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Indie film 'Paterson' parallels Pee-wee

The movie "Paterson" is a throwback to the pre-9/11 days when magical realism was all the rage on storefront stages and art house screens.

Jim Jarmusch, one of the high priests of this indie form, in which fantastical elements are accepted as natural in otherwise mundane settings, is the director.

Back then, in a world where nothing could go wrong — or so we thought — irony resonated. Later, as times turned, irony became an adolescent's luxury and the absurd became indistinguishable from our digital and political reality.

In the past year, there has been a tide of muted, loosely woven films with minimalist storylines ("Moonlight," "Jackie" and "Manchester by the Sea," among others), creating just the right wave for a movie like "Paterson," which combines the old and the new to ride in on.

Adam Driver (who stars in the HBO series "Girls" as Lena Dunham's unstable, emotionally raw love interest) is Paterson, who drives a bus in Paterson, N.J. He is a poet who lives in a little house with beige siding and a pink door, and a wonderland of hand-painted design on the inside.

He shares the little house with his breathtakingly beautiful artist wife and muse, Laura (Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani) and her Churchillian English bulldog Marvin, who is jealous of Laura's affections.

We spend seven days with Paterson: driving the bus, walking the dog and sitting at a local bar as



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colorful patrons perform their antics around him.

Such a ritualistic existence could go either way. But rather than a life of quiet desperation, rolling with Paterson is like slipping into an enchanted garden. Paterson's days are shot with poetry, humor and something like adventure within the confines of his broken city.

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On his breaks, spent at the Great Falls of the Passaic River, Paterson writes achingly beautiful poetry (by Ron Padgett) about ordinary life. He is inspired by love for his wife, the colloquy of passengers on his bus route and his appreciation of quotidian house-

hold objects. He writes his poems in a notebook and shows his words only to Laura.

The movie has a retro sensibility, like "Pee-wee's Playhouse" — except that it favors chiaroscuro rather than vivid color — given the loopy decor, the colorful friends, the fetish for things that are black and white and the participation of Marvin, the dog, as a character. (The canine actor, Nellie, won the Palm Dog at Cannes Film Festival when the film was shown there in May.) Driver even bears a squinting resemblance to Paul Reubens.

The film is filled with such absurdist elements, treasures hidden in plain sight and it is delightful to discover details such as the harlequin pattern of a pumpernickel and white bread sandwich in Paterson's lunchbox, or the eyes Laura draws on his oranges.

The recurrence of twins, the proliferation of circles in the couple's cereal, curtains and cupcakes and other patterns in the town of Paterson seem gratuitous, yet take on significance through repetition.

We are invited to spend time in Paterson's environment, which is enchanting or at least intriguing, enough to linger for a couple of hours. And there we linger, while Paterson resides inside his own head, left to figure out what is going on in there.

Quiet, ambient "Paterson" is an experiential film through which we enter an unexplored workaday world for a while and discover its treasures. Then we move on. After all, an empty page presents more possibilities.