

Film Review: *Moonstruck*

This is a 1987 romantic comedy very loosely based on Giacomo Puccini's classic 19th Century opera, *La Bohème* ("*The Bohemian.*") It consists of an entertaining series of romantic *vignettes*, but unlike Puccini's opera, it eschews the tragic ending and substitutes many moments of delightful humor, instead. Yet, both works promote the fatalistic notion that we should savor whatever fleeting moments of joy, happiness, love, and even intimacy we may find, because life is too capricious to do otherwise. As one character responds after being told that something was temporary: "*EVERYTHING is temporary!*"

The vignettes are interactions between Italian-American men and women that take place in New York City, most of which end up being as ill-fated as that of the two main characters in *La Bohème*. After losing her husband in a traffic accident only two years into her first marriage, the main character, *Loretta* (Cher,) is about to marry an obsequious, 40 year-old buffoon named *Johnny* (Danny Aiello,) because there's been no other man in her life for seven years. As she explained it, she waited until 28 to marry for love, then delayed having children, so when her husband was hit by a bus, "*I was left with no husband, no kid, no nothing.*"



Loretta

Loretta is shocked when her mother **Rose** (Olivia Dukakis) tells her that her father **Cosmo** (Vincent Gardenia) is having an affair. His affair is confirmed when Loretta sees *Cosmo* and his girlfriend at the **New York Metropolitan Opera** (*The Met*) one night during a presentation of **La Boheme**. Loretta doesn't tell her mother and *Rose* doesn't need confirmation. At the breakfast table the next morning, *Rose* confronts *Cosmo* in front of family members and declares that **"I want you to stop seeing her...and go to Confession."** After first dramatically rising from his chair and loudly slapping the table with his hand, *Cosmo* feebly assents to her request, but utters the following: **"A man understands one day that his life is built on nothing. That's a bad and crazy day."**



Cosmo Confronted by Rose

The evening before, while *Cosmo* was out with his girlfriend, *Loretta's* mother *Rose* meets **Perry** (John Mahoney) while she's dining alone at a favorite Italian restaurant in the neighborhood. After *Perry* has a drink thrown in his face by a much younger woman at a nearby table, *Rose* invites him to join her. The two immediately hit it off: he's educated, handsome, charming and well-groomed, and she's lonely. Thus, she receives the male attention that's lacking in her life, while *Perry* finds her

more worldly and intellectually stimulating than the coeds with whom he usually spends his evenings. Both appreciate the other's attentions, but any possibility of romance is impossible because *Rose* is married.



Rose and Perry at the Restaurant

Loretta's fiancé, *Johnny*, foolishly believes his mother back in Sicily is dying, a condition that appears to have arisen spontaneously when he hadn't visited for some time. After *Johnny* flew to Sicily to be at her "deathbed," he told her that he intended to marry, whereupon she experienced a "miraculous" recovery. *Johnny* may be the only character in the film who doesn't recognize that his mother manipulates him by pretending to be dying. Before *Johnny* left for Sicily, he asked *Loretta* to invite his estranged brother ***Ronny*** (Nicolas Cage) to their wedding.

Ronny is a tormented soul, much like *Rodolfo* in ***La Bohème***. The bad blood between the two brothers stems from an incident that occurred five years before in which *Ronny* lost part of his left hand in a bread-slicer at the family bakery where he works. *Ronny* was talking to *Johnny* while slicing bread when he became distracted and the accident occurred. His

disfigurement prompted *Ronny's* own fiancé to break their engagement and abandon him, so ever since he has blamed *Johnny* for ruining his life. *Ronny* is "***Moonstruck***" by *Loretta* soon after they first meet, and they end up in bed that same afternoon. Clearly, *Loretta* and *Ronny* are intended to mirror the characters *Rodolfo* and *Mimi* in ***La Bohème***.



***Ronny* Describing the Loss of His Hand**

The next day, *Loretta* divulges her dalliance with her fiancé's brother to her priest, which makes for a very entertaining *Confession*. ("***What was that second thing you mentioned, Loretta?***") Afterward, she vows never to sleep with *Ronny* again. However, *Ronny* convinces her to attend *The Met* with him to see ***La Bohème*** that night. Afterward, as he is walking *Loretta* home, *Ronny* seduces her once again with a very crude rendition of the theme shared by both ***Moonstruck*** and ***La Bohème***:

"Everything seems like nothing to me now that I guess I want you in my bed. I don't care if I burn in hell. I don't care if YOU burn in hell. The

past and the future are a joke to me now. I see that they're nothing. I see that they ain't here. The only thing that's here are you and me."

Several minor themes are woven into the fabric of the film, which are employed with varying degrees of success. One obvious theme is the gender role reversals that take place. The men are all romantics and "**drama queens**," while the women are more reserved and often skeptical about love and romance. (Twice *Rose* declares in one way or another: "**If you love 'em, they drive you crazy 'cause they know they can.**") Another recurring minor theme is the role of curses in ill-fated love. The Full Moon is a recurring motif, which seems to influence the men more than the women, despite what Italian folklore may say.

The film's most entertaining and humorous scene is its *denouement*, where every character mentioned -- and more, besides -- are gathered for various reasons at the breakfast table in *Rose* and *Cosmo's* home when *Johnny* returns from Sicily. I don't want to spoil it, but it's worth waiting for after all the dramatic tension that's been building. Unlike *La Bohème*, *Moonstruck* has a happier and much funnier ending.



The Denouement