The Purple Rose of Cairo

Inkshed

*The Purple Rose of Cairo* was really interesting to specifically look at as a illustration of audience, and particularly, female spectatorship. The plot itself revolves around Cecilia’s female gaze. Exhausted with her real life – draining herself mentally with long hours at a diner where she is routinely disrespected to support her lazy and abusive husband, movies are her only escapism. She immerses herself into the pictures, falling in love with characters and the actors who play them. After watching the namesake film, despite being a comparatively minor character, she becomes infatuated with the explorer Tom Baxter, played by fictional actor Gil Shepherd. Tom Baxter is hardly the typical protagonist that plays into the male fantasy. He is driven yet sweet, goofy yet sincere. Once Tom has escaped into the real world, the filmmakers are all so surprised that this minor character is so important to her – as filmmakers are so accustomed to accommodating the male gaze that they don’t even realize they made a character a woman would truly find worth fantasizing over. Subsequently, in Woody Allen’s real film *The Purple Rose of Cairo,* he is not primarily filming it for the male gaze. Cecilia, while ultimately certainly compelling for the male gaze, is a character women can see themselves in, exercising her agency with relatable struggles and motivations.