"Don't be so Modest, You're a Rat": Anthropomorphism, Social Class, and Renegotiation in *Ratatouille* and *Bee Movie*

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Abstract: One of the common fantasy stories involving anthropomorphized nonhuman animals in animated children's films is of humans and animals discovering they can communicate as equals. The human-animal relationship in the premise of these films exemplifies the idea of questioning and renegotiating ingrained social barriers. This article will analyze two such films (Brad Bird's 2007 film, *Ratatouille,* and Simon J. Smith and Steve Hickner's 2007 film, *Bee Movie*) using existing empirical research in child developmental psychology. I posit that these films use anthropomorphized animals and humans as allegories for the working class and middle class. These class allegories are often framed as ethnic stereotypes because children have a strong fluency of ethnic stereotypes from a young age. While these stories are ostensibly about the disassembling of social barriers, *Ratatouille* and *Bee Movie* ultimately model a heavy regulation on social mobility which largely reinforces existing status quos of class difference.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Children's Films, Ethnicity, Human-Animal, Social Class

Children's films can often be perceived as trivial in both audience impact and thematic complexity. However, children's films might appear this way, they can often be hugely impactful in modelling social dynamics and concepts such as social class to their young audience. Brad Bird's 2007 film *Ratatouille* and Simon J. Smith and Steve Hickner's 2007 film *Bee Movie* are two such films which largely reinforce existing status quos of class difference, using parallel coding of upper and working class with ethnic caricatures to better impact children. Although these films do showcase individual cases of social mobility, they do so only to exhibit discrete cases of individuals transcending their original social class while using anthropomorphism to establish that such cases of social mobility should be heavily regulated and generally discouraged.

While animated children's films may not immediately appear as important or influential ideological texts, several scholars have argued that such films have their own unique properties with which to model concepts and social behaviors to their young audience. In his article, "Children's Films as Social Practice," Joseph Zornado (2016) posited that the prolific use of animation in children's films can be attributed to their social responsibility as cultural-pedagogical texts. Zornado advocated reading children's films through the lens of iconology, quoting film theorist Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1987) in defining iconology as the premise that that "when we watch a film we are somehow dreaming it as well; our unconscious desires work in tandem with those that generated the film-dream" (p. 180). As children's films are seen as having the social function of educating their young audiences, the use of animation is a highly effective means of iconologizing cultural ideologies through the technical and psychodynamic aspects of the medium (Zornado, 2016). Zornado (2016) likened the iconology of animation within children's films to the iconology of religious art in the Renaissance:

> [I]conology understands the animated feature as a perfect merging of ideology and pedagogy both in the way the animated feature represents pedagogy in terms of narrative while enacting pedagogy in terms of the positioning of the spectator as one in a community of passive recipients of the film screen's action. The animated features exhibit pivotal "truths" that are "obvious and true" because [they are] common and familiar, yet moving, and still beautiful. (p. 3)

Animated children's films are important tools in explicitly or implicitly informing children about the world. Animation has long been intertwined with the presence of nonhuman animals (often anthropomorphized).

Children's films have strong ties to animation and so by extension, children's films also have strong ties with anthropomorphized animals. In his 2013 book, *The Animated Bestiary:*

Animals, Cartoons, and Culture, Paul Wells, a prominent academic in the study of animated animals and anthropomorphism, noted the predominant use of anthropomorphism in film animation since the early days of the medium – the first animated personality being a dinosaur. The ability to animate nonhuman animals was an impressive and moving visual spectacle. Such a spectacle was an appealing response to difficult societal conditions such as the Great Depression that led to "funny animals" often being popular respites for animated film patrons. Wells argued that the reputation for triviality held by children's films, anthropomorphized animals, and cartoons is unwarranted. Indeed, he posited that this reputation can empower and embolden symbolic explorations of human identity and difference in the aforementioned media content. He asserted that anthropomorphized animals could operate under the nonhuman guise distanced from social commentary yet still be strongly evocative of issues regarding identity:

> [A]nimal personae within literary contexts have been used the sidestep the overt engagement with political, religious, and social taboos more usually explicit in any human-centered, realist mode of storytelling.... [A]nimated characters [can be seen] in the first instance as phenomena and, consequently, able to carry a diversity of representational positions. At one and the same time, such characters can be beasts and humans, or neither; and can operate innocently or subversively, or as something else entirely. (Wells, 2013, pp. 7, 15)

Like Wells, in Judith Halberstam's 2011 book, *The Queer Art of Failure*, they considered how anthropomorphized animals in animation can be intensely subversive. In their chapter, "Animating Revolt and Revolting Animation," Halberstam posited that animated films involving anthropomorphized animals are particularly conducive to exploring symbolic themes of (human) identity and social dynamics: "Building new worlds by accessing new forms of sociality through animals turns around the usual equation in literature that makes the animal an allegorical stand-in in a moral fable about human folly," Halberstam wrote. "Most often we project human worlds onto the supposedly blank slate of animality, and then we create the animals we need in order to locate our own human behaviors in 'nature' or 'the wild' or 'civilization'" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 32).

One of Halberstam's foundational principles was that childhood itself can be considered a "queer" experience, in that children themselves are the non-normative, powerless faction in an adult-driven society. Utilizing this perspective, children's films have the potential to explore how different kinds of queerness can be represented. Halberstam (2011) identified a subsection of children's films which they termed "Pixarvolt" – animated children's films featuring anthropomorphized characters which tell stories about how characters might be queer in ways that revolt against or revolutionize systems of governance.

Halberstam (2011) noted that animated films released after 1999 have featured more mature and adult-oriented themes than previous eras of animations, and such themes have become integral to the emotional impact and success of these films. One of the more mature and adult-oriented notions of Pixarvolt films is how anthropomorphized nonhuman animals are used "to recognize the weirdness of bodies, sexualities, and genders in other animal life worlds, not to mention other animated universes" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 48). In their initial definition of Pixarvolt films, Halberstam (2011) posited that:

> Pixarvolt films make subtle as well as overt connections between communitarian revolt and queer embodiment and thereby articulate, in ways that theory and popular narrative have not, the sometimes-counterintuitive links between queerness and socialist struggle...the queer is not represented as a singularity but as part of an assemblage of resistant technologies that include collectivity, imagination, and a kind of situationist commitment to surprise and shock. (p. 29)

Pixarvolt films emphasize the critique and questioning of normalcy in social constructions. Although Halberstam's (2011) chapter was mainly focused on linking animation to animals to queer notions of the Self, I would also connect Halberstam's Pixarvolt films to stories of revolution and struggle against the social order through the medium of animation. Before applying Halberstam's Pixarvolt queerness to *Ratatouille* and *Bee Movie*, I will review existing empirical research on how children perceive social class and ethnicity in order to establish how these films ultimately reduce and minimize the queerness of Pixarvolt's struggles for communitarian revolt.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Children's Perception of Social Class

Ratatouille and *Bee Movie* both use stereotypical ethnic traits in their anthropomorphized animals as a means of re-skinning an allegory about class difference as ethnic caricature. These allegories often ostensibly involve renegotiating class differences but ultimately reinforce the necessity for those divisions. I would posit that part of this reinforcement is borne out from children's dispositions in their understanding of social class.

The burgeoning research on children's perception of class difference does not span the entirety of childhood but tends to focus on middle childhood (after infancy and at the beginning of childhood) to late childhood (the end of adolescence). What the research does indicate is that children in this age range are not ignorant or socially deaf to class difference. On the contrary, by the time that children are of school age, they are incredibly adept at identifying different social classes and competent in prejudicial practices in perceiving different social classes. In the meta-analysis, "Elementary School Children's Reasoning About Social Class: A Mixed-Methods Study," Mistry et al. (2015) observed survey results which demonstrated that while upper-middle-class adolescents were fairly accurate at self-assessing their own social class, most working-class adolescents also tended to identify as middle or upper middle class. Additionally, these surveys noted that those working-class adolescents aspired to upper-middle-class lifestyles as adults. The authors observed that

> [T]his pattern of identification among working-class youth is consistent with findings from adults – research with adults (both in America and internationally) shows an overwhelming tendency to subjectively identify as middle class, regardless of actual levels of income and wealth.... Toward the end of elementary school (i.e., between the ages of 10 and 12), children begin to show links between internal attributes (e.g., working hard, being smart) and social class group membership. Most of these beliefs are stereotypes in which being poor is associated with more negative attributes than being rich.... [A] qualitative study with middle-class and poor children found that children described middle-class families in an idealized, positive way (e.g., good manners, happy, responsible), regardless of their own social class background. (Mistry et al., 2015, pp. 1655-1656)

The first point of note was that children (and adults) were more inclined to believe themselves to be middle-class, regardless of whether or not they actually were. The second point was that, regardless of their own social class, children idealized middle-class living and negatively stereotyped strangers who were perceived as poor.

In a similar study, researchers investigated statistical studies performed on children's perceptions of social class and economic class mobility. The researchers found that the younger the children were, the less likely they were to see poverty as a malleable condition (Mistry et al., 2016). Another important finding was that children were more likely to suggest individualistic factors (e.g., receiving money) for upward class mobility as opposed to social or institutional factors (e.g., social connections or education). The authors found the following:

> [C]hildren's reasoning about helping those living in poverty suggest that younger children (6-8 years old) emphasize more egocentric ways of helping (e.g., giving money directly to a poor person) while older children (14-16 years old) focus more on structural forms of help and creating greater economic opportunities (e.g., the government creating more jobs). (Mistry et al., 2016, p. 763)

From this study, it could be reasoned that because younger viewers were more inclined to conceptualize means of escaping from poverty to be both unlikely and based on individualistic (as opposed to structural) factors, children's films that explore class differences portray upward social mobility in social class systems as individual, rather than institutional, cases.

The Parallel Codification of Social Class and Ethnicity in First Contact Films

Within depictions of anthropomorphism, there are varying degrees to which animals and humans are shown as similar and dissimilar. I would posit that certain depictions may be labeled as "First Contact" – those which feature humans and anthropomorphized animals discovering each other as cognitive equals (e.g., Betty Thomas' 1998 *Dr. Dolittle;* Simon J. Smith & Steve Hickner's 2007 *Bee Movie;* Brad Bird's 2007 *Ratatouille*). This discovery of humans and animals is analogous to the anthropological use of the phrase, "first contact," the first meetings between two cultures previously unknown to one another. In First Contact films, where the renegotiation of human-nonhuman boundaries embeds class conflict and mobility in the thematic foundation, social difference under the guise of ethnicity is significant. Because social class may be seen as more malleable and mobile than ethnicity, parallel-coding ethnicity with social class allows children's films a means with which to explore issues of social class that young audiences can follow.

In her 1988 developmental child psychology study, Frances Aboud considered ethnic and racial awareness (and prejudice) from a child-oriented perspective rather than considering displays of ethnic prejudice from children to simply be the miniaturized form of adolescent or adult ethnic and racial prejudice. In her review of the two leading theories of ethnic prejudice in children – social reflection theory and inner state theory –Aboud (1988) concluded that children develop a notable grasp of ethnic and racial categorizations by the time they are four or five years old and considered the two classic child development theories about the psychodynamic origins of prejudice in children to have strengths and flaws in explaining all facets of child prejudice. Aboud (1988) believed that social reflection theory, where children simply self-identify with their parents and adult authority figures and mirror the prejudiced actions and behaviors of those adults in an attempt to please them (Allport,

1954), did not account for the relative lack of variety of prejudice from children with parents from ethnic minorities, nor the fact that there was no increase in prejudice as the child grew older, which one might have expected as the child integrated more prejudiced behaviors into their psyche.

The second child prejudice theory Aboud (1988) considered was inner state theory, wherein a child punished for expressing hostility and aggression toward parental figures causes that child to generate anxiety and guilt (Adorno & Frenkel-Brunswik, 1950). The inappropriate reaction of this sequence of emotions causes a child to have antisocial and negative impulses and displace these feelings toward people who lack authority and power (e.g., minority groups). However, Aboud (1988) found the lack of specifying what targets children might take and how they decide upon them to be a significant weakness in explaining the psycho-social origins of prejudice.

Although she found the theoretical origins of ethnic prejudice in children to be inconclusive, Aboud (1988) observed from existing empirical research that while the levels of adult and adolescent ethnic prejudice have steadily declined in the past forty years, the levels of child ethnic prejudice have remained consistently high, suggesting that the phenomenon of child ethnic prejudice is not merely reflecting that of adolescents and adults.

In his essay, "Ethnicity and Disney: It's a Whole New Myth," Edward Rothstein (1997) noted how Disney films portray ethnicity:

> [E]thnicity involves complicated relationships between an outsider and a supposed center, between an immigrant and the mainstream, an aspiring lower class and a complacent middle. And these relationships are often the very subjects of the films themselves. Disney movies do not just incorporate ethnicity; they are, in a broad sense, about it. (para. 10)

Rothstein's (1997) main argument was that every character Disney produces carries an implicit ethnic allegory through their ethnic performativity and relationship with an outside protagonist that will eventually achieve mainstream success – the Italian puppeteer Geppetto to Pinocchio, the Jamaican anthropomorphic crab Sebastian to Ariel the mermaid, and the Eastern-European dwarfs to Snow White are all cases where marginalized companion characters who are primarily defined through their ethnicity become instrumental in helping the protagonist transition from fellow outsider to mainstream success without themselves benefitting from this transition.

For Rothstein (1997), these ethnic categories were not something to be admired or negotiated with. Instead, he believed they should be seen as a destabilization to the equalization of native and non-native cultures by suggesting that native cultures are best reduced to prejudiced, lower-class ethnic stereotypes whose societal function is to serve and aid the dominant ethnic class (Rothstein, 1997). Rothstein's (1997) argument of Disney's ethnicization of marginalized characters underscored a larger trend in the children's film genre to conflate non-dominant ethnicities with aspiring lower classes and to contrast those with the mainstream complacent middle class.

RATATOUILLE

The human-nonhuman dynamic in *Ratatouille* strongly enforces the ideal that the status quo of class difference is (and should be) structurally and morally sound. *Ratatouille* follows Remy, a wild rat, who has a natural gift for cooking and has ambitions of becoming a chef – something that his pack of rats cannot understand. "I know I'm supposed to hate humans," Remy says in a voiceover during the film's opening sequence, "but there's something about them...they discover, they create – just look at what they can do with food" (Bird, 2007). Remy parallels the eponymous *Pocahontas* (Goldberg et al., 1995) in their conflict against their "colonizers." Like Pocahontas, Remy is able to compromise with, and listen to, the humans prejudiced against him and questions why he should be prejudiced against them. Remy performs as an "aspirational animal," where nonhuman animals act "as a tool by which to demonstrate favorable human qualities and heroic motifs" (Wells, 2008, p. 52). As will be outlined later, Remy's realization of the aspirational animal acts as a form of the lower social classes reinforcing the class system.

An early expression of Remy's aspirational animality is his un-rat-like fixation on hygiene, which connects to his desire to prepare gourmet food. During the film's opening act, Remy's brother Emile is introduced while digging through an iconic cylindrical tin trash can, with the camera focused on the garbage. Emile's introduction as an unclean animal is underscored by the jump cut to a two-shot of Emile and Remy discussing cleanliness while walking side by side, with Remy walking bipedally and using his front limbs to carry food while Emile walks on his four limbs dragging food on the ground with his mouth. The framing of Remy and Emile displays the juxtaposition between their modes of walking, and their conversation ties those modes of walking with cleanliness:

> Emile: Why are you walking like that?
>
> Remy: I don't want to constantly have to wash my paws. Did you every think about how we walk on the same paws that we handle food with? You ever think about what we put into our mouths?
>
> Emile: All the time.
>
> Remy: When I eat, I don't want to taste everywhere my paws have been.

Emile: Well, go ahead, but if Dad sees you walking like that,
he's not going to like it. (Bird, 2007)

Emile's introduction and dialogue with Remy quickly establish the human standard of rats as unclean while also correlating cleanliness with food. This correlation also later informs the humans as middle-class characters.

After being separated from his colony after a physical confrontation with a human, Remy finds a human, Alfredo, who works in a menial position at Gusteau's, a gourmet restaurant. After Remy's discovery by the kitchen staff, Alfredo is tasked with drowning Remy in a canal as rats are considered unclean animals that have no place in the kitchen. Instead, Alfredo recognizes Remy's sentience and culinary skills, and the two secretly team up to work as a chef at Gusteau's. Through their mutually beneficial relationship that exists despite their species (and symbolic social) difference, Remy and Alfredo show that certain morally acceptable ambitions are the means to social and species mobility. The moment of first contact – Alfredo talking at, and subsequently to, Remy by the canal as Alfredo grapples with having to drown a rat – is filmed through a series of shot/reverse-shots over the shoulders of the two characters. The framing of the sequence makes each character occupy a similar amount of space within the screen which gives the impression that Alfredo the human and Remy the rat are the same size. By being framed as being of similar size, the human-rat dynamic is temporarily leveled by removing Alfredo's power advantage of size compared to Remy. This leveling belies a form of interspecies kindness where the two are of the same kind by being of the same (filmic) size.

The film's story uses the obvious rhetorical particularities of rats to encode the anthropomorphized rats as stereotypes of the poor as parasitical, unclean pests; in contrast, the humans (all of whom are gourmet chefs or high-society food critics) fulfill the stereotypes of the middle class as cultured, influential, and talented. One way that *Ratatouille* encodes symbolic statuses of class in its characters is through vocal performance. The rats speak in typical New York accents, an accent often perceived as "lower class, ethnic or crude" (McClear, 2010, para. 31), but also as signifiers for Italian Americans due to the accent's widespread use in the mafia film genre often set in New York. In a conspicuous contrast to the rats, the human characters speak in cartoonish French accents (befitting the Paris setting) or, in the case of one malevolent food critic, an upper-class English drawl encoding them as European.

Alfredo, the human chef who Remy secretly puppeteers to prepare food in the gourmet restaurant, is strikingly voiced in an American accent that far more closely resembles the rats' New York accents than the humans' French accents. As a mediator who is enacting the transcendence of the human-nonhuman binary, Alfredo's ethnic vocal performance disqualifies him as a middle-class human. *Ratatouille* parallels class difference with ethnic difference, and Alfredo's status as an imposter in middle-class European ethnicity belies a duplicitous element in helping the lower-class New York rats. Alfredo is constantly patronized by the other human characters in the film, hinting at the fact that he is symbolically passing as an ethnic equal and in the film's conclusion, Alfredo is happily relegated to the role of a waiter as if he has fulfilled his class role as an ethnic inferior to the other European-coded humans. While Remy becomes a chef at the end of the film, his role is both managed and hidden by human characters in order to avoid provoking systemic changes to the species (and ethnic) prejudice.

Although there is a clear power disparity between the rats and humans (symbolic of the class disparity between the working class and middle class), the film shifts the onus of this disparity away from the humans and suggests that the disparity is largely a function of nature and not an active and intentionally designed power structure. The shift of the disparity's root cause absolves humans of the disadvantages the rats experience (compared to the humans) which in turn implies that both the rats and humans have equal culpability for their contempt for the other as both species are merely players within this hegemonic system.

In a scene which punctuates the "natural" order of the human-nonhuman dynamic, Remy's father Django shows Remy a line of rat carcasses hanging in the window of a "pest" control store. As lightning and rain dramatically underscore the disparity of power between humans and rats, Django says "you can't change nature" as a way of demonstrating punishment for daring to attempt class mobility. However, this scene does not seem to vilify humans as inherently less-moral beings than the rats (who are never shown trying to kill humans). The rats' hatred of humans stems from the fact that humans poison them, but this naturalized hatred is equalized by the humans' hatred of rats, suggesting that both sides are equally wrong in their hatred and are simply misguided as Remy and Alfredo manage to transcend the human-rat (class) conflict through their culinary ambition. Rather than emphasizing the negative aspects of class difference, *Ratatouille* naturalizes the ideology that all animals have a social class, and that this understanding should be respected.

Remy's individualistic transcendence of the class divide is further reflected by the sociogenic identity of his species. The difference between rats as abject pest or adored pet is in numbers: a single rat has "undergone a process of cleansing" to reduce its contagion to a minimum (Edelman, 2005, p. 126). This cleansing process works as a means of delineating those cleansed individuals from the masses of wild and disease-ridden rats (Edelman, 2005). The sociogenic difference between an individual rat cleansed by humans and the contaminated masses of rats is conferred in the

anthropomorphism of rats in *Ratatouille* in two forms: the first being a rat as an individual aspiring for upward social mobility; the second being a rat aspiring for upward social mobility as an individualistic and nonconformist desire. Remy's singular aspiration as a symbolic blue-collar individual wanting to advance to a white-collar position isolates and contains the threat of institutional traversing of class; it is not just that Remy achieves some success in social mobility as an individual (although it is limited and maintained through his social access to humans), but it is precisely because his success is presented as an inversion of the conforming masses of the working class.

The class codification of the human-nonhuman dynamic in *Ratatouille* does not totally disavow the possibility of social mobility and the essentialism of social class; instead, the film colors that possibility in the same vein of the fantastical and implausible nature which resonates with human-nonhuman first contact. By conflating social mobility with the unlikelihood of human-nonhuman first contact, *Ratatouille* almost completely extinguishes notions of institutional changes that would promote mass social mobility. For these children's films, elevating from the blue collar to the white collar is a feat on par with talking animals, and while *Ratatouille* demonstrates that this elevation can happen, it could never happen on a large scale, nor could it be normalized in any common extent.

BEE MOVIE

Bee Movie follows Barry B. Benson, a bee recently graduated from bee college, who, after getting lost on a pollen expedition to New York City, discovers that humans have been harvesting honey from bees for centuries to supply to grocery stores. To confront the humans, he reveals the humanlike sentience of bees to them in order to challenge the humans' exploitation of the bees. The bees in *Bee Movie* are anthropomorphized in a way that heavily allegorizes them as Jewish American. Aside from the prominent Jewish star, Jerry Seinfeld, as the writer and producer of *Bee Movie* as well as the voice of protagonist bee Barry, there are several stereotypical markers of the Jewish American identity in the portrayal of bees. The bees display Jewish humor that is often predicated on self-deprecation, Barry's mother is characterized as the stereotypical nagging, coddling Jewish mother, the bees have a strong emphasis on community and the dangers of leaving their communal spaces to see ethno-racial (and in this case, species) Others, bees scoffing at the thought of Barry dating a human woman because she is not "Bee-ish," and the bees' many nasal vocal tics of "eh" reminiscent of Jewish characters in other forms of media (such as the television sitcom, *Seinfeld*).

I would posit that while the symbolic Jewish characters (the bees) in *Bee Movie* are portrayed as living middle-class lifestyles, these characters are, in many ways, alternate variants of middle class that have not wholly left behind the historical Jewish "outsider" status. Portraying the bees as stereotypical Jewish Americans acts as a form of basic reassurance known as "Jewissance" – a play on the French *jouissance* (Abrams, 1972, p. 1). The Jewissance stereotypes act as a means of grappling with and overcoming the historical turmoil of Jews through emphasizing the contested images and intricate ideological implications of Jewish identity. By being portrayed using non-threatening, recognizable archetypes, the portrayals of the Jewissance reduce the anxiety and discomfort of the underlying connotations of the Jew as outsider and invader (Abrams, 1972). While these Jewissance stereotypes offer secure points of Jewish identification and cand ridicule the exclusion of Jews and Jewishness, there is still vestigial historical Otherness that highlights tensions of Jewish assimilation into the middle class.

In discussing modern American representations of Jewishness, Alan Warren Friedman (1972) considered the Jewish identity to be somewhat inherently self-conflicted by the past legacy and future succession of Jewish "uniqueness." Friedman (1972) posited that the legacy of Jewish identity is intrinsically connected with "a historical grandeur and sense of destiny that, however, best manifests itself [through] suffering" (p. 42). Friedman's (1972) conceptualization of Jews emphasized the dissonance of Jews becoming middle class as they gained upward social mobility with their historical suffering as outsiders.

One continuous visual signifier of the bees' outsider status is the fluorescent yellow color of the bees and their beehive. While inside their beehive, the bees' yellow color scheme matches their surroundings, displaying their connection to a living space that is physically distanced from the mainstream human environments. When the bees move to anthropogenic spaces like apartments, courthouses, and airports, their bright yellow exteriors strongly contrast with the more muted greys, browns, and greens of the human environments. The contrast of colors between the bees' and humans' spaces constantly marks the bees as having an inconsistent placement in the non-bee landscape.

This idea of Jewish dissonance, then, as well as the notion of Jewish destiny through suffering, resonates in *Bee Movie* in various forms. In *Bee Movie*, the bees are characterized through this ethno-cultural (rather than religious) Jewish identity, as well as solidly middle-class lifestyles, parallel-coupling the film's social class coding with ethnic coding. However, for the bees, the middle class is treated as an alternate ethnic variant of the human middle class; the bees' own class system acts as a social microcosm reflecting – but not interconnected to – the human middle class. While *Bee Movie*'s Jewissance re-skinning superficially centralizes their identity as middle-class, the bee-human conflict acts to remind the viewer that while the symbolic Jews are an affluent community, there is an Otherness to them relative to the wider society. Indeed, the bees are

physically segregated by living in hives, so even though their middle-class lifestyles are comparable to humans', they are still geographically displaced from the rest of society. The bees' contentment and acceptance of suffering through their unwitting exploitation of labor by humans is indicative of how embedded the bees' suffering is to their cultural identity.

Barry, however, incensed by the humans' corporate theft and exploitation of the bees, sues the human race in a (human) court of law on behalf of the bees for ownership and the intellectual property for the world's supply of honey. After exposing the fact that beekeepers forcibly expose bees to smoke (likened to the dangers of cigarette smoking) in beehives (likened to internment camps), Barry wins the trial and the world's supply of honey and honey-related products is returned to the bees. The attorney for the humans, Layton T. Montgomery, gives a cryptic message to Barry after the judge's verdict: "This is an unholy perversion of the balance of nature, Benson. You'll regret this" (Hickner, 2007). After the honey is returned to the bees, the bees discontinue honey production and thereby stop pollinating the world's plants, leading the earth's flora to quickly die out, as well as the bees becoming dejected due to their "unemployment."

Barry eventually takes responsibility for the dying ecosystem and works to save both the bees' sense of purpose and the world's plants. The film resolves with humans and bees working together to license bee-approved brands of honey and the bees continuing to produce honey (and thereby pollinating plants). Barry's repatriation of honey is treated as an act of empowerment for the ethnicized bees. It also works as an acknowledgement and recognition that the bees are, in fact, outsiders by decisively dividing assets with the humans; this division separates the human middle class from the bees' isolated and human-independent middle-class community. The later lack of work for the bees brings malaise and ennui to the community, as if their work (and suffering) defined them; the bees' dependence on work for self-worth mirrors Friedman's (1972) argument that the Jewish sense of identity is manifested through suffering, thereby reinforcing the naturalization of the Jew as someone whose only purpose is to work. The recognition of the value of bees as individuals who suffer for their work is an act of reclamation by demonstrating that bees find meaning in this productive form of suffering.

Like *Ratatouille, Bee Movie* uses the First Contact renegotiations of human-nonhuman boundaries to alleviate the culpability of humans for anthropogenic effects on nonhuman animals to suggest that class difference is a necessary societal framework upon which people must depend for sustainable societal living. By remodulating the power dynamics between humans and bees through introducing interspecies kindness, these films are able to accentuate the necessity for class divisions for societal sustainability. Although *Ratatouille* suggests that humans culling rats is simply an intrinsic part of the species hegemony dynamic, *Bee Movie* actively suggests that humans and nonhuman animals are vital parts and essential players for their continual social and ecological existence. While the bees have visual markers of the American middle class (wearing ties, having bee-themed college educations, speaking in "white," middle-class American accents), their tangible work as honey producers is what gives their lives and community an ethno-cultural purpose and meaning.

Bee Movie suggests that both humans and bees alike depend upon their interspecies relationship – a relationship of inequality grounded in ecological diversity – for survival; without the stability of an unequal human-nonhuman relationship, survival of society itself is threatened. This mutual dependency between human society and symbolic Jewish class is crystallized by Barry willingly accepting the blame for the ecological catastrophe that emerged from the bees' abstinence from pollination (rather than blaming the humans for failing to compensate the bees or blaming all parties for passively engaging in an inherently inequitable class system). Barry's acceptance of blame is characterized as a moment of personal growth, as though accepting such an inequality of class paradigms is a marker of maturity. Barry taking the blame minimizes the humans' role in nonhuman exploitation by offering a worse fate for both human and nonhuman animals. The status quo of ethnic difference in *Bee Movie* can only ever be sustainable when founded on hegemonic structures that are acknowledged by all participants; the bees should be tireless workers for the humans because that is the "natural" biological purpose of bees, and without purpose, the bees have no ethno-cultural meaning to their lives. Moreover, the film clearly presents nature and the ecosystem from the perspective of unmalleable and unwavering biological functional fixedness where certain species not only excel but are designed for a specific subset of tasks (i.e., humans must take honey from bees to motivate bees to produce honey, bees produce honey to pollinate flowers). As the ecosystem is symbolic of social class stratification, it cements both the danger and rigidity of class mobility for the Jewish community. While Remy the rat cooks gourmet food under the auspice of a human avatar, Barry B. Benson is punished for refusing to cooperate in the interdependence of biological functional fixedness by shouldering the blame for nearly causing ecological collapse.

The difference between these two nonhuman animals challenging the alleged fixedness of nature is that Remy disguises his actions through a human figurehead while Barry's openly nonhuman status violates the human monopoly on the anthropogenic discussion. Barry's punishment acts as a form of basic reassurance, the karmic or cosmic balance of being punished for morally "bad"

behavior. While Barry had morally upright intentions in reclaiming the world's supply of honey, he is punished for the litigious insurrection as the lawsuit rebels against his outsider status as a member of the Jewish class.

CONCLUSION

As allegories of social class and ethnicity, *Ratatouille* and *Bee Movie* seem superficially to promote social mobility through liberation from white hegemonies – they are First Contact films where the human-nonhuman divide is seen through the prism of the middle class and the working class, and the nonhuman protagonists knowingly seek to challenge this divide. In many ways, these films are resolved through token inclusion of nonhuman animals into the human societal framework: Remy and his rat colony are secretly employed in the kitchen of a restaurant, and Barry continues to allow honey to be sold by humans through a non-detailed stamp of bee approval. These nonhuman characters singularize the Other and allow human privilege only for the most exceptional nonhuman characters without causing the child audience to question the current human-nonhuman status quo or invalidate the child audience's prejudices against social class. Although these nonhuman characters contravene species/class norms, the child audience is also never presented with any actionable morals for either rising in social strata or coping with the current system; as the aphorism goes, these exceptional nonhuman characters are exceptions – they prove the rule. By making exceptions on individualistic bases, children's films offer the possibility of social mobility and transcending social class while largely reaffirming the general legitimacy of class hegemony.

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