





 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

MY is screwing with us but I lectured on this! The Ur-Indie era MPDG run is Lulu to Leeloo. That is, Demme's "Something Wild" (1986), largely forgotten - although it makes the MPDG lists - to Besson's "The Fifth Element" (1997) which clearly qualifies but is seldom counted in. 1/



 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

In film, it goes back to classics like "Bringing Up Baby" (1938) and "My Fair Lady" (1964) - the latter is later but, due to its "Pygmalion" origins, makes the clear connection to earlier English drama. 2/



 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

The English original MPDG is Gilbert's "Pygmalion and Galatea". These were originally described as 'fairy comedies', showing the aptness of 'pixie', later. 3/

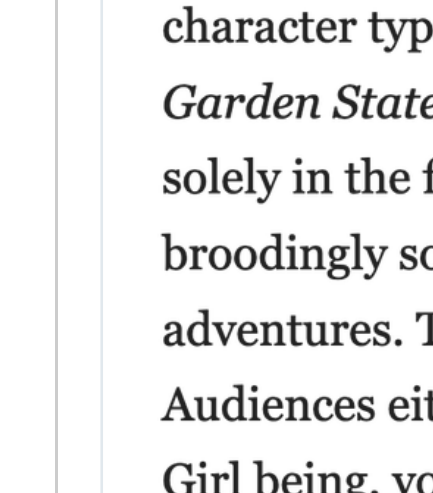


Pygmalion and Galatea (play) - Wikipedia  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion\\_and\\_Galatea\\_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_and_Galatea_(play))




 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

Anyway, the origin of "Manic Pixie Dream Girl" was as off-hand disparagement of "Elizabethtown", by Nathan Rabin. 4/

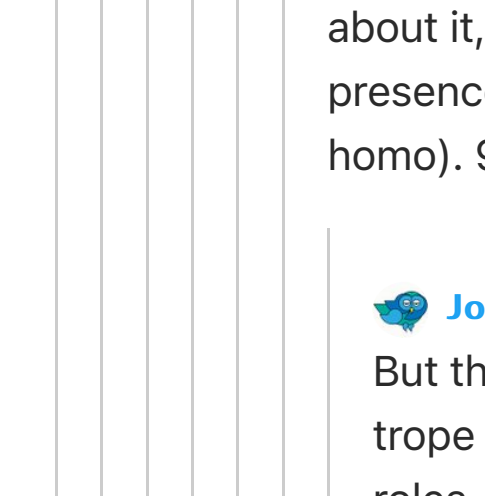


The Bataan Death March of Whimsy Case File #1: Elizabethtown  
"As somebody once said: There's a difference between a failure and a fiasco. A failure is simply the non-presence of success. Any fool can accomplish failure..."  
<https://www.avclub.com/the-bataan-death-march-of-whimsy-case-file-1-elizabe...>


Then again, Sarandon's character is the very embodiment of gritty neo-realism compared to Kirsten Dunst's stewardess/love interest. Dunst embodies a character type I like to call The Manic Pixie Dream Girl (see Natalie Portman in *Garden State* for another prime example). The Manic Pixie Dream Girl exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures. The Manic Pixie Dream Girl is an all-or-nothing-proposition. Audiences either want to marry her instantly (despite The Manic Pixie Dream Girl being, you know, a fictional character) or they want to commit grievous bodily harm against them and their immediate family. As for me, well, let's just say I'm not going to propose to Dunst's psychotically chipper waitress in the sky any time soon.

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago


Rabin has since repented the over-sized afterlife of his offhand coinage. 5/




I'm sorry for coining the phrase "Manic Pixie Dream Girl"  
In 2007, I invented the term in a review. Then I watched in queasy disbelief as it seemed to take over pop culture  
[https://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/im\\_sorry\\_for\\_coining\\_the\\_phrase\\_manic\\_p...](https://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/im_sorry_for_coining_the_phrase_manic_p...)

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

But it's a good term for something real! But obviously taking as swipe at "Elizabethtown" is no way to encompass Pygmalion, as a mythological archetype. MPDG comedy is classic comedy, including great films and crappy films. 6/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

It's tricky to analyze right. It's not that she isn't a 'real character' and he is. The guys in these comedies are as one-note as the gals, from Henry Higgins to Grant's 'I'm a silly dinosaur scientist' schtick to Daniel's nebbish-y yuppie Charlie in "Something Wild". 7/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

It's not that the trope isn't reversible. It is. As has been pointed out, "Twilight" is reverse MPDG. Another example I've never seen anyone note: "Silence of the Lambs" is reverse MPDG, with Hannibal teaching Clarice a few life-lessons. Manic Demon Nightmare Boy. 8/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago


In a weird sort of way "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" is Manic Pixie Dream Boy. Think about it, and what it means that his girlfriend, Sloane, is so oddly a non-presence in the narrative. Many buddy comedies are Manic Pixie Dream Bro (no homo). 9/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

But the difference reversal make points to real differences, and obviously the trope encodes all sorts of very sexist assumptions about 'proper' gender roles. I think the best way to think about it is this: 10/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago


The MPDG trope seeks to achieve escape velocity from a basically Victorian construction of ideal femininity and only half-succeeds. Victorian wives are childlike and domestic. The husband retreats into this safety zone from the tribulations of the modern world. 11/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago


The MPDG is childlike and anti-domestic. It's as though the MPDG tries to achieve a higher synthesis of that split between an ideal home, presided over by a gentle, childlike 'good fairy', and the wild - harsh - modern world of real adult life. 12/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

The job of the 'ideal woman' is to get a man's head on straight so he faces modern life as a man should: fearlessly & forthrightly, with a sense of who he really is. She can do that by being a presiding Good Fairy, at home, or an MPDG who drags him on a wild ride around town. 13/

 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago


#actually, the original Manic Pixie Dream Girl is Elizabeth Bennett. Fitzwilliam Darcy, at the start, is too full of himself and his consequence—and too afraid of embarrassment—to engage with the world and use the immense social power that inheritance of Pemberly gives him... 1/

 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago


...for good, he witty, snarky woman who does not have good clothes or ostrich feathers woos him & wins his heart, greatly against his conscious will. But once he is caught, he has to become the Man Deserving of Her Regard rather than a fribble, & they live happily ever after... 2/

 Woke Space Diva @B\_of\_the\_Bang 7 hours ago


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 PDFMakerApp @pdfmakerapp 7 hours ago


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 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago


...only be fact pt "Pride & Prejudice" is written from Elizabeth's point-of-view rather than Fitzwilliam's keeps her Manic Pixie Dream Girl nature from being blindingly obvious. 3/END

 John Holbo @jholbo1 14 hours ago

That is a very interesting point. The general issue is the larger 'are women FOR men' Bechdel Test one. Do women exist to fix and complete and complement men - various competing theories of how best they do that: wild or wifely - or are they ends in themselves, ethically? 4/

 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago

Consider the women from whom we are descended who lived in the pre-industrial agrarian-age world that was the fount of our art and literature. If they were to be our ancestors, they had to make choices which led to their having two (or more) children survive to reproduce... 1/

 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago


...lines and patterns of behavior that did not lead to that... do not, cannot loom large in our family trees. But what does that require in a pre-industrial plague-ridden society? Two surviving to reproduce requires four surviving to age five, which requires six healthy &... 2/

 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago


...robust infants. What wib miscarriages, stillbirths, we are talking eight pregnancies: six years of your life eating for two, & ten more years eating for two while breastfeeding—perhaps 20 years total, & pt is "if" you survive your one-in-seven death-in-childbed risk... 3/

 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago


...plus mobility & pus social agency is rder hindered by pe toddlers, especially before strollers, breastpump, & formula. Pis heavy biological load & grind, & transformation of society via technology & escape underpuns, for example, the "Cordelia" parts of Lois McMaster... 4/

 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago


...Bujold's "Vorkosigan" series. Pt is not our world. But be art & literature pt we have inherited & against which we make our own art & literature were all written in be shadow of p biological pattern. Pus things get highly weird as tropes & expectations pt made sense wib... 5/

 Brad DeLong: 'Live long, & prosper!' @delong 14 hours ago

...pt agrarian-age biological-patriarchal pattern as the background clash with how we live now—where for the typical woman eating for two is not a matter of two decades but of four years. 6/END

 eyefull1 14 hours ago

The main character from Northanger Abbey, I forget her name, seemed very Manic Pixie Dream Girl to me.

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

Note the divide between versions in which the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is made, in the home - maybe literally sculpted from stone, in the home - and in which she is found, in some conspicuously accidental 'meet cute' collision, outside the home. 14/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

The film that most perfectly interrogates this tension is, of course, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind", which strongly thematizes the accidental meeting AND how it's all in Joel's head. She's a wishful projection out of him (as she tells him). 15/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 15 hours ago

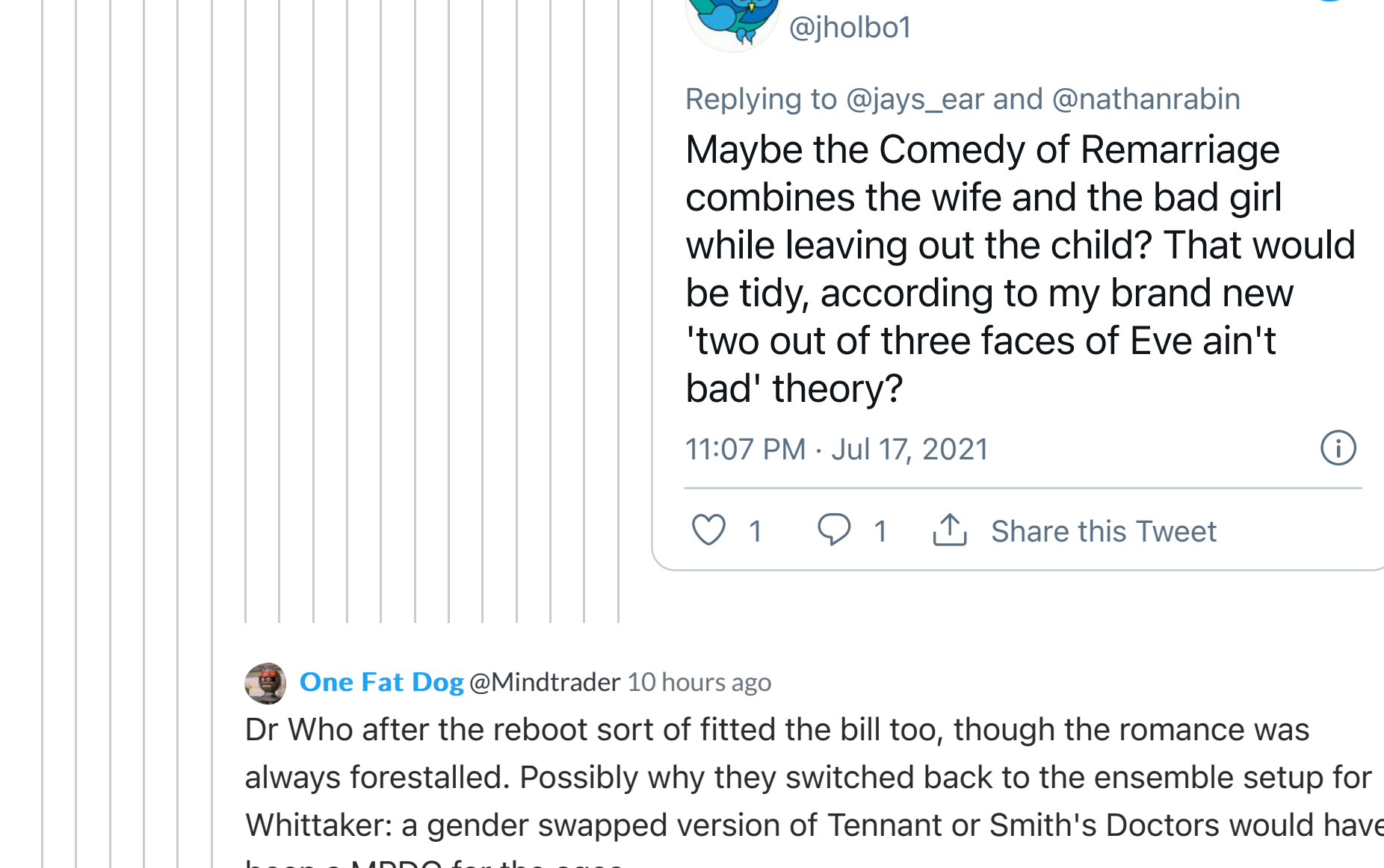
"The Fifth Element" is also good to focus on. Compare and contrast Leeloo with Neo, in "The Matrix". Masculine vs. MPDG incarnations of what it means to be 'the One'. Anyhoo. 16/


 John Holbo @jholbo1 13 hours ago

Final thought: in a way, the battle between the Victorian ideal of domestic femininity, and the MPDG ideal of wildchild femininity - these dueling formulas for 'completing a man', getting him to be his healthy, balanced self, in the crazy, mixed up modern world - 17/


 John Holbo @jholbo1 13 hours ago

turns the classic Madonna-Whore binary into the Three Faces of Eve three-corner struggle: you've got a wife, the sexy bad girl, and the child. The Victorians combined wifeliness with child-like-ness. Enchanted dull domesticity as childcult. That's one type of 'fairy' ideal. 18/



 John Holbo @jholbo1 13 hours ago

The MPDG, by contrast, combines the sexy bad girl with the child - not that you are having sex with a naive. But her 'bad' character is softened by making her naive and childlike and impulsive, not deliberately manipulative - not a seductress. That's another 'fairy' ideal. 19/

 John Holbo @jholbo1 13 hours ago

So you've got a sort of 'two out of three faces of Eve ain't bad' thing going on. Is probably sick of talking about it. But the MPDG is not a dispensable trope. It was only a bit unfortunate to introduce it in reference to a bad, disposable film. 20/

 Jamsheed @jays\_ear 13 hours ago

I strenuously object to the inclusion of Katherine Hepburn in this (or really any of the comedies of remarriage) but otherwise this is really great. cheers!

 John Holbo @jholbo1 12 hours ago

Maybe the Comedy of Remarriage combines the wife and the bad girl while leaving out the child? That would be tidy, according to my brand new 'two out of three faces of Eve ain't bad' theory?

 Jamsheed @jays\_ear 12 hours ago

that's a good way of putting it and makes a lot of sense. and it's been a bit but IIRC, switch out "bad girl" for a kind of prelapsarian innocence, and that's sort of where cavell ends up after a couple of hundred pretty intense pages :)

 John Holbo @jholbo1 12 hours ago

"Ah, this new but unapproachable Stanley" as I call him.

 Jamsheed @jays\_ear 13 hours ago

I mean obviously hepburn is fairly manic in Bringing Up Baby but to the extent that I understand the modern characterization (and I admit I've seen almost none of the modern rom coms), I think the gender and romantic dynamics in remarriage/screwball comedies are a bit different.

 Jamsheed @jays\_ear 13 hours ago

and even then, with say Lombard in Godfrey or Colbert in It Happened One Night, maybe, but Hepburn as pixie anything ever just doesn't scan. at least to me.

 John Holbo @jholbo1 12 hours ago

To me it works because - maybe this is a very personal opinion - she isn't really quite right for "Baby". She's a bit too grown-up and althoher Hepburn-y to read her pixie lines with conviction. I confess, I'm not a "Baby" fanboy.

 Jamsheed @jays\_ear 12 hours ago

I love it immensely but I understand not everybody does.

 John Holbo @jholbo1 12 hours ago

Footnote. objects to "Bringing Up Baby" - by extension, classic filmic comedies of remarriage - getting shoehorned into MPDG. Maybe I can round out my new-born 'two out of three ain't bad' theory, like so:

 John Holbo @jholbo1

Replying to @jays\_ear and @nathanrabin  
Maybe the Comedy of Remarriage combines the wife and the bad girl while leaving out the child? That would be tidy, according to my brand new 'two out of three faces of Eve ain't bad' theory?

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 One Fat Dog @Mindtrader 10 hours ago

Dr Who after the reboot sort of fitted the bill too, though the romance was always forestalled. Possibly why they switched back to the ensemble setup for Whittaker: a gender swapped version of Tennant or Smith's Doctors would have been a MPDG for the ages.

 Epimetheus The Second @epimetheushall 12 hours ago

Has there really been MPDG "backlash"?

 John Holbo @jholbo1 12 hours ago

I think it has frequently been implied that it is bad and stupid to make films in this mold, since the problems with it are so obvious. But the same could be said of almost any trope: it's been done, and it's blinkered in some ways.

 Epimetheus The Second @epimetheushall 12 hours ago

Yes thank you much better put than I would be able