

Trabajo Fin de Grado

The Female Perspective in Nicole Holofcener's Cinema: *Lovely & Amazing* as an Independent Romantic Comedy of the 2000s

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ABSTRACT

This undergraduate dissertation aims to analyse the way in which Nicole Holofcener uses the female perspective of romantic relationships in her movies. The movie selected to illustrate this is *Lovely & Amazing* (2001) and the analysis is focused in how the movie provides the audience with the perspective of its female protagonists (Annie, Michelle, Elizabeth and Jane), while leaving the male characters at a secondary level of importance. Furthermore, through the analysis, this dissertation also aims to accurately explain *Lovely & Amazing* as an independent romantic comedy of the beginning of the 20th century and compare it with Hollywood romantic comedies and indie productions of the genre from the same, previous and posterior decades. To do this, the analysis will not only focus on the ideology and conventions presented by the movie but also in the themes it deals with, such as death or parenthood, among others.

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado busca analizar la forma en la que Nicole Holofcener utiliza en sus películas la perspectiva femenina de las relaciones amorosas. La película seleccionada para ilustrarlo es *Lovely & Amazing* (2001) y el análisis de esta se centra en como dicha película da a la audiencia la perspectiva de las protagonistas femeninas (Annie, Michelle, Elizabeth y Jane), dejando a su vez a los personajes masculinos en un segundo plano. Además, mediante este análisis, este trabajo busca también explicar con exactitud *Lovely & Amazing* como una comedia romántica independiente de principios del siglo XX y compararla con la comedia romántica de Hollywood, y la comedia romántica independiente de su década, pero también previas y posteriores. Para ello el análisis no solo se centrará en la ideología de la película y sus normas, pero también en los temas que trata como pueden ser la muerte o la paternidad entre otros.

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1. Introduction

Lovely & Amazing (Nicole Holofcener, 2001) tells the story of four women, Jane (Brenda Blethyn), Michelle (Catherine Keener), Elizabeth (Emily Mortimer) and Annie (Raven Goodwin), all belonging to the same family, and it focuses on the problems each one has to overcome regarding love, looks and other aspects of their lives. While Jane opts for a liposuction to look younger and beautiful, and this leads her to health problems, Michelle is not able to bring money home and starts dating a teenaged co-worker of hers because she finds in him the things that her marriage lacks; Elizabeth questions her appeal and tries with a film heartthrob, and Annie (a black woman) suffers a clash because she tries to fit in her white adopted family but also connect with her heritage as a black person and, as a consequence, has social and identity contradictions.

The movie did not go unnoticed. It had a good reception by critics, receiving mostly positive reviews. For instance, Todd McCarthy said in *Variety*, "[e]ngaging, intermittently insightful but too glib to wring full value out of its subject matter, this brightly performed study of an extended family of females has enough going for it to quickly graduate from the fest circuit to a respectable career in specialized release . . . [it] evinces keen antenna for (mostly) female foibles, a good ear for dialogue, talent for directing thespians and a clean, unfussy visual style." Another example of these positive reviews on the movie can be found in *Rolling Stone*, in which Peter Travers opines that "[i]n this painfully funny and touching look at the vanities and insecurities that a mother can pass on to her daughters in the name of love, writer-director Nicole Holofcener does a chick flick right... Holofcener's film feels untidily honest. It's true to life, not to the Hollywood version." The movie was not only acclaimed by the critics, but also the movie and the actors received a great number of nominations to various indie cinema awards,

with Emily Mortimer as the only winner (Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Actress). In terms of the audience, it was also well received and it did well at the box office. According to Mojo, it made \$4,677,852 joining domestic and international data. We could say it was a complete success in all aspects.

Lovely & Amazing is an indie movie that belongs to the genre of romantic comedy and deals with issues and topics that are not common in the mainstream rom-com industry such as death, parenthood or race, among others. The movie presents new topics as the previously mentioned ones and enjoys an innovative plot that makes it clear that the romantic comedy is not a stale and repetitive genre. Nicole Holofcener succeeds in creating an interesting movie that differs, not only from the romantic comedy conventions of the previous decade like *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990) or *My Best Friend's Wedding* (P. J. Hogan, 1997) but also with the conventions of those movies produced by Hollywood and released in the first decade of the century such as *500 Days of Summer* (Marc Webb, 2009). This essay aims to understand and explain *Lovely & Amazing* as an independent romantic comedy movie, framing it within the context of the evolution of romcom in and outside Hollywood in the first decade of the 21st century.

2. Theoretical Framework

In regards to the romantic comedy genre, Deleyto (18) explains that it has been commonly defined as a narrative of the heterosexual couple with a happy ending in which humor does not necessarily play an important part, but this seems to be a limited definition. Actually, film genres are not always clear-cut categories to classify films. Deleyto is one, among many other cinema scholars, that believes that genres are defined by the conventions that films deploy, and not by the movies by themselves. He also proposes (18) to find a different approach to the rom-com definition in two different but close directions; the first one that comedy itself is a crucial part of romantic comedies; and the second one that the genre does not represent a specific ideology.

The comic is crucial in the construction of the genre because it seems to protect the lovers from the social conventions imposed by their surroundings. To do this, the rom-coms have to succeed in the process of creating a comic space. A single space, very close to reality, that through the advance of the plot is changed into something better, and that is presented as benevolent and sheltering for the couple and their relationship, as Deborah Thomas explains (14). Furthermore, Northrop Frye, one of the most important rom-com theorists, argues that there are two types of comedy, one being the general tendency of the comic irony, satire, realism and studies of manners, while the other is the less popular tendency of the Shakespearean and other types of romantic comedy (1957: 166-7). This bifurcation of comedy seems to be present since the beginnings of the comedy until now, and despite the fact that the ironic comedy is more popular than the Shakespearean one, both of them seem to be successfully used in the romantic comedy genre.

Regarding the ideology presented by these movies, it is not always the same. As Grindon explains in his work, romantic comedies have been a cornerstone of Hollywood entertainment, from classics such as *Trouble In Paradise* (1932) or *The Lady Eve* (1941) to worldwide known movies like *Pretty Woman* (1990) and to contemporary rom-coms, like Will Gluck's *Friends with Benefits* (2011). Nevertheless, such a long-lasting movie genre is not always static. Throughout their history, romantic comedies have evolved, that is to say, their conventions have changed with the passing of time. It is not just a "boy meets girl" genre. "The basic ideology within the romantic comedy genre is the primary importance of the couple" (McDonald, 2007) is a statement that is true for classic rom-coms such as *The Awful Truth* (1937), in which true love was only heterosexual and was presented as eternal, able to fulfill your necessities, and the key to an ideal life. However, this portrayal has been challenged by more contemporary rom-coms, in which many experts claim that new options to love have emerged (friendship for instance), new types of protagonists are presented (such as in *Enough Said*, in which the protagonists are older than what we are used to seeing in this genre), give a deeper view on the relationships outside marriage (like in *Vicky Christina Barcelona*), or intimate relationships before marriage are a common thing, as Oria (151-156) develops in her work.

On the other hand, in order to understand *Lovely & Amazing* as an indie movie, first it is crucial to know where to set the line between independent and Hollywood cinema. Hollywood could be defined as a movie industry that first appeared in the 1910s, after the move of the film companies to California, and is formed by a small number of giant companies. Simply put, independent films would be those that, in the course of US film history, have been produced outside those big companies. Yet, over the last years, critics have found considerable difficulties when defining the term independent. The word "independent" could be defined as something that is free from outside control and

that is not subject to another's authority, or something that is self-sufficient and does not depend on another to survive". Following this idea, in 1999, Emmanuel Levy defined an indie as a fresh and low budget movie that was made in a gritty style and offbeat subject matter, and that presented the director's personal point of view (1999, 2). This definition centres the issue on economic and industry factors, but it is more complex than that. Actually, there are some indie movies that have not such low budgets, with costs of various million dollars. Because of this, as Holmlund (2005, 7) explains, in 1999, the Spirit Awards were opened up to include all films made in the "spirit" of independence, relying on the spirit rather on the economic or industrial background. In the 1990s the Hollywood industry started to show interest in indie cinema and to absorb some of these indie studios. In the 2000s, what Thomas Schatz (2008, 31) named "conglomerate Hollywood" emerged, and divided the cinema industry in three types of movies: big-budget blockbusters, films with a lower budget and produced by indie divisions of the conglomerate, and genre and specialty films handled by independent producers with a very low budgets. As can be seen, the concept of indie cinema nowadays is much more flexible than before. However, despite this complexity of the delineation of the difference between what is independent cinema and what is not, *Lovely & Amazing* can be easily categorised as an indie rom-com, since it both presents the view of her director (Nicole Holofcener) and has a very low-budget, no more than 250,000\$.

This categorisation of the independent romantic comedy with a lower budget and for a narrower audience may lead people to ignore these movies, but they are not necessarily all that different from Hollywood rom-coms. Indie cinema tends to present thematic and formal innovations, and indie rom-coms are not an exception. In this case, he argues that the indie romantic comedy has contributed to an increase of the variety in the genre. Among these innovations we can find the visibilisation and normalisation of

non-heterosexual romance (something that had been ignored before), the emergence of friendship as an alternative to love, using women's point of view, or giving a more realistic approach to the representation of heterosexual relationships. To reinforce this idea, Oria explains that contemporary indie rom-coms presents richness and diversity and provides a broad picture of love. She states that contemporary indie rom-coms treat love in a different way, treating uncomfortable topics like abortion as in *Greenberg* (Baumbach, 2010) or parenthood in *Friends with Kids* (Westfeldt, 2011); create anti-climactic, open and ambiguous endings (against the typical happily ever after) such as in *The Romantics* (Niederhoffer, 2010), or provide a more realist treatment of sex by directly showing it in very realistic terms and playing an important role in the courtship process, as happens in *Sideways* (Edward Burns, 2001).

Lovely & Amazing was released in 2001, that is to say, it is one of the first rom-coms of the century, and as such, it reflects features from both decades, the 1990s and 2000s. It is also the time in which indie cinema was rising in popularity and Hollywood started to take a closer look at it. According to Oria (147), there have been many attempts to “kill” the romantic comedy in the last decades, and many academics and popular culture writers have highlighted the downfall of the genre. It is true that the popularity of the romantic comedy has decreased with the passing of time, taking into account that when Hollywood started, it was one of the most popular genres. She mainly relates this downfall to the 2000s decade. Actually, the average annual US rom-com market share between 1995 and 2004 was 6.4 per cent (the highest point being 9.9 per cent), which are not really great numbers but many well-known romantic comedies were released in the 90s, for instance, *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990), considered one of the most popular rom-coms of all time, or *My Best Friend's Wedding* (P. J. Hogan, 1997), both of them having had very positive reviews and a very good reception. On the other hand,

romantic comedies from the 2000s were not as popular; for instance, *The Holiday* (Nancy Meyers, 2006) is one of the most popular rom-coms of the decade and seems to be far from the box office of the other two.

Nevertheless, the conventions shown by these two films are not the same that those from *Lovely and Amazing* or later movies from the 2000s. The romantic comedy industry evolved, partly hand in hand with ideological changes in society. Obviously, the common ideology of the 1990s was not the same as in the 2000s; in the last one, minorities like women, black people and the LGBT community enjoyed a better life. This was reflected in arts, literature and cinema, in which there started to be changes in how women were portrayed to the audience.

The focus on women and their experience in intimate relationships is one of the distinctive features of the filmography of the director of *Lovely & Amazing*, Nicole Holofcener. She is a female director that often gives the female point of view of the quest for romance. Director of mainly indie romantic comedies, Nicole Holofcener is one of the most recognisable figures in contemporary indie cinema. She started her career as writer and director of *Walking and Talking* in 1996, a film that was critically acclaimed in sites like *IMDb*. Among her works we can find *Friends with Money* (2006), *Enough Said* (2013), or, the most recent, *You Hurt My Feelings* (2023). Of course, in such a long career, there is bound to be some evolution in the conventions and the ideology the movies convey, but they all have something in common: the female perspective. Nicole Holofcener also stands out among other directors because she gives the historically forgotten perspective of the women and always regards the topics of the movies from a female perspective. Another aspect that characterises the director is that in most of her films, she uses Katherine Keener as her protagonist. Over the years, this actor has

embodied the type of femininity that is associated with Holofcener's take on intimate relationships. Actually, in an interview for *Variety*, she stated that she wrote some characters specifically for her, as happens in *Lovely & Amazing*. Holofcener has been nominated for a huge amount of indie cinema awards, winning Independent Spirit Robert Altman Award for *Please Give* in 2010 and other three in 2018, Writers Guild of America and Satellite Awards for Best Adapted Screenplay, and Independent Spirit Awards for Best Screenplay (all of them with *Can You Ever Forgive Me?*). Thus she is consolidated as one of the most prominent directors of independent romantic comedies in the last few decades.

Lovely & Amazing not only serves as an example of the conventions of the indie romantic comedy of the beginning of the 21st century and how they differ from Hollywood rom-coms and those from previous and posterior decades but also it perfectly reflects Nicole Holofcener's cinema. The movie counts with four main characters, all of them women, and tells the story of each one of them and the obstacles they have to overcome, always from their point of view. In this movie, Holofcener completely ignores the perspective of the male characters that seem to play a secondary role in it.

3. Analysis

As has already been said, *Lovely & Amazing* (2001) is an indie romantic comedy. In general terms, it conveys the vision and ideology of its director, Nicole Holofcener, who is known for providing the female point of view in portrayals of intimate relationships; a perspective that has been traditionally ignored in Hollywood productions of this genre. The objective of this analysis is to explore the characters and explain how, through them and their relationships, the movie provides the female perspective, offering the audience access to the female protagonists' minds, and displays characteristics that serve to define it as an indie rom-com of the 21st century.

The first scene to be analysed here is the first of the movie. It not only advances some of the topics that the movie will deal with, but also how the characters are going to feel, and the perspective that is going to be given to the audience. What is shown in this scene is one of the main characters, Elizabeth (Emily Mortimer), in what seems to be a photo shoot. It is her job, she is an actress, and she is having photos taken to advertise her new movie. While doing this, she is asked by the photographer to undress – she is clearly sexualised by him. This is an important aspect in the movie because most of the problems the main characters suffer are due to this sexualisation women receive; that is to say, through this scene the movie is advancing one of the main problems the characters, and specially Elizabeth, are going to face. Moreover, regarding the ending of this dialogue between her and the photographer, they state some sentences that give the audience some hints about the plot of the movie. She says that she does not feel like herself when posing as she asked to do, and the photographer answers “Who does?” This is advancing the plot, in the sense that *Lovely & Amazing* is mainly about the changes, situations and difficulties its main characters have to face due to their unhappiness towards the life they

are living. They do not feel comfortable with their situations. In the case of Elizabeth, she is heavily sexualised in her job, and this leads to her and her boyfriend breaking up, and to her having sex with a heartthrob that mainly values her for her looks but that does not see her as a love interest.

With respect to formal aspects, they are also used to convey meanings and show the director's ideology. In this case the scene starts with a medium shot of Elizabeth posing (fig. 1). This shot seems to be from the perspective of the photographer, but soon it starts to zoom in on her face (fig. 2). The acting of Emily Mortimer succeeds in giving a clear message to the audience, the character she plays is not comfortable with her situation. We notice her uncomfortableness while the camera is approaching her face, and with the advancement of the conversation, we notice the cause of this feeling. As the camera approaches her face, the audience learns more about the character, her problems and feelings, as if with this zoom into her face, the audience was entering her mind. Although not being a narrator in the movie, the audience get to know what happens inside the character's mind, maybe with the objective to get the public to empathise with her. Furthermore, the colours used in the background and the costumes also play an important role in conveying meanings in this particular scene. The background is white, which may reinforce this idea of her not wanting to be sexualised since this colour often symbolises purity. On the other hand, she wears black clothes, creating a clear contrast between what she wears and what she thinks. This reinforces the idea that she does not feel comfortable with what she is being asked to do, although she is not a completely pure character, she does not like when she is sexualised by her own industry.



Figure 1



Figure 2

This scene is very telling and important as the opening scene in *Lovely & Amazing*. From the beginning, it gives us some of the most important themes it will discuss in the rest of the movie, and explicitly shows that women are the protagonists. It is their perspective that is going to be given to the audience. Moreover, this scene also reflects some aspects related to the indie romcom of the 20th century: it gives the female perspective of love that is so characteristic of Holofcener's cinema (it directly presents the ideology of the director), a perspective that was not very common outside the indie romantic comedy at the time it was released.

However, Elizabeth is not the only character whose perspective is given to the audience. For instance, Annie (Raven Goodwin) is another case: through thematic and formal aspects we can infer how she sees things and how she feels. Annie is a character whose story develops around the issue of race. She is a young adopted black girl that lives in a white world. She is surrounded by white people in her family and friendships, and has little connection to her roots. These aspects lead her to feel like an outsider. She is incapable of feeling beautiful because she tries to fit in the white society she is part of, but she feels treated in a different way due to her skin colour. This is the conflict she has to overcome in the movie: to accept herself and not try to be something that she is not.

This treatment she receives and her feelings towards these situations can be seen in the following scene to be analysed: the one in which Michelle (Katherine Keener) takes Annie to the pool with her daughter, her friend, and her friend's daughter. In this scene, there are two relevant events that exemplify the treatment she receives. Firstly, when the other two white girls leave the swimming pool because their mothers are going to apply sunscreen on them, Annie remains in the water. When Annie sees this, she asks if she can use it but Michelle rapidly answers that she does not need it since her skin cannot burn. These words can sound innocent for Michelle, but not for Annie. Michelle is excluding her and implying that the reason she is not like the others is mainly the colour of her skin. What Michelle is indirectly doing here is increasing Annie's feeling of inferiority and otherness. The other important event is when she pretends to drown, only to get the adults' attention (fig. 3). She feels like this is the only way to be at least at the same level of importance for them as the other two girls.



Figure 3. Annie pretending to be drowned

Regarding formal aspects in this scene, since it is a dialogue between Annie and Michelle, it uses the typical shot-reverse shot so commonly found in these kinds of scenes. The aspect to be analysed here is not the type of shot but the camera angle. When Michelle talks we see her through the point of view of Annie, and vice versa; but they are not

placed at the same level. Annie is below Michelle and when we have her point of view, the camera uses a high angle (fig. 4). When we have Michelle looking at Annie, it is the other way, she is placed a little higher, so we see Annie from a low-angle shot (fig. 5). This may convey how Annie feels, she has to look up to see the other characters, they are portrayed one level above, as if they were superior to her. Annie here has a sense of inferiority in part produced by Michelle's words. Moreover, in this scene too, when she is shown on screen, she is presented alone in the pool; contrary to when Michelle appears, who is portrayed surrounded by the other white characters. This may reinforce the idea that Annie has a sense of otherness, she does not really feel as if she was part of the family.



Figure 4. Annie's point of view shot



Figure 5. Michelle's perspective of Annie

Furthermore, having Annie as one of the main characters allows Holofcener to introduce other topics in the movie. Apart from treating themes related to women in an activist way (she stands for equality) such as looks and femininity, she also introduces the issue of racism and race, two themes that could be considered as uncomfortable.

Lovely & Amazing also provides the subjective perspective of Michelle in many scenes, but to exemplify her vision towards the situation she has to overcome, there are two revealing scenes that could be analysed and compared in order to understand it better. These two are the one in which she tells her husband she has been hired for a new job and the scene in which she enters her teenager lover's room.

Michelle is a white middle-aged woman who pretends to have a perfect life in front of other people (she tells her friend that she has sex regularly, for instance). But this is not true, she is a frustrated artist because nobody seems to be really interested in what she does and struggles to bring money home. As a result, the marriage seems to be affected by this, and the relationship with her husband could be described as non-existent. Each time they talk they end up arguing or speaking in a passive-aggressive way. Regarding sex, he does not seem to be interested in his wife in a sexual way; they even have a conversation about this, implying that they do not have an active sexual life. They do not act as a couple and the only thing that seems to keep them together is the daughter they have in common. Michelle feels there is a lack of attention from her husband, and in response, when she is searching for a job, she meets a man and has a date with him. She seems to be attracted by the interest this teenager shows in her, which is what she lacks in her marriage. In this scene, both actors, Catherine Keener and Clark Gregg, offer a wonderful performance through which the audience can easily notice that although not saying it explicitly, they do not tolerate each other.

In the first place, the scene in which she talks with her husband: The context of this scene is that she has gotten a new job to make her husband happy because he has been accusing her of not bringing money home. This conversation is presented through a shot-reverse shot, like many others in the movie. The difference here is that we seem to

have the point of view of Michelle when the camera frames her husband (fig. 6), but the reverse does not happen when Michelle is framed (fig. 7). In other scenes like the one at the swimming pool, analysed in previous pages, we have both points of view, but this time we only have Michelle's. This may not only reinforce the idea that the movie seems to side with women and provide their perspective but also it may convey that he is not paying attention to her. Not having his point of view in this scene feels as if he was not looking at her, which is how she really feels at the moment. For her, it does not matter what she does, her husband will never pay her the attention she thinks she deserves. Moreover, the fact that both actors are in different positions may also suggest some meanings. While the man is standing and moving, she is sitting on the bed. They are at different heights, which could imply that they are on different pages. This idea is reinforced by the position of the camera and the use of the setting. Thanks to the position of the camera when framing the man, the audience can notice the wall and know that he is in a different room. Of course, this is intended, as it reinforces the idea that both of them are on different pages: they are not a real couple anymore.



Figure 6. Michelle's husband from her perspective



Figure 7. Michelle sitting on the bed

On the other hand, when Michelle is alone with the teenager in his room, things are very different. Here, both characters seem to have more chemistry in comparison with

the marriage, and although Michelle is sad because of her mother's situation, he manages to make her laugh. Regarding formal aspects, both composition and frame distance are relevant. Regarding the former, each time the camera frames both characters they are placed at the same level and have each half of the screen each. Unlike in the previous scene with her husband in which they were in different positions, never shown together and at different heights, in this case, they appear as equals. They seem closer and they seem to be on the same page. This can be seen for instance when he closes the door: both characters are standing in front of each other and both occupy the same space on the screen (fig. 8). This also happens when they sit on the bed: there is a scene in which both of them are shown and the same happens. Moreover, in this part of the scene, there is a conversation between them and the movie uses the classical shot-reverse shot to frame both characters' faces. In this scene, the movie still offers Michelle's point of view (fig. 9), since when the teenager appears on screen he is shown from Michelle's back, letting the audience see the same as her. The difference here resides in how she is shown. When she is framed, we get his point of view (fig. 10). As with him, when we see her, we do it from his back, that is to say, both points of view are provided at this moment. This may convey the idea that, unlike when she speaks with her husband, she receives attention from the teenager and he is paying attention to her. Furthermore, the camera here has no low or high angles, reinforcing the idea that they are equal in some sense. Also, this scene helps the audience to understand why she feels attracted to him, although simultaneously feeling that the situation is weird.



Figure 8. Both characters standing in front of each other



Figure 9



Figure 10

These characters and scenes are created by Nicole Holofcener with the aim of presenting what Oria (152) describes as uncomfortable topics such as divorce (the first scene implies that it is nearly impossible to save the relationship and that it will end in a breakup), or infidelity. These are, according to Oria, topics the indie rom-com often features. *Lovely & Amazing* is a good example of this point.

Finally, the last perspective provided by the movie is Jane's (Brenda Blethyn), the mother of the other three female protagonists. She is obsessed with looks and weight, and she decides to reduce hers with liposuction. This surgery leads her to suffer severe health problems, which constitutes most of her part of the plot in the movie. An example of a scene that can serve to illustrate how the movie uses her perspective is the one in which the doctor is revising the scars of the surgery while she is lying on the bed. She is shown

through a medium shot from the ceiling of the room (fig. 11) as if she was not lying, and then the camera starts to zoom in on her face (fig. 12). This could convey similar ideas to the previously analysed scene of Elizabeth at the beginning of this chapter. As the conversation develops, the audience learns what the character's preoccupations are, and learns more about her. This goes hand in hand with the zoom on her face, acting as if the audience were getting inside her head and discovering her thoughts. Moreover, thanks to this shot and the composition, we can also see the head of the doctor and the bed she is lying on. The props are really important because the pillow on which she is lying is pink, a colour used to symbolise love and romance, not only in cinema but also in other arts. We later know, when she calls Michelle, that she feels like the doctor is flirting with her. The use of this pink object anticipates this information.



Figure 11



Figure 12

In this scene we get to know her: she is opening herself up not only to the doctor but also to the audience. She is preoccupied with her young daughter; she feels old and she is aware she is going to die someday and yet she does not trust her two older daughters ready to take care of Annie. She does not want to leave her alone.

This character's perspective and depth of thought are crucial for the definition of *Lovely & Amazing* as an independent romantic comedy of the beginning of the 20th century. She is not only related to the kind of themes that Oria (152) points out, such as parenthood or death, but she also embodies a type of character not really common in the history of the romantic comedy: she is an older woman than what we, as spectators, were used to seeing in examples of romantic comedies from previous decades.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, romantic comedies are one of the most important genres in cinema history, and unlike what many people can think, it is not a simplistic genre. In the course of history, the genre has evolved in terms of the ideology presented by the movies, as well as the conventions they have used. For instance, *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) and *Friends with Benefits* (2011) do not have the same ideology; in the same way that they do not present the same conventions and do not construct the relationship of the characters equally, among other aspects. For instance, *Trouble in Paradise* was released in a time in which the Production Code was very strict and the portrayal of nudity or the use of drugs was completely forbidden. On the contrary, *Friends with Benefits* and other contemporary rom-coms have normalised these aspects.

This genre presents a great number of variations not only depending on the time it was released but also on who produced it. There could be found some differences between Hollywood romantic comedies and those released by independent studios, such as the representation of relationships other than heterosexual, other alternatives to love, different kinds of characters, or different themes and topics.

It can be said that *Lovely & Amazing* (Nicole Holofcener, 2001) fits the definition of many experts of the indie romantic comedy due to the budget with which the movie was made, the studio that released it, and the fact that it portrays the director's view. Of course, this movie has some characteristics that not only differentiate it from the Hollywood rom-com productions of the 2000s decade but also from preceding and posterior decades. Keeping in mind that it was one of the first indie romantic comedies released in the 21st century, it is a perfect example of the numerous changes that the new

century brought with it in the rom-com genre. For instance, the movie has different characters from those we are used to seeing in the rom-com tradition (we have a young black girl and an older woman), deals with uncomfortable themes such as racism, death, parenthood and divorce, and the characters do not enjoy a happily ever after ending (although the movie has a relatively happy ending, it is not the classical ending from romcoms in which the couples end together).

Nicole Holofcener is a well-known indie romantic comedy director because of her innovative focus on women's perspective on their relationships. *Lovely & Amazing* is not an exception. As one of her most popular movies, in this film Holofcener succeeds in providing the audience with the perspective of the four female characters: Annie, Michelle, Elizabeth and Jane. By doing this, she does not only seem to change the romantic comedy canon in which there has been an egalitarian focus on the perspective provided between men and women (with examples of rom-coms that use male protagonists and their perspectives like *Annie Hall*, and rom-coms with a female perspective such as many of the Julia Roberts romcoms of the 1980s and 1990s) but also allows the audience to enter the minds of the characters and creates them with a rich depth of thought. In order to intensify the female perspective in her movies, Nicole Holofcener uses thematic and formal aspects like colour in props or background, camera angles, compositions, camera shots and push-ins on the characters.

In all, *Lovely & Amazing* is a perfect example of a movie that both epitomizes the romantic comedy of the first decade of the 21st century and serves to understand the differences between indie rom-coms and those produced by the Hollywood industry in the same decade.

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