

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Amélie</b>
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Source	<i>Time Out New York</i>
Date	2001 Nov 01
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	85
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain (Amélie from Montmartre), Jeunet, Jean-Pierre, 2001



Time Out Nov 1-8, 2002 pg. 15

## Reviews

### **Amélie**

**Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet. 2000. N/R. 120mins. In French, with subtitles. Audrey Tautou, Mathieu Kassovitz.**

It's ironic that *Amélie*, a capricious comedy exploring the role fate can play in changing peoples' lives, makes it so hard to ignore the very non-magical origins of movie enchantments. How is a beloved screen heroine created? *Not* by dumb luck, but with lots of people working behind the scenes to perfect her ready-to-be-copied look, polish each syllable she speaks and ensure that the angels seem to supply the glow around her.

This is not to discount the self-generated appeal of Audrey Tautou, an adorable gamine with a perpetually surprised face who first won acclaim as a supporting player in 1999's *Venus Beauty Institute*. In *Amélie*, chance induces Tautou's childlike title character to devote herself, with mounting boldness, to performing good deeds for others. So when the film's tag line promises that Amélie will "change your life," it's referring to the recipients of her attentions. But it may also be true for love-struck 15-year-old French boys who now want

to become filmmakers (to meet babes like Tautou), and for idolatrous 12-year-old girls, of all nationalities, who now want to live the life of a French starlet.

Even more mature viewers will be delighted by the alluring vision of Paris director Jean-Pierre Jeunet conjures. Jeunet's Paris abounds with wonderfully odd figures and endless possibilities for love—for Amélie, with a peculiar fellow played by Kassovitz.

But it's a wonder that Tautou gets noticed at all amid the frenzy of whimsy and wish fulfillment the film becomes. Poor Amélie is constantly being bullied by the overbearing narrator (the voice of André Dussolier) and elbowed aside by cutesy visual embellishments. The happy-making seems designed in part to distract us from the tale's depressing underpinnings: Amélie's sudden desire to spread sunshine is a steam-valve-release reaction to her crummy past. Most people at the



**SHE'S SUCH A CUT-UP** Mischievous Tautou spreads joy by pasting together a mock missive.

screening I attended roared as the film ridiculed the character's childhood with a punishing, neurotic mother and emotionally distant father; but I couldn't help thinking that it's lucky Amélie didn't wind up a psychopathic killer. (For a more artful example of how to successfully juggle hardship and humor, see Jeunet's macabre treat *Delicatessen*, the 1991 film he codirected with Marc Caro.)

The legions of French viewers who have made *Amélie* a hit would scoff at such an interpretation. You might want to look at it their way. Try not to be too worn out by the filmmaker's desperate attempts to beguile you with the beautiful leading lady and the lovely setting. Just focus on the spectacle and you'll go home happy. (Opens Fri; see Index for venues See also "Moulin ruse," page 15.)

—Nicole Keeter