart condition since childhood, and Mayu, who has always supported him from the sidelines. While he initially distances himself, he is forced to confront his own feelings for her when presented with a flirty rival, an ever-common archetype in the larger genre. The central conflict of the film emerges when the aforementioned rival becomes the final hope as a potential heart donor after a tragic accident, yet this ultimately falls through as his family clings on to his own slim chance for life. The love triangle, family melodrama, and constant obstacles admittedly all contribute to what may appear to be a trope defined by its rather admittedly emotionally manipulative core, capturing the intensity and transience of adolescent love.

The natural exhaustion of these established tropes arrives with *Blue Spring Ride* (2014), where the lovelorn Futaba is suddenly reunited with her first love, Kou, who has lost his prior radiance as a result of the death of his mother. Rather than a genre exercise that focused on the contrast between these broader, more generalized characterizations, the film focuses more on the specific personal relationships, which is a marked shift in the storytelling, yet it embodies all its more tired tendencies as the female lead is burdened with the lack of emotional maturity of an unadjusted male, which admittedly is a universal tenet of romantic comedies as a whole. It's a transitional film that marks the maturation of a genre, which begins to challenge its established norms and structure as it moves beyond the conventional superficial juxtapositions that defined its earliest films.

## Genre Subversions: Challenging the Norms and Established Framework

The established structure of the shōjo adaptation has a very clear framework and set of tropes that hinges on the perspective of a female lead, often rather shy and meek or with an outsider streak, who pursues or is pursued by a charismatic, popular male love interest, sometimes with a bit of a bad boy edge, and occasionally a rival that's either edgier or outwardly kinder, though never one that particularly has a real chance in a genre that focuses solely on the primary romantic couple. As the language of the cinema evolves, filmmakers begin to experiment within this space, with films now stemming from adaptations from other mediums, challenging expectations, and even making some meta-commentary on its form and mode of storytelling. Based on a novel, *My Pretend Girlfriend* (2014) visually appears not dissimilar to the typical high school romance, yet it shifts the locus of control, where the two-timing popular senior Miyazaki has his unpopular underclassman Noboru pretend to be in a relationship with Momose, the mistress in this scenario, as a cover-up from his main girlfriend, Tetsuko, who comes from an affluent family. Both agree due to their shared admiration, but there's no happy ending for Noboru, whose one-sided feelings, despite perhaps having some real chemistry within this false arrangement, lead him to write off love later in life. Similarly, *His Girlfriend* (2015) involves ordinary schoolgirl Rika's pursuit of the popular Keigo, who has his eyes on an older college girl, and she is strung along throughout the entire process as a second option while he figures his shit out. While it does have a more typical shōjo ending compared to the previous film, these films demonstrate a sort of shift from the idealistic representation of shōjo storylines as the dynamic shifts from the push-and-pull of a single romantic relationship to one that perhaps reflects the true agency all along of the popular male with an advantageous position in patriarchal society who has merely been dragging quirky girls into his sphere of influence.

The fashion of shōjo has ranged from the more evergreen school uniform to expressive personal clothes that represent the style of the era, but they've typically been grounded in a more typical beauty standard, where even the allegedly unpopular girl is usually just someone who hasn't put effort into her appearance or taken off her glasses, the ever-common universal rom-com trope. *Princess Jellyfish* (2014) is sort of a triumph for representation both in terms of personal beauty and identity. Based on a josei manga, with a target audience that trends toward older women, the film centers on the residents of an all-female apartment building of *otaku* women, all neurodivergent-coded with their own special interests. The sole outlier is the cross-dressing love interest Kuranosuke, whose true identity is unknown to the other residents besides the nerdy jellyfish-obsessed Tsukimi, who slowly gets over her androphobia as he gives her and the other girls makeovers that bring out their unconventional beauties, rejecting the existing beauty standard in favor of personal expression. *My Love Story* (2015) has a rather unconventional male love interest in the brutish, macho Takeo, who falls for the cute, petite Rinko after she expresses gratitude when he rescues her from a groper. It becomes a comedy of misunderstandings as Takeo and Rinko's friends constantly assume she's actually after his more conventionally handsome best friend while he inadvertently misreads and shirks her advances. Though technically an adaptation of an *ecchi* shōnen manga with more overt sexual content, *Recently, My Sister Is Unusual* (2014) interrogates the exercise of adaptation by introducing pink film aspects that go even further than the source material, something that surprisingly hasn't been done since. While it ostensibly looks like a high school romance, it's constructed like a pink film, where the male lead is played by a more ordinarily looking actor compared to the usual male idol casting, and the women come from the adult video space. There's even an extended lesbian sex scene between the sister Mitsuki and Hiyori, the ghost of a girl who was in love with her brother Yuya who periodically possesses her body to attempt the sexual actions she was unable to do in life. The base template of incest, though this time between stepsiblings, and romantic feelings developed through cohabitation are not unfamiliar tropes in Japanese rom-coms, but this film introduces more of the male gaze in the form of accidental perverted scenes that will appear in shōnen-adapted romances that have previously had limited film adaptations.

With the language of a genre that is fully formed, filmmakers continue to build upon the existing foundation. What exists as a heightened variant of the popular bad boy comes into full force in *The Black Devil and the White Prince* (2015) with the sadistic "Black Devil" Haruto and the contrasting pure "White Prince" Takumi, both of whom antagonize their childhood friend Yu. The double subversion is that, as expected, Haruto is actually quite kind-hearted compared to the more manipulative Takumi, emblematic of the pinnacle of these archetypal tropes. Though Yu initially falls victim as a pawn within the two's rivalry, she ultimately develops her own confidence and agency as she later dominates the dynamic, for a rather refreshing take on the genre as a whole. As a pure meta-commentary on the tropes of the genre itself, *No Longer Heroine* (2015) features a self-aware high school girl, Hatori, who realizes that she's the side character of her own shōjo manga when her popular childhood friend Rita begins dating the awkward Miho. While the film ultimately does culminate in the traditional romantic resolution, the process to get there is rather unconventional, where she momentarily dates the womanizing Kosuke. The characters each go through their own respective journeys with other people to better themselves before finding themselves at the natural conclusion, which is perhaps a more accurate representation than the more idealized storybook ending.

Though the genre has experienced quite an evolution during this period, a genre that is truly mature begins to echo the beats that have made it a tried and true formula. *One Week Friends* (2017) is a rather transitional film, which focuses on the transfer student Kaori, who refuses to make friends with others due to past trauma that has given her selective memory loss that would cause her to forget everything after a week. Naturally, this invites the curiosity of the slightly nerdy, yet friendly Yuki, who pushes to be her friend through an exchange diary. It's quite unconventional in its own way, where there isn't a true romantic resolution, with the girl eventually forgetting about him after she decides to be with yet another transfer student from her past, but it's one that follows many of the conventions of the genre of a spark between the more reticent girl and the more assertive boy, and it promises a certain optimism as she remembers him at the very end.

## A Return to Basics: Reinforcing the Tenets of the Genre

With the language of the genre in constant flux, the tropes developed in the more experimental films of the genre are incorporated into its vernacular to further reinforce the definition of the shōjo adaptation. As a synthesis of both the terminal illness trope and the ever-common relationship dynamic of a weird girl with the popular guy, *Closest Love to Heaven* (2017) is such a quintessential execution of the genre, where the weird bird girl Nino makes a bold gesture of cutting off her bangs to reveal a rather pretty face in a moment of passion as she confesses to the most popular guy in school, Kira, who is actually suffering from an illness giving him only a year left to live. Even with an expiration date, she pursues the relationship wholeheartedly, and her earnestness shows through as he has a reason to choose life.

Though many of these films during this admittedly fallow period do adhere to the grammar of the genre, that doesn't necessarily mean they have to be boring. *Peach Girl* (2017) appears to be a *gyaru* film, but it's actually about a shy girl, Momo, with tanned skin that gets mistaken for being sexually promiscuous, to the chagrin of her childhood friend, Toji, all the while class playboy Kairi is constantly getting her into compromising situations. *Marmalade Boy* (2018) has the absolutely wild premise of a partner swap turned share house scenario where the two same-aged Miki and Yuu find themselves in a classical cohabitation scenario, and even with the even more insane twist of a potential incest scare due to the shared history of their parents, they still pursue their romance regardless. Though these two films sound bolder than some of the earlier shōjo adaptations, they're actually based off of seminal works from the 90s, with the outrageous premise acting merely as window dressing for the more classical executions of the genre.

However, many admittedly are rather boring and poor executions of genre tropes. *My Brother Loves Me Too Much* (2017) features the tired dynamic of the unpopular Setoka and the cool Haruka, who just happen to be siblings, but they're, of course, not blood-related. *Principal: Am I In a Love Story?* (2018) appears to be an admittedly ambitious film with the dynamic duo of the cool high school boys Gen and Wao, who clearly love each other more than any female character in the film, and for what could have at least been a love triangle scenario, it ends up with Gen in an enemies-to-lovers scenario with the awkward female lead Shima, with Wao in an unrelated side unrequited romance with an older woman. *Anitomo* (2018) features the shy Mai, who falls for her older brother's friend Sota, a seemingly handsome guy who is actually just as inexperienced in love, and while this has the makings for a sweet, even if rather trite, execution of the genre, it ends up distracted with its own love rival and misunderstanding plot. *Honey* (2018) also has a similarly generic dynamic between the shy Nao and the seemingly bad boy Taiga, who is actually a kind-hearted boy that dyed his hair red due to loving the red Super Sentai, which of course is also mired by its own sort of uncomfortable incest vibes with the uncle who serves as the guardian of the female lead.

This isn't an entirely dead period for the genre, though, and *My Little Monster* (2018), though as classical of a shōjo adaptation as ever, pairs two school loners, Shizuku and Haru, who both learn to love being around people as they bring each other out of their shells, though this doesn't come without friction, with the usual jealousy arcs, misunderstandings, and clash of personalities. The film is a throwback in aesthetic to the earliest days of shōjo adaptations with its distinctly vibrant uniforms, codifying the individuality of peak early 2000s fashion into the modern school-issued attire.

## Heightened Parody: Moving Beyond Self-Awareness

As a genre begins to rehash itself, there is a certain self-awareness of this internal logic, alluded to even quite early on in the aforementioned *No Longer Heroine*, yet soon commenting on the actual genre itself becomes a part of its DNA. There is a rise of *otaku* and adjacent films, involving characters with niche interests in the genres of manga, anime, and romance itself, and there is a manifestation of these literary tropes as they blur the lines between the fictionalized construct and the presumed reality of the worlds they occupy. *Real Girl* (2018) features the *otaku* male lead Hikaru, a high school boy who has entirely written off the real-world high school life that normies experience in favor of his love for magical girls, whose optimism and ideological conflict between good and evil make more sense to him than the constructed logic of vapid teens, until suddenly his pace of life is interrupted when the class beauty Iroha suddenly asks him out, transporting his reality into a manga-like scenario. This is later revealed to actually be a more typical terminal illness turned memory loss cliche until they find their storybook ending, and it's one that's so deeply entrenched in the vocabulary of the genre. Similarly, *Wotakoi: Love is Hard for Otaku* (2020) features former high school *otakus* who later become work colleagues, Narumi and Hirotaka, where the former attempts to hide her *otaku* ways due to the negative perception disproportionately impacting women interested in nerdy hobbies compared to more conventionally attractive men, yet despite her attempts to mask her true interests, she ultimately finds herself most comfortable with the one person who knows exactly who she is and isn't afraid of it. *Kiss Him, Not Me* (2020) goes into full parody as it involves Kae, a *fujoshi*, a fan of BL (boys' love), who was previously ignored due to her weight yet goes through a massive transformation after a bout of depression, leading to all of the hot men in school throwing themselves at her.

In films that directly engage with romance media, the way the characters directly interact with one another is influenced by the very tropes that are woven directly into the diegesis. In *Missions of Love* (2018), Yukina is a cell phone novelist who writes steamy romance novels but begins to run dry due to her own lack of experience until she unwittingly involves the popular Shigure after finding blackmail material on him, and in parallel to her own lessons on love and romance as a literary vehicle as they engage in missions, they naturally develop feelings for one another. *Come Kiss Me at 00:00AM* (2019) is ostensibly a classical romance involving social class differences when ordinary schoolgirl Hinana, who dreams of being swept away by a prince like in the movies, finds herself caught in a whirlwind secret romance with actor Kaede, and while his actual personality contrasts with his screen persona, she finds herself charmed by his earnestness as they work through the real-world consequences that come with a relationship with a celebrity, both in terms of public image and the life experience gap. In both of these films, romance becomes something that blurs the lines between the fictionalized narratives and constructed images and the complexities of real-world romances in a genre that's aware of its own existence.

With films that depict high school romance stories moving beyond just pure shōjo adaptations, there's an ever-so-slight shift in both the actual tropes and execution of the genre in terms of the depiction of romance and the relationship dynamics, which had already been observed in films based on works that challenged the conventional dynamics. Based on a Taiwanese novel, *You Are the Apple of My Eye* (2018) is a more meditative romance that focuses on the differences between the more impulsive Kosuke and the more serious Mai, and though they have a natural attraction to one another, their clashing personalities and life aspirations prove to be a chasm they cannot overcome as their romance is left as memories of their youth. Modern high school romances continue to draw from other demographics, very commonly shōnen manga, illustrating a shift both in terms of a wider range of appeal as well as subject matter. Whereas harem elements weren't completely absent in shōjo manga, where a couple could often have another male rival that almost always has no real shot, a film like *Nisekoi: False Love* (2018) is based on a source material that infamously bounces between two potential love interests, where the pathetic high school student Raku goes back and forth between Chitoge, the new transfer student who he also happens to be engaged to, and Kosaki, the schoolmate whom he has a deeply held affection for. The decline in shōjo adaptation to film mirrors the real-world shift in interests for the largely female demographic, whose interests have shifted away from shōjo manga to more universally popular shōnen manga, niche interests such as BL and *otome* games, and the current revival of the Hallyu waves. Even something like *Your Lie in April* (2016), a film based on a manga about a fairly typical terminal illness romance, which perhaps could have been a shōjo manga in the past, was published in a shōnen magazine. There's less of a need to fixate on idealized romance in a generation more focused on independence and personal development within a society that's still largely patriarchal, and perhaps the real escape is not a storybook romance but boys kissing each other without you having to actually interact with them.

## Coda: The Current State of Shōjo Adaptation

While it may seem like the shōjo adaptation to film was on its last legs, COVID proved vital in terms of retraining an audience to reach back for their comfort material. A string of largely forgettable, straightforward adaptations are not particularly worth mentioning, as the industry was just getting ready to pick up again, but more recently the films that have emerged in the past couple of years build on the tradition of the genre as it continues to evolve. *Please Excuse My Younger Brothers* (2024) combines the cohabitation element with the reverse harem as Ito suddenly finds herself with four new younger brothers, who, of course, are all conventionally attractive as she balances her role as a matriarchal figure while balancing her burgeoning sexual tension with Gen, the one who is initially most antagonistic as he naturally occupies the classic enemies-to-lovers role. *A Girl & Her Guard Dog* (2025) takes a character who would normally be an authority figure in an age gap romance, the overprotective Keiya, who enters the school of the awkward, young daughter of the head of the group, Isaku, and plays it as a standard high school romance despite the fact that he should be a well-adjusted adult but has instead lacked all of the formative life experiences as a man who never experienced youth. *My Special One* (2025) continues the tradition of the idol genre as a bookish girl, Sahoko, completely swears off of love, men, and particularly idols after a poor experience, and who can blame her, only to slowly fall for new in popular boyband member Kouta, who immediately sweeps her into his own pace, though he returns her burgeoning feelings with his own baggage as a result of his past and his status, creating difficult hurdles that they ultimately have to overcome together. Even as the genre grows more niche, the creators continue to develop more diverse works, and consequently, with a richer film history, the rom-com genre that began out of straight adaptations to deconstructions has since both rehashed and remixed itself in many different forms, forming a particular language of cinema completely detached from the Hollywood style, representative of a new way of telling Japanese stories from a film tradition without a real foundation in the romance genre.

# THE DIFFERENT MASKS OF THE
# PHANTOM
## OF THE OPERA

BY JULIA PETTY

@PettyWap

*The Phantom of the Opera* 1909 novel by Gaston Leroux has spawned a plethora of film adaptations. Starting with the well-known Universal Pictures silent film *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) starring Lon Chaney and ranging all the way to the cult-classic *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004) featuring a suave Gerard Butler, there are a lot of different ways the titular character has shown up in movies. And more notably, how many different ways the Phantom's backstory, personality, and disfigurement has changed throughout the years…and how the mask explains it all.


1.

1.        What many consider to be the "original" *The Phantom of the Opera* film (there was a German lost film made years prior), the 1925 *The Phantom of the Opera* directed by Rupert Julian, contains a mask that flies under the radar, but is arguably more accurate to the novel. Lon Chaney's makeup as the Phantom is far more infamous than the mask that covers it, however, the subtlety of the mask is arguably the point in this adaptation. The mask features an uncanny human face covering 3⁄4 's of his face, with a flap hanging from the bottom effectively covering his mouth whilst allowing him to talk and sing clearly. He also sports a Middle Eastern style cap that pays homage to his travels in Persia from the novel.


2.

2.        Another Universal Pictures film, *Phantom of the Opera* (1943) directed by Arthur Lubin features a more romantic version of the character, rather than the original monster that Lon Chaney created. And yes the *The* is not in this title…a very interesting choice by Universal. The origin of the Phantom's disfigurement has also changed, rather than by birth, it is caused by acid being thrown on his face. This plotline was started in the Chinese adaption of this story called *Song at Midnight* (1937) directed by Ma-Xu Weibang. (The only reason I did not include this adaption is because the Phantom in this version does not wear a mask, however, I highly recommend watching and looking into this classic silent film). The Phantom's anger comes from the fact that his music was stolen. As a result, Claude Rains creates a more sympathetic character perhaps leading to the romanticization of the Phantom later on. This mask is more simple, calming, and more approachable than other versions.


3.

3.        *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962) directed by Terence Fisher is the Hammer Horror version of the tale. Herbert Lom takes on the role of the Phantom, with a DIY sewn together type of mask that covers the entirety of his face. One of his eyes is covered up, due to blindness in one eye, and almost identically to the previous adaptation, his disfigurement is due to acid being thrown on his face (by himself accidentally in this version) and his anger as a result of his music being stolen. The mask is far more disturbing and horrific in this version, giving an almost Leatherface feel. This film also features a bizarre side plot of the Phantom being taken care of by a man in the sewers. And SPOILER: He is also impaled by a chandelier at the end of the film, which is the most graphic thing so far in an adaption, but not the most graphic thing that will be covered in this article.


4.

4.        Brian De Palma's rock musical, *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974), contains the most aesthetically intriguing and unique mask of all the adaptations. This film is a much looser take on the story, drawing inspiration from not only *The Phantom of the Opera*, but also *Faust* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The mask is silver, owlish, and punk, and probably the most beloved of all versions.


5.


6.

5.        *The Phantom of the Opera* (1989) directed by Dwight H. Little is the gory, R-rated version of the original tale. Featuring Robert Englund, known for *The Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, basically plays a Freddy Kruger-looking Phantom that is immortal obsessing over reincarnated Christine's in different ages. The mask in this version is less mask, and more the Phantom cutting people's faces off and stitching them together and then onto his face. Apparently there was also a sequel planned, *The Phantom of the Opera 2: Terror in Manhattan*, but it was cancelled due to not getting filming access to the Toronto subway system that was imperative for the movie.

6.        *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004) directed by Joel Schumacher is the film adaptation of Andrew Llyod Webber and Charles Hart's stage musical. Notoriously low rated, but audience adored, this film features the charismatic and overtly handsome Phantom played by Gerard Butler. The iconic half mask that most people associate with the character comes from this version. Going back to the novel origins, the Phantom is once again disfigured at birth, however this time, it is only one the one side of his face. A stark bone-white mask that "covers" his disfigurement and creates the dichotomy the Phantom struggles within himself as a physical set piece. This is definitely the most well-known adaptation. (In this film it seems like the disfigurement is not under the mask and rather, is cut to on another shot, with Butler's makeup only on the second shot.)


7.

7.        Finally, to end on an arguably even more unique adaptation than the *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974) is a French musical/animated film *A Monster in Paris* (2011) directed by Bibo Bergeron. The Phantom in this version is actually an enlarged flea named Francœur created by Raoul (Christine's love interest in most adaptations) in a lab accident. This is perhaps one of the only adaptations featuring a happy ending for the Phantom. The mask is an even simpler version of Claude Rains' mask, however it is white like in the musical and resembles more of a masquerade mask than anything else. He also wears a wide-white brimmed hat, another nod to the Phantom, although in white. Though this film is more comedic as it was clearly tailored with a children's audience in mind, and *The Phantom of the Opera* serves as more loose inspiration with easter eggs, it still doesn't take away from the main theme of "monster or man" due to appearances. It is a sweet homage to the original story and I very highly recommend it as the sweet cherry on top to the rest of these much more tragic versions. This film also features the origin of a popular French song "La Seine" sung by Vanessa Paradis.

All of these adaptations hold a special and unique place in my heart, and just goes to show how even the tiniest of differences, even a mask, can change an entire character. I would also like to say, I wanted to include the 1990 *The Phantom of the Opera* with Charles Dance's Phantom and mask, but as it is technically a television miniseries I reluctantly had to cut it.

P.S. for those that read my last month's article:

Answer to last month's puzzle: "My sister and I loved each other, despite everything. Can you two do the same?" - Woo-jin Lee *Oldboy* (2003)

# "THE LONG GOODBYE"

WRITTEN BY

## JOHN CHRISTOPHER NELSON

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The best adaptations don't ask their audience to choose between the source material and the film. Take *American Psycho* and *The Shining*, two examples wherein one can appreciate the respective textual and cinematic experiences for entirely different reasons; because the consuming of each fulfills diverse pleasures, a compromise in favoring one above the other need not be made. This quality is one of many that makes Robert Altman's 1973 adaptation of *The Long Goodbye* so distinct and sensational. The film is reverent to its foundation, while utilizing it to synthesize a distinct thesis.

A jazzy rendition of "Hooray for Hollywood" plays over the United Artists production logo, apprising the audience that they aren't sitting down to a traditional detective yarn. To be fair, by the time Raymond Chandler wrote his sixth Marlowe installment, the overall tone of his writing had transformed. Even watching the film the 1953 novel inspired, it's no surprise to learn that Chandler's wife was dying while he wrote the book, that her illness and subsequent death perpetuated his alcoholism, that he'd considered taking his own life. The mood carries over from page to screen and permeates Philip Marlowe's Los Angeles of the seventies.

There's an accepted template for noir private investigators, a series of check-boxes. With both brawn and wit, they've gotta be able to hold their own, against thugs or cops, dames or buddies. By the time this adaptation was released, folks were a bit worn out by that whole routine. The handsome, morose, mysterious Marlowe, as performed by Humphrey Bogart in *The Big Sleep,* lacked intrigue and was banal by the seventies. Enter Elliott Gould's Philip Marlowe, the character's quintessential portrayal.

He's an oddball slob who's seemingly always smoking a cigarette. He's an unremarkable loner, yet universally known and liked. Charmingly gawky, unflappable to a superhuman degree. Not someone you'd call good-looking, but disarmingly charismatic, despite being a touch aloof. This Marlowe is decidedly unintimidating, not the kind of noir bruiser you'd bet on in a fight, but he relies on his acuity and dumb luck to get where he's going. He's a wise-ass, not because he knows something we don't, but because he truly has nothing to lose. Wistful, with a dash of existential nihilism, but don't mistake him for an antihero; he's a true everyman. No matter what comes this Marlowe's way, however absurd, his constant refrain is, "It's okay with me." Regardless of the stakes, he goes along to get along.

*Chinatown* is typically given credit for ushering in the genre, but I'd argue that *The Long Goodbye* was the first film to transcend from noir to neo-noir. Like Joaquin Phoenix's Doc Sportello or Jeff Bridges' The Dude, Gould's noir protagonist is a fish-out-of-water victim of circumstance. In each character's film, a catalyst with one foot in their personal life is what lures them into their respective cases. It's that specific twist on the familiar trope that elevates these stories to neo-noir: the naturalistic notion that things simply happen, and they happen to people like you and me. There need not exist some diabolical plot or government conspiracy. This is relatable, in that it's trivial. A betrayal by a longtime friend, sadly, is not so out of the ordinary.
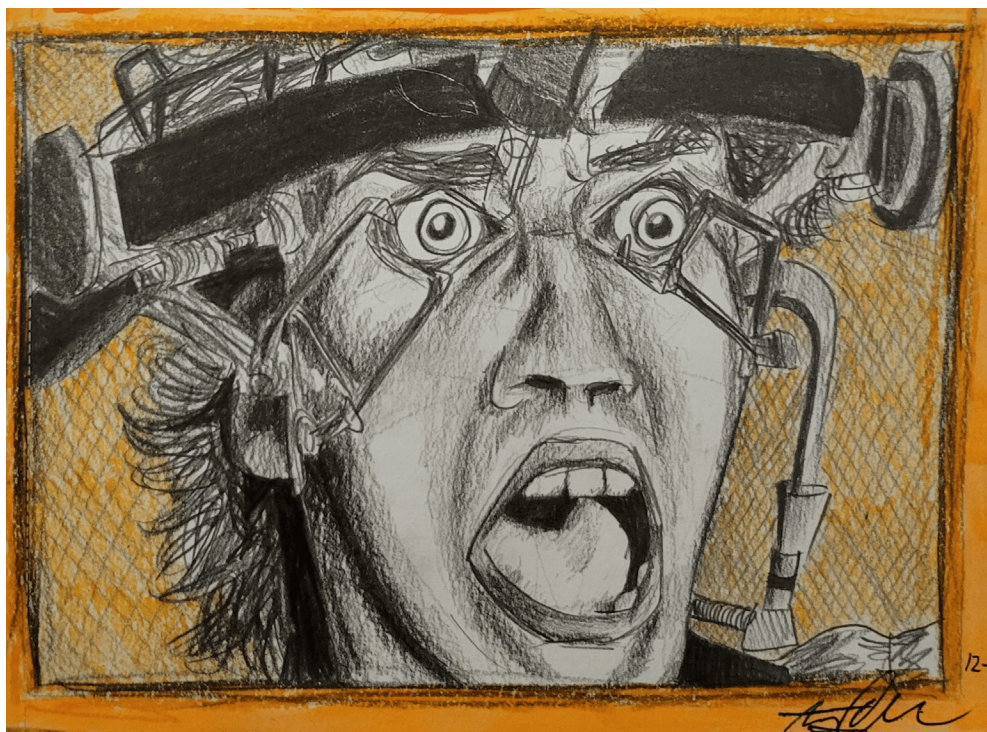
Another tenet of a neo-noir PI is that, despite being a deadbeat by choice, they're steered by a more austere moral code than most. Without spoiling anything, this is why I disagree with critics who believe the severe, terminal act of this Marlowe is out of character. In reality, it aligns with a guiding belief system that's deeply rooted in some intrinsic, albeit antiquated, understanding of right and wrong.

Unfortunately, seventies Los Angeles is an ethically muddied setting. Mobsters mutilate their girlfriends and Hemingwayesque writers commit suicide, only for the case to come full circle, revealing there was no great mystery all along. The worlds in which these happenstance detectives operate are both dangerous and labyrinthine, with right and wrong proving to be not so cut and dry. It's a troubling space for a character like Marlowe, a man with a nuanced moral code, to navigate.

I've long held the belief that Los Angeles is the inevitable pile-up of Manifest Destiny, the westward momentum of capitalist society's creative urge. When it could not churn any further west, it roiled in a grotesque frenzy at the coast of the Pacific, and the result was the City of Angels, the genuine birthplace of authentic noir. The trouble with Los Angeles is that, unlike other hubs of culture like New York or San Francisco, it did not emerge organically, but was orchestrated into being, a manufactured commodity in an attempt at financial gain. The mythology of Los Angeles fosters such an impermeable haze, that it is impossible to truly view the city for what it is. It remains an amorphous notion, rather than a concrete location. No wonder it is the ideal setting for noirs, lurid tales of betrayal, mayhem, and seduction.

Chandler himself was acutely aware of the superficial culture upon which Los Angeles was built. Part of what troubles Marlowe in the text, a component to his journey that translates to his cinematic counterpart, is the futile effort to unearth humanity in a city that has little of it to offer.

In either case, what makes this version of Marlowe so effective is that it deviates from the traditional interpretation of the character, and in doing so breathes authentic, sincere life into a tired archetype. This detective isn't just an onscreen persona. We relate to him and discover glimpses of ourselves in his behavior. Gould had nothing to lose and everything to gain with this role. The studio was skeptical to hire him, following reports that he'd been difficult to work with on his previous film. The risk ended up paying off for audiences with the rare performance that's an exception to the rule, when an unconventional portrayal stands out among its peers for all the right reasons.

*A Clockwork Orange* art by Tanya O.

# MUSINGS ABOUT

## THE CANE FROM CITIZEN KANE

By Wally Walladarsky
*(No Social Media Available)*

I remember watching Citizen Kane in high school. I was amazed with how many scenes in Citizen Kane are frame-by-frame rip-offs from the classic animated tv sitcom The Simpsons. The song and dance part of the Inquirer Newspaper party scene with the "Charlie Kane" song particularly stood out to me with how closely the music and shots matched up to the "Mr. Burns" song sung by Smithers in the episode "Marge Gets A Job" (season 4 ep7). It is wild how many times Citizen Kane references classic Simpsons episodes, wait no I got that backwards, it is wild how many times the Simpsons reference Citizen Kane.

According to one of the Simpsons episode DVD commentary tracks,

the series writers, directors and animators use the term "homage" for when they reference classic movies and culture they truly love and respect. It definitely comes across as a form of adoration when the Simpsons team take a whole episode of their TV series to map the characterization of Charles Foster Kane right on top of Springfield's own local plutocrat, Charles Montgomery Burns, then title the episode "Rosebud"(Season 5 Ep 4) after Kane's sled. The amount of love the Simpsons creators have for Orson Well's epic is reflected in how closely they imitate the film. To animate a scene to match the amazing composition of the film's cinematographer Gregg Toland requires the animation team to study the intricacies of a scene and

translate a piece of cinema into an animation that is both instantly recognizable to the film while staying grounded in the Simpsons. There is a scene in the "Rosebud" episode where there is a Simpsons style sign gag of a box of "Nev-R-Break" brand snow globe Mr. Burns, dreaming of his childhood ~~rosebud~~ bobo the teddy bear, drops the snow globe, it shatters and ~~the nurse~~ Smithers, appears in the shatter globe reflection. The mix of gags and scene for scene inspiration from the movie creates a great interpolation of the original Citizen Kane snow globe scene into the Simpsons episode. And to me the wild part is it takes work to time everything to clearly match the inspiration source material, I mean I don't think

there was an existing character model for Smithers reflection in a crushed snow globe! To match the movie with the TV show scene by scene, takes care and real appreciation for the film and a real desire to share this movie with the viewing audience. Same with the Charlie Kane/ Charlie Burns song it takes love, adoration and a good writing staff to tease out a song that is both a homage to the source movie and still be an indelibly Simpsons song.

As a kid I watched the hell out of The Simpsons. And as a kid you don't have a deep well of cultural references, so almost every joke felt like an original Simpsons gag. When I finally watched Citizen Kane in high school, I was blown away by the story and cinematography, and it suddenly clicked why The Simpsons would rip off so many scenes from it. Citizen Kane is a classic; classic movies are classics for a reason. The films The Simpsons chose to build "homage" episodes around were generally all-time greats, and as a kid in high school and college I wanted to see the movies that had influenced the people who made this show I loved. I adored the classic Simpsons episodes, so they pushed me toward the movies they paid loving tribute to: the Cape Fear episode (season 5, ep 2), the Thelma and Louise episode (season 5, ep 6), and the Streetcar Named Desire/ Great Escape episode (a twofer!) (season , ep2). All of them are classic Simpsons episodes where classic movies map onto Springfield perfectly.

I credit the "Rosebud"/ Citizen Kane episode of The Simpsons as the adaptation that opened the door for me to deeper cinema. The show really was my gateway into taking film seriously. I'm more out of the loop on TV now, but I hope there are shows out there doing for today's kids what The Simpsons did for me: nudging them beyond surface-level pop-culture jokes and into the wider world of movies and culture.

# The Literary Inspirations of Phantom of the Paradise

## By: Mayra Lopez

⓿ @mayraaalopezz  ⬛ @maylop

In 1974, writer and director, Brian De Palma, strayed greatly from the norms of text-to-film adaptation. Rather than adopt the standard single-text-to-single-film method, he instead chose to adapt three entire literary works into his unique, cult masterpiece: Phantom of the Paradise. In his film, De Palma tells the story of Winslow Leach: a little-known yet passionate musical composer whose music is stolen by Swan, a powerful and ruthless music producer. Winslow becomes physically deformed and threatens to wreak havoc on Swan's new, long-awaited performance venue: the Paradise. In an effort to stop him, Swan deceivingly convinces Winslow to sign a binding contract, granting Swan all rights to Winslow's music, body and soul until Swan's unforeseeable death. What follows is a winding narrative of mystery, betrayal, and rock 'n roll. For Phantom of the Paradise, De Palma draws inspiration from three of the most enduring stories in all of classic literature: Gaston Leroux's The Phantom of the Opera, Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, and the legend of Faust. In the characters of Winslow and Swan, De Palma weaves together motives, behaviors and ambitions present within Leroux's Erik, Wilde's Dorian Gray, and Faust. Each character is united by an overwhelming desire to harness their most valued qualities in order to achieve unattainable greatness and perfection. They resort to unnatural and unethical methods of doing so, resulting in fatal repercussions for each. For Winslow and Swan in particular, their ambitions are perpetuated by a desire to propel their success in the rock 'n roll industry, with Winslow striving for artistic creation and prowess, and Swan striving for status and monetary gain. This desire corrupts their sense of self worth and blinds them to the ruinous consequences of their actions, ending their lives and ultimately wasting their efforts.

Both Winslow and Swan both go to desperate lengths in order to pursue greatness and perfection, with means and motives nearly identical to those of their literary predecessors. To protect their masterful talents of musical composition, both Winslow and Erik assume the guises of murderous phantoms, terrorizing artistic establishments–the Paradise and the Palais Garnier–that demonize their physical deformities and threaten to suppress their creative abilities, both ending their lives in doing so. Meanwhile, both Swan and Dorian seek to protect their youth and beauty, allowing material images of themselves to age and decay in their place as they descend into worlds of sin and vanity, all until they die upon each image's destruction–Swan's image being a tape recording, and Dorian's a portrait. To ensure they do not take such measures in vain, Winslow and Swan enter into binding agreements, offering their bodies and souls to powerful figures who falsely promise to fulfill their wishes with the intent of reveling in their failure. Winslow binds himself to Swan, only to have his music stolen and performed against his artistic wishes. Swan, however, is bound to the Devil himself, who promises to keep him young and beautiful for as long as his tape recording remains intact, only for it to be later destroyed. Their contractual agreements are an evident nod to the story of Faust, the very story on which Winslow has based his cantata–the sum of his entire life's musical work. Faust sells his soul to the Devil in exchange for otherworldly knowledge and indulgence, only to have his soul carried off to Hell upon his death.

Thus, Winslow and Swan exist as conglomerations of Erik, Dorian, and Faust, weaving together the misguided consciences, transgressions, and insatiable natures shared amongst them. Whether through music, beauty ,or knowledge, each character is possessed by a frantic desire to distinguish themselves from the ordinary–to rise above their fellow man and to reach unrivaled mastery and perfection by any means necessary. In the case of Winslow and Swan, their inheritance of these traits causes them to fall victim to corruption by the entertainment industry. Rather than be valued as individuals, they are valued as products, and are made to believe that they can only amount to the sum of their most desirable qualities. As a result, they give their bodies, their souls, their entire lives to propel their success within the cut-throat world of rock 'n roll. Like their predecessors, they pursue perfection, talent, and praise in hopes of selling themselves, and of convincing others that they matter to the world. However, this very pursuit becomes their downfall, as Winslow and Swan eventually suffer the consequences of their overreaching ambitions and fail to achieve the unattainable greatness they desire. They "terminate together", their once-valuable music, youth, and beauty wasted and forgotten amidst the unfeeling Paradise, mimicking the grim fates of their literary inspirations.

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# THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

# The Magic of Muppet Adaptations

By: Daniel Ogura 📷 @kiyozora17

While there are many ways to adapt works for films, perhaps one of the most unique ways to do so is to have The Muppets do it. They need no introduction. Created by Jimmy Henson in 1955, The Muppets are one of the best known characters in all of media. In their storied career, they have adapted only a few stories, but in each of these adaptations, they have brought in a unique point of view and magic that only they could bring, and we need more of them.

For some reason or another, they only have two theatrical releases that adapt a classic work: The Muppet Christmas Carol in 1992 and Muppet Treasure Island in 1996. There is a lesser known television film adaptation in The Muppets' Wizard of Oz and two specials in Hey, Cinderella! And The Frog Prince. In each of these works, we find The Muppets retelling classic stories, working alongside human actors. The Muppets are able to bring these stories for a modern audience, interjecting their Muppet humor and antics. The adaptations are unique because The Muppets are able to disengage at times and just go off the wall. But that also is what makes these adaptations all the more memorable. The Muppets also bring in their classic musical talents, adding in songs that further along the narratives.

The Muppets have always been known for their ability to get people to work with them. From Michael Cain in The Muppet Christmas Carol to Ashanti and Queen Latifah in The Muppets' Wizard of Oz. People want to and enjoy working with The Muppets. Not only that, but people respect working with them. Tim Curry has said in his memoir Vagabond that "I cannot overstate how much I adored working with the Muppets. The extraordinary thing about them is that they are all characters in their own right, and you should treat them as such." Michael Caine has said that he treated working with The Muppets as if he was working the the Royal Shakespeare Company. The reverence and respect that actors and actresses have when they work with The Muppets translate onto the screen. Whether they're treating them as fellow actors, or when they embrace their inner zany Muppetness, it allows for a project with love and soul.

When it comes to a Muppet adaptation, you receive not only the message of the original work, but also the unique antics and commentary that only The Muppets can bring. The Muppets inherently bring in contemporary pop culture and constantly reference it in their films. Not to mention, their fourth wall breaking quips. This works because The Muppets force a unique suspension of disbelief to the audience. They force you to engage with them as living characters. But they also play with that suspension to their advantage, whether that's for humorous effect like with Rizzo's constant requests for food, or to help convey necessary messages like in The Muppet Christmas Carol.

I think it is hardly a controversial opinion nowadays that Disney is wasting The Muppets. The Muppets are dearly beloved, and yet they rarely release new films or content with them, despite actors and celebrities continuing to be willing and wanting to work with them — a fact we've seen recently with Miss Piggy making a guest appearance at Sabrina Carpenter's concert to be arrested, putting her on par with actresses like Nicole Kidman and Anne Hathaway. The Muppets allow for unique meta-defying and 4D breaking commentary when doing adaptations, and in times like these, we need more Muppet Magic in our lives.
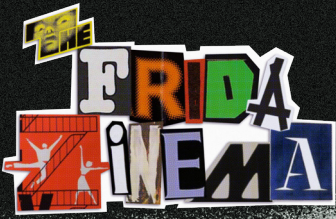
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