Apples at a Storefront

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imperfection

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Abstract: My thoughts on female characters, caricaturization, characterization, the word "imperfect," lowercase song titles, asymmetrical faces, the film industry's secret hostages, how error is human, and apples. I expess my frustration with the portrayal of female characters, lament about why Hollywood is failing, and discover the meaning of human existence, all under 1000 words. No, I am not okay, why do you ask?

Table of Contents

1. Hermione and Joyce

Hermione Granger and Joyce Byers are *very* similar fictional characters. Both of them are intelligent, somewhat conspiratorial women. Both of them are love interests for central male characters and/or are shipped with other male characters for no reason, and are frequently ignored or poorly handled by the creators. They are both the least explored out of all the main characters. They are often brought up in romances, including ones they aren't a part of, for no reason. Despite being consistently correct every time in everything they hypothesize, and despite doing everything almost perfectly, they are frequently mocked and made the center of a joke by their male costars, who do not seem to be able to notice a pattern that is dancing in front of their faces.

Both of them are commonly treated as if they were obsessive, rude, naïve, overly emotional, or deranged by both the characters and the writers – despite the writers themselves making them seem unrealistically flawless and having none of the above traits. They have the best overall traits, are usually the most "likable," and always without fail get along with other female characters, *unless* it's about a boy. (And God forbid it's about a girl.)

This is bad female character writing. The fact that I can connect the dots between two characters so far from one another – separated by author, genre, age, time period, publication date, role, and personality – is sad. Well, actually, I said I can "connect the dots," but it's really only one dot. "Female." Of *course* Hermione Granger and Joyce Byers are both mysteriously experts on emotions and relationships to a superhuman level. Of *course* they're the "mature" ones that are

somehow also the most annoying. Of *course* they're the most sensitive and the most intelligent (but also the most conspiratorial). They're women. And to some people, that is what sums up being a woman.

This problem is more than bad female representation. Kids, my fellow teenagers, and adults subconsciously look to characters as role models. I bet that a bunch of young girls tried their hardest to see themselves in these flawless yet ridiculed female characters and failed. Because who could identify with perfection? Nobody, because perfection is just a societal theory. I tried to identify with white, straight, cis, rugged, angry, emotionally distant boys who get into fist fights, have the emotional range of a teaspoon, shout over girls and have no hobbies. I failed.

Hollywood, tell me where you're keeping them hostage. Where are you keeping the real characters hostage? You know which ones. Where are the girls who run their sneakers ragged? Where are the boys who hug one another in celebration? Where are the girls who can fight without it becoming their whole personality, and without acting masculine the whole time? Where are the boys who make scrapbooks and cut paper printouts and fold origami and giggle with one another?

And for God's sake, where are the non-binary people?

Nowhere. That's why Hollywood is failing. I wouldn't say it's focused on perfection, necessarily, nor should we be not focused on perfection. I'm saying that we're focused with putting people in boxes, labelling, forming archetypes. Stuff that high schoolers do in their freshman year and

quickly grow out of. Like characters are files that you put in a cabinet. Identical apples you sell at a storefront. Rather than sweet little cutouts from a life we could have lived in a world we could have inhabited had it not been fictional. The idea that characters can be caricaturized at all is so widespread that we're in *desperate* need of some real characters. So let's do that. Let's create some good, beautiful, flawed, and rounded characters, and let's strike that idea through and highlight the most human thing to ever exist: imperfection.

2. Imperfection (To Err Is To Be Human)

Let's be a little wrong, shall we? Here are two poster designs I drew. Which do you like more?

You probably said the one to the left, but they're both designed by the same person, me. Why do you like the one to the left? It's the human in you. The imperfection in you. Why does the rule of thirds exist? It's because we get acne. Why did music artists randomly become obsessed with lowercase titles?[1] It's because none of their faces are symmetrical.

Here are some texts.

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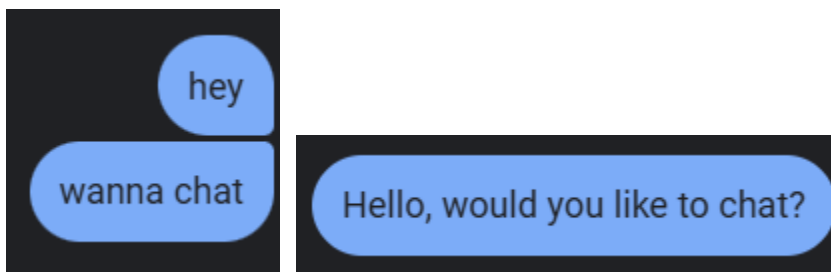
[1] I use all-lowercase titles in my 2024 poetry collection *New Winter Musings*, and this logic still tracks, because my face is also, in fact, asymmetrical. In fact, my face would be extraordinarily horrifying if it were symmetrical.

Why do you find the left text(s) more friendly than the right one? It's because your fingers are spaced irregularly. It's because we have unused organs. It's because we can't find a rhyme for "orange." Imperfection is imperfection no matter which context it's in, and imperfection is human.

You still don't believe me? Okay. Look at the word "imperfection." Look at the way it's spelled.

imperfection

It's telling you its secret right there: "I'm perfection." Because it's true! Everyone's imperfect, so that means that everyone is perfect. Imperfection is perfection. Confused? Good. Be imperfect, because it's meaningless at the end of the day.

Imperfection is perfection, and that's a meaningless statement, so let's mess up our characters a bit, can we? Let's bruise them a bit. Give them a few blemishes. A few scars. Apples come in all

kinds of colors: red, green, yellow, white… why can't our characters? Let's make our storefront thoughtful, but off-center. Built strangely. Make our apples imperfect – ergo, make our characters imperfect – ergo, life is imperfect – ergo, life imitates art – ergo, you are art – ergo, you are our characters – ergo, you are imperfect – ergo, you are perfect.

You are perfect. You deserve to see someone whose face resembles yours on-screen. You deserve to have ideals that your blood is in, you deserve to desire your blood, to feel safe in your blood, to feel connected to yourself. It took me sixteen years to not wish to be white, and I had to write a full-length book of free-verse poetry to do that. Let's bruise our apples a bit and shorten the process for our future kids, okay?

And gender shouldn't even *be* a talking point. Characters should just act like people. People act good and bad regardless of gender. Some of the worst people I've ever met have been women. Just as some have been men. Hollywood needs to realize this, and fast. This is one of the biggest industries in the world, so it's not like my opinion as a random teenager on the internet matters, but…

I'm afraid.

If Hollywood doesn't fix their mentality quickly, I'm afraid the damage they'll do will be irreversible, and we'll never love another character again. They'll all be files in a cabinet. They'll all be red, shiny, whole, smooth, perfectly sized, perfectly proprtioned, perfect apples at a storefront.

And to think that all of this ranting and deep thinking from a random teenager on the internet

came from a simple idea about two female characters... doesn't seem very perfect, does it?