Candidate 3 evidence

To what extent does the character of Amélie in 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain conform to the expectations of women in France in the late 90s?

'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' by Jean-Pierre Jeunet is an inspiring film, portraying an unusual woman, Amélie, who breaks away from the societal normalities of 1997 Paris.The rights of women in 1990s France were extremely limited compared to the modern day, during the 90s there grew a wave of resistance for "the maintenance of a strong awareness of oppression and domination" highlighting how much more power men at the time had over women and that something had to be done about it. The film subtly shows the imbalance in power between men and women in France at that time, with its use of characterisation, dialogue and cinematography.

From the beginning of the film, Amélie Poulain is portrayed as an unusual character. The narration within the first few minutes ensures the watcher is aware of her strange tendencies, different from the expected norm of children in France around that time. This is shown through Amélie being punished at school, highlighting her differences compared to the other children around her, behaving as expected. As her adolescence is progressively shown, her personality gradually develops and her abnormality becomes clearer. Despite most people around her forming relationships, Amélie keeps to herself, in her small, classically Parisian apartment. Even her acquaintances notice that she holds herself back in life. Indeed, her neighbour Dufayel advises her to be more daring in life, "Vous n'avez pas les os en verre, vous pouvez vous cogner à la vie." (1), this links to the expectation that women in that era should keep to themselves, yet Dufayel tells Amélie to put herself out there.

Despite her overall shy personality, Amélie can be quick to criticise other people. This is another area in which she can be classed as different from the more typical woman in 90s Paris. For example, when Amélie speaks to the grumpy street vendor, he makes a comment about his employee and Amélie replies with "Vous au moins vous ne risquez pas d'être un légume puisque même un artichaut a du coeur!"(2). Suggesting that he isn't at risk of being a vegetable as even an artichoke has a heart. Where it could be said that the 'ideal' woman at the time would have bitten her tongue, Amélie does not conform to these expectations and instead returns the vendor's attitude. Because this seemingly harmless woman can be so quick with a witty comeback, it often rubs other characters the wrong way and even watchers, making it difficult for the viewer to form a solid opinion on the unique character that Amélie is. "Amélie on t'aime ! Amélie on te hait !" (3), writes Jaques Moran in his article as if she has almost multiple opposite personalities.

The main colours used by Jean-Pierre Jeunet in the film, especially around Amélie are green and red which complement and contrast each other. In concordance with her confusing character, the lighting helps to show the differences in Amélie's emotions and their outcomes, as red symbolises her love and passion paired with green showing wealth and her need to help improve other people's wellbeing. This highlights the range of emotions felt by Amélie in the film. The cinematography is also used to portray Amélie's isolation, the hustle and bustle of preoccupied Parisians is often shown together with a softer lighting around her as she observes others, isolating her from the rest of the world. This almost depicts her in a more feminine light which women at the time were expected to be seen in. However, Jeunet's use of softer lighting could also be seen as to portray women as less powerful and almost inferior, with the lack of strong colours used around them.

Throughout the film, Amélie is continually told to put herself out there more, "Si Amélie préfère vivre dans le rêve et rester une jeune fille introvertie, c'est son droit. Car rater sa vie est un droit inaliénable." (4) says the narrator, scolding her for living an introverted lifestyle, despite it being her choice and her right to do so. However, it could be perceived that Amélie does put herself out there with her need to help those around, although she does it quietly and discreetly, meaning people don't appreciate the efforts she takes to aid others. Dufayel, who suffers from a brittle bone condition, even says to her, "Si vous laissez passer cette chance, alors avec le temps, c'est votre cœur qui va devenir aussi sec et cassant que mon squelette." (5), telling her that he believes she should not let the opportunity to be with Gino pass, or else her heart will become as brittle as his skeleton. Again reinforcing to Amélie the view of those around her who believe that she lives too sheltered a life. However, when Amélie makes an attempt to speak out or behave extrovertedly, she is looked down upon by society. Due to the portrayal of Amélie as a child, Jean-Pierre Jeunet allows watchers to feel sympathy towards her. We can believe that her awkwardness and her tendency to keep to herself stems from her childhood, as she was excluded and ignored by almost everybody around her from the very start of her life due to her being different.

Women at that time were expected to keep to themselves and so Amélie's intense desire to help others is somewhat criticised. When she attempts to help a beggar, he replies; "Non merci, ma petite dame, je travaille jamais le dimanche".(6) He doesn't accept her change as it is a Sunday. This scene suggests to viewers that she is mocked for trying to help others, as if the rest of the world is telling her to give up in her quest for other's wellbeing. Her kindness doesn't stop there, as she is minding her business returning home, she finds a slightly confused blind man and immediately takes him under her wing, beginning to guide

him, "Venez j'vais vous aider. On descend. Et Hop c'est parti"(7). Showing she doesn't help people for selfish reasons or to be recognised by those she wants to like her. This characteristic of Amélie actually aligns with the way in which women were expected to act in 90s France. She is entirely selfless in her aid to help others, yet she is still judged and criticised by those around her. Jaques Moran's article concurs, it describes Amélie's intentions as a quest for humanity, "sur les traces de ta quête du genre humain."(8), which is truly what it is. Amélie simply looks for the best in those around her, and doesn't hesitate to help them despite any criticism from others, making her a strong influence as to how women can actually be without having to think of how they are expected to be living their lives.

Women, especially those of Amélie's age, were expected not to be happily single. This is shown numerous times throughout the film, "Une femme sans amour, c'est comme une fleur sans soleil, ça dépérit" (9) says the newswoman, likening a woman without love to a flower without sunshine, highlighting yet again how it was expected for women not to be independent. Amélie is told repeatedly to go out and find someone, yet she finds many other things to keep her occupied. The fact is Amélie is not against finding somebody, as we actually learn, she loves love. This is shown with her strong want to set up Georgette and Joseph. However, despite her eagerness to help others find their person, Amélie is not so willing to help herself with this. This is why, when Amélie finally finds Gino, those around her find it so extraordinary. "Il va reposer sa petite cuillère. Et ramasser le sucre sur la table avec son doigt. Puis il va se retourner et là, il va me parler" (10). In this scene, Amélie shows that her knack for noticing the small things in life is not lost when it comes to those she loves, in fact she is instead shown to be paying more attention to them. This suggests she somewhat conforms to the expectations of women when love is concerned. Her knowing this about Gino already shows her obsession with him and her simple want to be loved, and loved not due to, but despite the fact she is expected to be.

Overall, I think the character of Amélie doesn't conform to the expectations of women in France in the 90s as she is portrayed as an independent, strong character, which differs from how women were supposed to act. Amélie's uniqueness is a key factor to her resisting these expectations, as she acts differently to most women around her. Making her likeable and inspiring. The film doesn't show women to be completely inferior yet it shows the blatant disregard towards women at that time. Amélie's aversion to these expectations is also inspiring to anybody watching as not conforming to the normalities was an uncommon concept at its time and I believe it heavily influenced many female watchers to not feel inclined to stay within the social norms.

Sources:

(1) 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' (1h51m)
(2) 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' (1h20m)
(3) https://www.humanite.fr/culture-et-savoir/-/cinema-le-fabuleux-destin-damelie-poulain-a-attire-plus-de-cinq-millions-de-spectateurs-pourquoi
(4) 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' (4-6m)
(5) 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' (1h51m)
(6) 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' (11mins)
(7) 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' (35mins)
(8) https://www.humanite.fr/culture-et-savoir/-/cinema-le-fabuleux-destin-damelie-poulain-a-attire-plus-de-cinq-millions-de-spectateurs-pourquoi
(9) 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' (52mins)
(10) 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' (1h37m)

Bibliography

'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain' by Jean-Pierre Jeunet. (2001)

Jacques Moran, Amélie Poulain, le cinéma dans tous ses états
https://www.humanite.fr/culture-et-savoir/-/cinema-le-fabuleux-destin-damelie-poulain-a-attire-plus-de-cinq-millions-de-spectateurs-pourquoi 29/03/26

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