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### Analysis of the Paperman

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## Anna Lyons—Best Analysis

Anna Lyons is a freshman nursing major from Claxton, Georgia. Outside of nursing, Anna plays the French horn in the Cedarville orchestra and is hoping to add a women's ministry minor to her time here at CU.

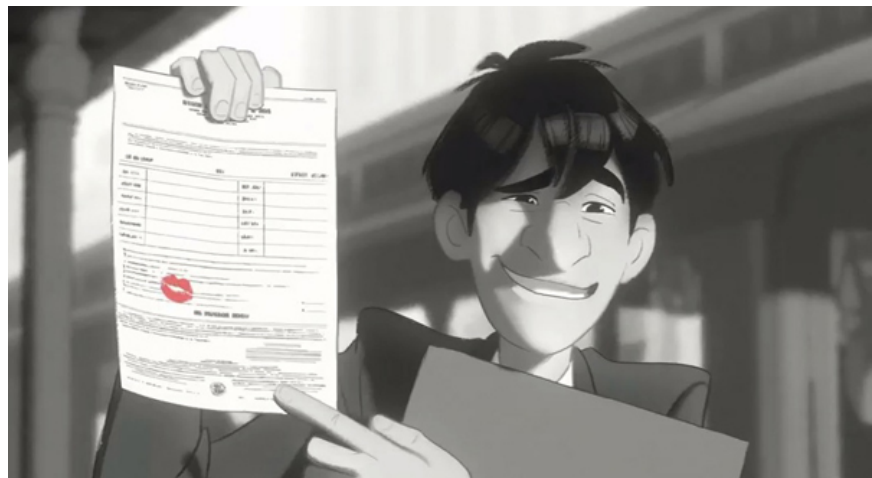
## Analysis of the Paperman

John Kahrs, known for his animation work in *Tangled*, *Ratatouille*, *Incredibles*, and *Monsters Inc.*, purposefully directed the Disney short, *Paperman*, in a “stylized photorealism” to tell the story of a potential romance in which strangers have an abrupt initial encounter (Radish 2,7). Kahrs has hopped between Pixar and Disney animation productions (Radish 2). The techniques from each are shown through his stylistic choices to illustrate the story in an unfamiliar combination of varying techniques.

The *Paperman* received an Annie Award for best short film and an Oscar in 2013 (Oatley 2,7). Directors have discussed breaking the admired story down into a full length featured film (Oatley 12), but doing so would strip it of its intentional simplicity. Overall, audiences who first viewed *Paperman* as the featured short for *Wreck-It-Ralph* were awed and interested in the style and story work of the short (Oatley 10).

The concise but emotion catching short film tells the story of how a brief encounter flourishes into a relationship between two ordinary individuals on the streets of New York City. Most viewers perceive the text as a simple romance, but through the manipulation of color, sound, and physical structure, *Paperman* uses a love story to comment on the timeless issue of loneliness among people.

The absence of color and the antique aesthetic are at the forefront of Kahrs design for the *Paperman*. According to Jessica Mallinson's analysis, the short is a commentary that “love is timeless” for all of history (12). Kahrs uses black and white to illustrate



a lonesomeness in the individuals' lives by lack of variety in color; though the city floods with people, no faces are familiar aside from their own reflections. When the woman is introduced, the audience's eyes are immediately drawn to her red lipstick as it stands alone in the color scheme. By having a sudden burst of color as in Figure 1, there is a moment of recognition beyond the paper man's typical quiet hustle of life. Red, in this particular short story, represents both romance and longing between the individuals. These specific details were intended to embody the longing to escape solitude. As the pair reunite at the train station, sunlight changes the hue of the final shot to represent a shift in emotions. The two are able to acknowledge a relationship and therefore step out of their state of loneliness put forth by their business driven lives.

In addition to the plain color palette, there is only music, no commentary from characters. Just as there is a single accent of color, there is one moment in which the man's sigh is verbalized as he barely saves the lipstick marked paper from flying away. The instances that stand out represent a depth to the individuals that may not have been realized before they were highlighted. Kahrs spent a significant amount of time living a lonely life in New York City and comments on how he used to spend much time admiring the black and white images of the New York skyline (Macquirre 4). Through this and his time in crowded subways, he pondered on how many faces would go by, yet he still felt alone (Macquirre 4). By stripping the film of color and speech, Kahrs personifies a combination of his experiences and imaginations through the *Paperman*. Producer Kristina Reed shares that, "the cityscape serves as a visual metaphor for the



lead character's isolation..." along with the lack of color (Macquirre 8).

Structure is a key strategy in relaying the underlying message of this short film. Both of the key characters in the story are tall and slender, resembling that of their background.

The importance of body structure is most evident when the two are in the same shot. In Figure 2, the screen has all of the weight on one side which directs attention to the need of a balanced frame and likewise represents the paper man's lopsided social life. Figure 3 visually displays the way in which the woman counterbalances the paper man. The paper man also has a rectangular body with harsh sides yet his hair seems ruffled upon his soft edged face. This allows him to stand out slightly among his identical, sharp-edged co-workers in the paper company. The girl has much softer

lines yet does have elements of rectangular definition such as her face and upper shoulders. This design promotes the idea that neither one identifies solely in a particular sect of society yet are embracing their individuality with which they both recognize in the other. The animation of the film is a first time combination of 2D hand drawn characters with 3D Computer-generated characteristics (Macquirre 3). The DNA of the short, similar to the characters, does not fit into one particular arena but is an experiment of distinctiveness.

Paper is an important motif as well in this short film. When obscuring the clear-cut edges, the paper man causes strife in the office as he begins to fold flat, 8.5 by 11's into airplanes. As paper is suddenly seen by the paper man as a tool for reaching the woman, it represents that strange faces among the city can have more meaning--more possibilities--than what is initially assumed.

Kahrs' short film is more than a romance clip; Paperman is an encouragement for the audience to reach beyond conforming to the norm. Though the story appears to be of a simple nature, Kahrs entwines intentional color, sound, and basic structure manipulations to



represent difficulty in relationship formation as well as in the trials of loneliness. The characters' battle against loneliness is a timeless issue in culture and by addressing it, Kahrs is calling people to step out of their accepted dissatisfaction and to be in communion with one another.

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