

Almost Famous by Cameron Crowe. The rock and roll journey

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Abstract

This essay considers the movie *Almost Famous*, a road movie with a comic-dramatic tone. Beyond the story itself, which boasts a rock and roll backdrop, the film has autobiographical overtones. These permit the director, Cameron Crowe, to conduct both an ode to and a diatribe about journalistic work, through the main character.

Key words: Road movie; Cinema; Rock and roll; Journalism; Comedy-drama.

Almost Famous, known in Spanish as *Casi Famosos*, is a Cameron Crowe film that was released in 2000. It fits into the dramatic comedy genre, although in this case, it also has a place in the independent *road movie* category, as it revolves around a road trip in which the protagonist, William Miller (Patrick Fugit), seeks an interview with one of the most important members of the band *Stillwater*, to later be published in *Rolling Stone*.

A famous American publication dedicated to the rock scene. It was created in 1967, and may be found worldwide, impacting local musical rock contexts. In this movie, musicians profess great respect and admiration for said magazine's work, as its articles are of great social influence.

Almost Famous has become a cult film, especially among those nostalgic for *rock* music from the late 60s and early 70s, during which time the film is set. It is also a story of learning, personal acceptance, and the struggle to continue working toward one's dreams (Universo Cinema, s. f.). This film's main character, William Miller, was the victim of an overly-controlling mother during his childhood. This repressive family environment caused his sister to leave home and give William her record collection, which contained the music of famous rock bands. They would change his life completely.

Years later, young William is a fan of the rock greats, including *Led Zeppelin*, *Black Sabbath*, and singers like *David Bowie*. He is not just interested in the music, but also in the artists' lives and their behavior, on and off-stage, with their fans and family. Likewise, he writes for his school paper and sends his articles to *Creem*, a magazine that publishes *rock and roll* content.

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Thanks to one of these articles, he is contacted by *Rolling Stone* to do a story on the tour of the up-and-coming band, *Stillwater*.

William's trip to get the interview, return home, and write and publish the article begins here. The movie interweaves both fun and endearing moments together, which help the audience, from the protagonist's point of view, to recognize the apex and decadence of rock's glamour, the way that dreams always have two sides, and the way in which human identity is variable (Universo Cinema, s. f.).

At the beginning, the movie does not operate as a *road movie*. The tour doesn't begin until almost an hour into the film. The trip is not particularly descriptive, highway shots are rare, and few stops are made along the way. There are, however, a great many scenes in the vehicles in which the characters are transported.

Different genre characteristics, including illegality, are revealed, as band members consume drugs and participate in parties with minors. Additionally, the pessimistic character of the story, and the need to reach a goal in order to return to the starting point emerge, as the band is conflictive and their internal links are self-motivated. For William, his motivation to go on tour is to get interviews, return to publish them in the magazine, and graduate from college. The road trip supposes self-discovery for the young reporter, who, owing to his introverted personality, has to modify his own biography in an extreme situation. The audience witness family breakdown, as William's home disintegrates as a result of maternal overprotection. Finally, a representation of masculine power is recognized, as on one hand, the majority of individuals on the trip are men, and on the other, the bands of the time did not allow for female members.

"Inasmuch as William Miller is exposed to the world of rock 'n' roll, the adults around him are obligated to grow" (Caracciolo, 2017, s. f.). The protagonist is a 15-year-old adolescent in an extreme environment. As such, the band, in several ways, must be responsible for his care.

Intertextually, this film connects with the music scene. Although the band *Stillwater* is fictitious, it is able to establish nexuses with other *rock and roll* groups of the time. They all exhibit conflicts between members--the majority stemming from the desire to become famous. Similarly, fame is the cause of conflict when it becomes the musicians' ideal. *Groupies* (fans who seek intimacy with the artists) are also present as a key element of the story. More specifically, the movie references the *Beatles* song, "Penny Lane", as the title of this song is the name of one of the *Stillwater* fans. "In the eyes of the adolescent journalist and lead guitarist, she is the ideal muse, inspiring both article and song writing" (Caracciolo, 2017, s. f.). Penny is key in the story because William falls deeply in love with her. However, owing to differences in age and maturity, his love is unrequited. She is Russel's partner, despite the fact that he, the band's guitarist, has a girlfriend in New York.

In subtextual terms, or the film's ideological weight, *Almost Famous* offers a negative image of the press. The band calls William "the enemy", because as a result of his role, he has the power to destroy their career or popularity, if he airs their dirty laundry, which includes relationships with *groupies* who become lovers, despite the partners they have at home.

Notably, the film imbeds a variety of stereotypes, in terms of character construction, that might detract from its credibility. These include rockers devoted to excess, and *groupies* as easy women.

To conclude, the film may be considered semi-autobiographical, given that it contains overtones from director Cameron Crowe's story, embodied in the character of William Miller. The filmmaker wrote articles about *rock* bands that were published in different media. This experience permitted him to design the story of this particular road movie in which the stage music makes a musical soundtrack.

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