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# Paperman: A New Light to Lost Love

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## Recommended Citation

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Lila Pattison is a freshman nursing major who was raised in Oregon. Growing up as a book lover, writing became a way for her to express herself throughout her life. When she is not studying, she loves cuddling up with a hot cup of tea and a good book, as well as spending time with friends and listening to good music.

# *Paperman*: A New Light to Lost Love

What would happen if the one that got away… really didn't get away? What if love at first sight existed and changed lives? What if those who we have the brief and yet strong connection with ended up being our soulmate? The short film *Paperman* addresses this romantic concept in a new and thought provoking way; by combing a compelling story with groundbreaking technology. It won Best Short Film at the Academy Awards, Best Animated Short Subject at the Annie Awards, and Best Animated Film at the CinEuphoria Awards; as well as being nominated for Best Animated Character for both the main characters at CinEuphoria. *Paperman* tells the story of a young businessman, George, who is locked into the drudgery of daily life as a single office-worker. As he proceeds with his normal morning routine, he runs into a young lady, Meg, and is tragically torn away from her as she continues on to an interview. The rest of the short film follows his life as he tries to get back to her, and along with the help of a fleet of paper airplanes he eventually is reunited with his long lost (or should we say hours-lost) love.

**History and Formation**

*Paperman* broke through barriers in the film world by combining the old-fashioned art of 2D sketch animation and the modern detailed craft of Computer Generated (CG) animation. Not only does *Paperman* combine them in a skillful way, but also in a way that you don't even notice the difference as you're initially watching the film; it draws you into the storyline as a means of building a new form of reality. The mastermind behind *Paperman* is a man named John Kahrs; he was animation supervisor for *Tangled*, as well as an animator in the films *Ratatouille, Monsters Inc.,* and *The Incredibles*. Kahrs states in an interview with GoSeeTalk that the questions he wanted to address in the film were; "…what if two people were perfect for each other who made

that random connection on a street or train platform, and what if they lost each other, how would they find their way back to each other again?  And maybe how would the fates conspire to bring them together if they really tried hard enough"1 (Exclusive: Interview…).

Kahrs uses Paperman to present a new and unique thought process on life and love at first sight, encouraging the viewers to not overlook the little things that happen in life, but rather to take notice of what could be mundane and find the beauty in the unexpected.

**Animation Techniques**

By Kahrs bringing together 2D sketch and CG animation, he is providing a background supportive argument for his main point.  2D sketch is seen as the old familiar romance, something we all can relate to and it represents the classic love story.  CG brings in the new and thought-provoking perspective, complimenting the old and shining a different and unique light on the subject.  By using this unique and subtle representation in the specifics of the animation in Paperman,  Kahrs is subtly and tactfully adding another layer to the thought-provoking aspects of this short film.

**Lighting**

As a strictly black and white film, with the exception of lipstick, Paperman relies on shading and brightness to portray emotions and feeling as the film progresses. The primary means of shading come out strongly in the portrayal of sunlight and shadow; which turns out to be drastically dynamic in the setting of the city.

Sunlight

Sunlight provides not only the feeling of hope and brightness in Paperman, it represents the expectation and reality of love.  Throughout the film, it forms paths and illuminates the bright spots of life as the lovers go through their daily lives on the path of fate towards their meeting again.  In the following picture, the sunlight is illuminating the very alley in which all of the airplanes George has sent in Meg's direction have landed. These airplanes then form a fleet and set off in pursuit of George and Meg in a desperate, and successful, attempt to reunite the

lovers. The sunlight specifically lights a path down to the fleet of airplanes, illuminating them as a last ray of hope and piquing the curiosity of the viewer.



### Shadow

Shadow plays an important role in Paperman; portraying not only sadness and domination, but also a lack of freedom. Not only is darkness used in the office George works to give a sense of imprisonment, but it is also used as a portrayal of the character of people. We see George wearing a darker grey suit, bound by droll duty; dominated strongly George's boss (pictured in the following screenshot) who is wearing a black suit which portrays him as a taskmaster. Shadow strongly contrasts light, bringing in a different perspective on the monotony and drollness of everyday life; which is shaped and formed by the different shades of emotion and personalities, some of which are darker than others.

**Camera Perspective**

The perspective the camera takes plays an essential role in interacting with the viewer and pulling them into the story. By taking unique viewpoints, the viewer is not only drawn into the story, but also is pulled into the emotions, helping them to relate to the characters on a personal level. One brilliant example of this would be when his last airplane is taken from his hands by the wind and whisked out over the street. We watch this from over his shoulder as he desperately tries to reach out and retrieve it. It gives a sense of desperation, which we all can relate to on one level or another.

**Scene**



**Transitions**

In *Paperman*, the transitions between scenes are sharp and abrupt, keeping the attention of the viewer as the story progresses. It keeps things interesting, and also gives off the feelings of desperation and anxiousness that comes with having a new love. The viewer can easily relate to the feelings of infatuation and adrenaline that comes along with the shock of the abrupt scene changes; this expresses how sudden life can feel as you first experience new love. It also stays true to the old style that the 2D animation brings to this film.

**Color**

One unique aspect of *Paperman* is the lack of color except for Meg's red lips, bringing a unique side to the story. The constant black and white in the film speaks so loudly of the mundane, and then Meg's lips come as an expected shock. They bring in an aspect of passion in

a passionless world, and they give a spark to George's life in a way he never expected. By bringing in a new color, and that of passion, Kahrs plays with intrigue and mystery; making *Paperman* more than just a child's story. He makes it a story that an audience of all ages can relate to, and brings in an aspect of maturity.



**Sharpness of Lines**

One huge factor of *Paperman* that provides an underlying and subtle form of communication is the sharpness of the lines used. In the world of Paperman, lines are used to suggest not only stability and security, but also imprisonment and being locked into life. In the opening and closing scenes that show a distant shot of the train station, the sharp and bold lines under the train station provide a feeling of new security and support in his life. People naturally form a life of stability as they settle into a daily routine, as seen by the dark and enclosing buildings; and yet what humans sometimes need is to be shaken out of their monotony. Meg brings that awakening to George in Paperman, and as the film continues we see him defying the

standard steadiness of life and forming a new kind of security in his life; one that is built around Meg.

**Closing**



**Thoughts**

By combining 2D and CG animation, John Kahrs was able to create a masterpiece the like of which has never been seen before. Kahrs played with shading and lighting, as well as the high detail of CG and original feel of 2D animations, and managed to produce a short film that not only tells a story without words but also brings the audience into a thought provoking viewpoint on love at first sight. Rejecting the social norms that imprison us, Kahrs brings a thought process to light that rejects those ideals and presents a new take on life.

Works Cited

"Exclusive: Interview…Disney Animator & 'Paperman' Director
       John Kahrs." GoSeeTalkcom. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Oct. 2016.