# Sideways – The white and the red

Sideways (2004)

Cast: Paul Giamatti (Miles), Thomas Haden Church (Jack), Virginia Madsen (Maya) & Sandra Oh (Stephanie)

Director: Alexander Payne

The movie sideways is about a middle school English teacher, Miles (who is going through depression and trying to get a book published) going on a road trip to the wine country with his c-list actor friend Jack, to celebrate that Jack is getting married. The two unlikable guys then get into a lot of trouble with the local girls there and go back home.

The two main-characters Miles & Jack waste no time in starting to make us dislike them. Already from the first scene the lying starts, and then Miles goes and steals some money from his mother. Not a good start if you are the type of person who wants to root for the main characters. The two seem very opposite in nature, one is very positive and the other very negative, almost like red & white wine. This contrast seems to pop up more than once in the movie.

This theme can also be seen when we meet Maya (the waitress at the Hitching Post), she’s drinking white wine and seems very cheery, and Miles despite his mood, invites her over to talk, she signifies that she wants to hang out, but Miles just says he wants to go back and crash, while drinking red.

Jack is almost the opposite of Miles; he is really positive and optimistic. We then meet Stephanie in a winery, serving wine tastings, and while Jack is being positive, Miles and Stephanie are negative about the wine. Jack and Stephanie set up a date, almost likes opposites attract each other.

We also see this white & red theme later in the movie when Miles is in the restaurant with Maya and he drinks white wine, and being cheery while doing so, but as soon as they switch to red wine, Miles becomes very depressed and even calls his ex-wife.

Sideways is also a very appropriate name for the movie, as the character development during the movie really is just sideways. Normally you would expect a movie to contain a lot of character development from negative to positive, maybe some obstacle they must tackle in the middle, and then a happy ending. But this movie is not like a normal development, even though there are realizations of the characters during the movie, Miles and Jack basically end the movie like they started it, as dislikeable characters.

This is also illustrated in the fact that Miles meets Maya, finally beginning to establish a relationship with her, but ending up sabotaging himself and Maya breaking it off. Jack meets Stephanie and gets together with her, but in the end, he returns and gets married with no real repercussions, sans the broken nose of course.

Though I have been harping on about the characters being dislikeable, that does not mean we do not feel sympathy for them either. The movie is great about getting us invested in the characters even though we do not like them. Miles gets a call about his book not being published and gets really upset, and we sympathize with him, cause we all know the feeling of having worked for something a long time, and having it ended up as a failure.

There are also other creative elements to convey how Miles feels during the movie, if we take a look at the title cards for each day, we can see it’s just a black background with white letters, signifying that Miles is depressed, but the one day where he wakes up with Maya, it’s not a black background, but a colourful view of the local area, signifying Miles isn’t depressed anymore, because of Maya. That day, Maya breaks it off, and the next day we’re back to the black background, signifying Miles is back in a depressed state.

I didn’t like the Movie the first time I watched it, I think I was expecting the characters to have a positive development during the movie, and thus wasn’t satisfied with the open ending. Watching it the second time around, I noticed a lot more of the elements, as the red/white theme, and how even when we don’t like the characters, we can still root for them and feel sympathy.

In conclusion I really like the red/white contrast in the movie, and how like in Miles book, we do not know if he gets together with Maya or what happens to him.

I would recommend watching this movie not only once, but multiple times to really get a sense of how the movie conveys emotions and characters.