

“Little Match Girl”

Critique/Analysis Short Animation

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“Little Match Girl” is an animated short film produced in 1937 by director’s Arthur Davis and Sid Marcus. The film is part of an episodic series produced by Charles Mintz of Columbia Pictures. The story centers around a poor girl who sells match boxes in the town square during new year’s. The ignorant cloud of celebrators ignores and even mocks the poor girl by trampling on her matchboxes, harassing her as she looks with envy for the simple needs of life: food, shelter, and love. The hardships and coldness of the world is symbolized in a heavy wind that continues to press against the match girl. She eventually makes her way to the back alley somewhere in the city. The match girl tries to stay warm by lighting her supply of matches. For each warm match lit births, a personal fantasy of being in the comfort of food and shelter. The winds of the world blow out and interrupt each dream fantasy until she finally finds herself with one lasting match with transports her (out-of-body) to heaven. In heaven she is lavished with gifts and clothes and the dancing entertainment of baby angels. All is well until once again the harsh winds of life come in to blow out a candle in heaven. The match girl desperately fights against the wind to stop the candle (match) from going out. Her final desperate attempt only ends in last minute defeat as the match goes out and she inevitably dies of hypothermia back in the real world. Upon her death a beautiful angelic woman comes down from heaven to meet match girl’s spirit. Like a loving mother she holds and comforts her only to eventually take her home to heaven where the pain and the sorrow of the winds of life can no longer affect her.

The stories’ themes are sort of comedy/tragedy with the moral of the story about caring for others who are less fortunate. As simple as the animation is, it truly has made an impact over time being a wonderful example of considering others as well as never becoming so prideful in riches to then mock the humble poor. The greatest symbolism continues to be the wind: it presses hard against her while the other passerby’s go with the wind, she is the only one fighting

against it, struggling to remain humble and pure of the worlds mean spirited hypocrisy and mockery.

The plot structure is broken down into three acts. The setup is the match girl trying to sell her matches to rich passerby's only to have her merchandise trampled on. The main catalyst is the out-of-body experience where the match girl goes to heaven. Two turning points occur in the second act where instead of cursing the young heroin she is given blessings from angelic children. The second turning point is the winds of world coming in to destroy her heavenly bliss. The climax is the match girl's attempt to keep the candle (match in real world) lit as to fight for her very life. The resolution is the match girl being received into God's kingdom by an angel.

The actual animation was done by using traditional cell animation. The process was tedious especially with new technicolor processing for the animators which was relatedly new practice for the time. Some amazing renderings of the 2D to perceive 3D were beautifully rendered to give a highly immersive heavenly experience which was very innovative for its time.

There are many examples in the film demonstrating a few of the principles of animation. At the beginning of the film, the crowd is overly exaggerating their celebration of the new year by violently and intrusively blowing off party favors and shouting for joy. Later in the film we see follow through demonstrated as the match girl enjoys a swing set in Heaven. At the end of the film squash and stretch is demonstrated as a large gust of wind blows and bends the trees over.

My personally loved the films simplistic message and is without a doubt universally needed today. We move throughout the world in more abundant electronic distraction that goes beyond a few party favors at a new year's celebration, paying no mind of consideration for one

another's circumstances or feelings. It's wonderful to see that a fairy tale written in the 19th century continues to be re-visited in so many mediums including virtual reality and television. It's a timeless tale and not to be taken as too simple. The animation is rough but overall, the power of the message makes up for the somewhat jittery cell animation.