

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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***Babe: Pig in the City* (1998)**

George Miller

OVERVIEW

Director George Miller was born in 1945 in Chinchilla, Queensland, Australia. From an early age, Miller was interested in both film and medicine: he practiced for several years as a medical doctor while simultaneously making short films with producer Byron Kennedy. Miller and Kennedy achieved huge international success with *Mad Max*, Miller's feature film debut. Kennedy Miller Productions went on to produce two *Mad Max* sequels and films by other Australian directors such as John Duigan and Phillip Noyce. Miller then directed high-profile and internationally acclaimed films including *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), *Lorenzo's Oil* (1992), *Babe: Pig in the City* (1998), and *Happy Feet* (2006), for which he won an Oscar. Miller returned to *Mad Max* in 2015 with *Mad Max: Fury Road*, which earned widespread praise and prompted the writing of two additional sequels.

Film *Babe: Pig in the City* was a sequel to the extremely popular *Babe* from 1995, which was a faithful adaptation of a children's book called *The Sheep-Pig* by Dick King-Smith. In *Babe*, a naïve and kind piglet named Babe, who lives on a small farm, inadvertently discovers a talent for sheep-herding, even though he is not a dog. *Babe: Pig in the City* picks up right where *Babe* left off. Both films are intended for children; they feature not-quite-realist settings, farcical situations, and talking animals. The animals all talk to each other but are not understood by humans.

Background While George Miller wrote and produced both *Babe* and its sequel, the first film was directed by Chris Noonan. Miller himself sat in the director's chair for *Babe: Pig in the City*. As in the earlier film, the animal characters were constructed using a combination of trained live animals, animatronics, and CGI. James Cromwell and Magda Szubanski reprised their roles as Farmer and Mrs. Hoggett, while Mickey Rooney joined the cast as the aged clown. The film was not nearly as financially or critically successful as *Babe*, though it still received an Oscar nomination for best original song.

CHARACTERS

Babe – young pig who lives with Farmer Hoggett and does the work of a sheepdog

Farmer Hoggett – old-fashioned farmer who owns Babe

Mrs. Hoggett – Farmer Hoggett's wife

Hotel owner – woman who owns the animal hotel

Fluggly Floom – hotel owner's uncle, who performs as a clown

Bull terrier – dog who tries to attack Babe but then becomes his friend

Chimpanzee family – group of chimpanzees living at the animal hotel

SYNOPSIS

Babe and Farmer Hoggett return to the farm in triumph, following Babe's victory in the national sheepdog competition. Soon after, though, Babe accidentally causes Farmer Hoggett to fall into a well and injure himself gravely. Mrs. Hoggett tries to do all the farm work alone, but the farm's finances worsen. Men from the bank announce that they will have to seize the farm. In an attempt to save the farm, Mrs. Hoggett takes Babe on a trip: they will accept one of the many invitations for him to do a paid sheep-herding demonstration at a state fair. But a misunderstanding on the journey causes them to miss their connecting flight. They are stranded in a strange city while they wait two days for a flight home.

In the city—which contains landmarks from numerous global metropolises—Babe and Mrs. Hoggett are soon separated, as she is arrested over another misunderstanding. While waiting alone in their hotel, Babe encounters the numerous other animals who apparently live there, including cats, dogs,

chimpanzees, a monkey, and an orangutan. The primates live with an elderly clown. Various accidents and hijinks ensue, resulting in a raid on the hotel to capture all of the animals, given a city ordinance against having them inside. Babe, who has become a leader in the group of animals, helps them all to escape. Meanwhile, Mrs. Hoggett is released from jail and accompanies the hotel owner in looking for the animals. Ultimately, the humans find the animals, and they all join forces: the hotel owner decides to rent out the hotel as a dance club and move, with the animals, to Hoggett Farm. In turn, she contributes the rental money to the Hoggetts, which enables them to save the farm from the bank. Babe and Mrs. Hoggett are happily reunited with Farmer Hoggett and the farm animals.

SCENES

Ups and downs – Babe and Farmer Hoggett participate in a victory parade celebrating Babe's recent triumph as National Sheepdog Champion. In the following weeks, Farmer and Mrs. Hoggett receive multiple invitations for Babe to make celebrity appearances. But before they accept any of them, Babe causes an accident in the well that seriously injures Farmer Hoggett. Babe's words cannot be understood by humans, but he tries to express an apology to Farmer Hoggett.



Farm imperiled – Mrs. Hoggett tries to do the work of the farm herself, but she struggles. Two men from the bank come and announce that they will have to take back the farm soon. To earn some money to save the farm, Mrs. Hoggett sets off with Babe to take him to a sheep herding demonstration at a state fair. They fly in an airplane.



Flight problems – While Babe is in a carrier waiting to be sorted with other luggage and put on the connecting flight, he gets into a conversation with a drug-sniffing dog that results in the dog barking loudly in order to demonstrate to Babe how richly the humans reward the dog for finding "the right smell." The human authorities then think that Babe's carrier contains drugs. They investigate the carrier, Babe, and Mrs. Hoggett. Although no drugs are discovered, the process takes so long that Babe and Mrs. Hoggett miss their connecting flight.



Animal hotel – Lamenting that it is now too late to get to the state fair, Mrs. Hoggett says that they will have to go home, but no other flights are available for a couple of days. Mrs. Hoggett struggles to find a hotel that will take a pig, especially given the particularly strict laws about keeping animals in this city (which is a fantastical amalgam of many famous global cities, with landmarks from Rio de Janeiro, New York and San Francisco). Finally, Mrs. Hoggett discovers a hotel that will accept them. When she and Babe enter the hotel, they see that many animals of various species are living in the hotel.



Captured – While Babe is waiting alone in the hotel room for Mrs. Hoggett to return from buying food, a monkey comes into the room and takes Mrs. Hoggett's suitcase. Babe, trying to get it back, follows the monkey to another room, which turns out to be the home of a family of chimpanzees, an orangutan, and an elderly human clown. The clown captures Babe.



Human chaos – Mrs. Hoggett discovers that Babe is gone and looks for him outside. She inadvertently causes an accident involving a biker gang, two police officers, and two men changing a billboard. She ends up covered in glue and in the back of a police van.



Sad clown – Babe is forced to join the clown’s act, “The Fabulous Flooms and their Amazing Apes,” in a performance at a children’s hospital. Babe thinks that he will be paid and thus can help save the farm. Instead, Babe accidentally trips the clown while he is holding a lighted match, causing all of the sets and props for the act to catch on fire, though the hospital itself is saved by the automatic sprinkler system. The clown looks devastated. Babe realizes he is not going to be paid.



Home alone – Babe spends the night in his hotel room alone, unsure where Mrs. Hoggett is. The clown dies, apparently from his injuries and from his advanced age. The hotel owner cries, saying that he was her uncle. She follows the coroner carrying out his body. That night, the animals in the hotel, now left without any humans, realize they are all very hungry.



Hunger and danger – The chimpanzees leave the hotel in search of food, though they acknowledge that this is risky. Babe follows them. They trick him into distracting some guard dogs while they rob an establishment for its food. Babe is pursued by a bull terrier; the chase goes on for some time. Babe is about to be caught but he jumps into the water. The terrier’s collar has gotten stuck to a chain and he is left dangling from the bridge, soon to choke to death.



An unlikely ally – Babe, having escaped death himself, cannot bear to watch the dog die. He saves the dog’s life by pushing a boat toward him and getting the monkey’s help to unfasten the chain. The bull terrier is extremely touched by this and devotes himself to serving Babe. Many other animals have gathered to watch; they agree that they are all very hungry. With backup from the bull terrier, Babe suggests that they all line up inside the hotel to share the food that the chimpanzees managed to steal. They do so.



Discovered – The female chimpanzee gives birth to twins. The bull terrier encourages Babe to say something ceremonial; he starts to sing, and the other animals join in. A woman living in the house across the street hears them and complains about how filthy the neighborhood is. Soon, human authorities carrying cages break down the door of the hotel. After much chasing and struggle, they capture almost all the animals.



Captivity and escape – Babe and a couple of other animals who were not captured follow the authorities’ van in an attempt to help the animals who were taken. They discover them at a scientific research facility. Under Babe’s leadership, the animals escape.



Humans to help – Mrs. Hoggett is taken before a judge. She explains what happened; the judge releases her. When she returns to the hotel, she finds the hotel owner sitting sadly amid the wreckage of the raid. The hotel owner explains what happened. The two women set out to try to rescue the animals.



More chaos – The animals end up in a building near the research facility where a charity banquet is taking place. Mrs. Hoggett and the hotel owner hear the commotion they are making and run in to try to get them. A chaotic scene ensues, in which a chef tries to take Babe and all the animals run around the banquet room trying to evade capture, while Mrs. Hoggett ends up attached to a bungee cord while trying to get to Babe. Eventually, she succeeds.



Home again – Mrs. Hoggett and the hotel owner decide on a new plan together. The hotel is rented out to be a dance club, and the hotel owner and all the animals join the household at Hoggett Farm. The rental money from the hotel allows the Hoggetts to keep the farm from seizure by the bank. Farmer Hoggett, recovered from his injuries, sets up an outdoor faucet to use instead of the well, as Babe looks on.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Babe Babe is a young pig who lives on the small, old-fashioned Hoggett Farm. Prior to the start of this film, it became clear that Babe had a talent for doing the work of a sheep-dog, so he gets to live on the farm with his beloved Farmer Hoggett instead of being killed for meat.

Kind Babe's defining characteristic is kindness. In a section of the film with the chapter title "The Kindest Heart," Babe saves the life of a bull terrier who recently tried to kill him. Throughout the film, Babe is generous and polite to other animals, offering help and assuming the best of everyone.

Naïve What gets Babe into trouble is his naivety. Often when he is trying to do the right thing, he causes a mishap or finds himself in danger because of his ignorance of the situation. For example, he is easily tricked by one of the chimpanzees into distracting a pair of guard dogs while the chimpanzees steal some food.

Leader Despite some shyness, Babe is a natural leader. When the bull terrier tells all the other animals to listen to Babe, Babe is willing to accept this role, suggesting ways that they can fairly distribute food and cohabit peacefully in the hotel. Babe later leads all the animals out of captivity.

Mrs. Hoggett Mrs. Hoggett is Farmer Hoggett's wife; she lives with him on their little farm and helps with the work of maintaining it.

Determined Throughout the film, Mrs. Hoggett faces challenges but persists in trying to overcome them, often single-handedly. She works the farm alone when her husband is injured; she thinks of a way to get more money when they need it; she manages to get Babe back home despite all of the mishaps they encounter in the city.

Loving Mrs. Hoggett is driven by love for Farmer Hoggett. She tries to save the farm when he is too injured to do anything. In the previous film, she took longer to come around to seeing Babe as a sheep-herder rather than a meal. But she knows her husband loves the pig, so she does everything she can to bring him home safely.

Bull terrier The bull terrier is a chained guard dog in the city until he breaks that chain in his zeal to pursue Babe. But after he almost dies and Babe saves his life, the bull terrier changes his tune completely, becoming Babe's personal guard and advocate.

Warrior The bull terrier states more than once that it is in his blood to be a warrior. "A murderous shadow lies hard across my soul," he says in response to Babe's suggestion that he could simply stop attacking others. When he has sired puppies at the end of the film, he encourages them to remember their warrior blood.

Loyal Despite his fierceness, the bull terrier is ultimately more driven by loyalty to Babe after Babe saves his life. He attacks no more animals after that event. He champions Babe as a leader of the group of animals and verbally chastises any animal who shows disrespect to Babe.

THEMES

Relationships

Kindness Despite all the action and danger, the core theme of *Babe: Pig in the City* is kindness. Babe's unfailing kindness drives almost everything he does. He wants to help save the farm, so he goes off to the city with Mrs. Hoggett even though he is afraid. He refuses to let the bull terrier die even though the dog was trying to kill Babe just minutes earlier. He tries to help all the animals in the hotel and the stray animals outside, so that they will all have a warm place to sleep and something to eat. Even though he is not captured in the raid on the hotel, he follows the animals who were captured in order to help them escape, endangering himself in the process. Babe's kindness begets kindness in others, such as the bull terrier, who no longer hurts innocent animals after being saved by Babe. The film presents a cruel world in which indifference and selfishness drive most decisions. But individual acts of kindness, like Babe's and also the mutual aid of Mrs. Hoggett and the hotel owner, can make a difference in improving the lives of many.

Illustrative moment: The most striking moment of kindness is Babe's decision to try to save the life of the bull terrier just a little while after the dog tries to kill him. Babe looks at the dog helplessly dangling from the bridge on his chain, and he swims over to him with a boat in order to give the dog a place to put his feet down. Babe's kindness inspires the monkey to help by unfastening the bull terrier's chain. Then, the dog is transformed by Babe's kindness, becoming a kind creature himself who helps Babe distribute resources fairly among the animals.

Society

Identity Throughout the film, identity is repeatedly either in flux or unacknowledged by others. Babe is unfamiliar with the primate species he encounters at the hotel, and they are unfamiliar with pigs: the orangutan has to explain to the chimpanzees what a pig is. One of the dogs initially believes Babe to be a cat. The orangutan defines pigs as serving only as food for humans. Babe politely but firmly disputes this definition, saying that he is a sheep-pig. Babe is a character who is very confident in his own identity; he knows who he is and what he believes to be right. Meanwhile, some other characters' identities are more prone to change. This includes the bull terrier, who changes drastically under Babe's influence, and to a lesser extent all the other hotel animals and strays, who learn to get along after Babe encourages them to do so. Ultimately these animals are willing to put aside rigid, category-based identities like "warrior," "dog," and "cat" in order to work together.

Illustrative moment: The bull terrier has a crisis of identity when Babe saves his life. Although he insists that he is descended from warriors and thus has the urge to attack in his blood, he undergoes a complete change in behavior and priorities. Far from continuing to try to kill Babe, he aligns himself with Babe and tells the other animals, "What the pig says, goes." They all obey because they are afraid of the bull terrier. He thus begins to use his warrior identity for good, backing up Babe as he tries to get the animals to share resources fairly. Although the bull terrier sometimes yells at the other animals, he no longer attacks any of them.

Politics

Conflict Conflict is constant in *Babe: Pig in the City*. It is presented as the natural order of things, and it takes many forms. The film's action is set in motion by the conflict between the men from the bank, who demand their payment, and the Hoggetts, who wish to keep the farm even though they have struggled to make ends meet since Farmer Hoggett's injury. Mrs. Hoggett's conflicts with authority figures continue. She is erroneously flagged as a drug mule in the airport, and later, in the city, she is arrested for her role in an accident, even though she did not set the accident in motion (the true culprit was the biker who tried to steal her purse). Meanwhile, conflicts proliferate among the animals inside and outside the hotel, often consisting of one species going up against another. Ultimately, Mrs. Hoggett gets out of conflicts by virtue of her fairly obvious innocence, while Babe usually gets out of them by showing kindness and thus turning

the tables on his adversaries. The film suggests that conflict is ubiquitous, but that kindness can overcome it.

Illustrative moment: When all the hotel animals and stray animals have gone inside the hotel with the food stolen by the chimpanzees, a dispute breaks out about how to distribute it. The chimpanzees believe they should have the larger share because they “did all the work.” The dogs want to withhold food from the cats, and vice versa. Babe, supported by the bull terrier, simply suggests that everyone line up and be given an equal share. This is done, and a fragile peace sets in, disrupted only by the arrival of raiding humans the next day.

Power Babe seems to be a powerless character in the big human city because of his diminutive size and animal status. Certainly, these things do deprive Babe of some power. But Babe’s personality gives him the power of influence over the other animals, and his determination is powerful, too, as it pushes him to find clever ways to accomplish what he wants to accomplish. There are of course power hierarchies within the animal group, which shift over the course of the film from favoring the primates to favoring Babe and the bull terrier. While humans generally have more power than animals, there are also differences of power within the human world. Authority figures—including the bank employees, the airport drug authorities, the city judge who hears Mrs. Hoggett, and the authorities who capture the animals—are powerful enough to affect others’ lives temporarily, but they can be overthrown or appeased by the forces of truth and cleverness. Ultimately, the world of the film is one in which power is sometimes abused and unequally distributed, but is also subject to change.

Illustrative moment: The bank holding the mortgage to Hoggett Farm has the power to foreclose. Although Mrs. Hoggett was already struggling to keep up the farm after her husband’s injury, it is the arrival of the bank employees that precipitates the crisis. Their power is so great that they are not even shown to speak in the film: they simply appear, two men in dark suits, and loom menacingly over the farm. They hammer a “For Sale” sign into the ground. This sends Mrs. Hoggett into a frenzy, rifling through old mail in order to look for the state fair invitation that she believes could help get them out of this crisis.

Quest

Quest Babe defines himself to the chimpanzees as “a pig on a mission.” The quest to save the farm from seizure by the bank is the main topic of the film. When Babe and Mrs. Hoggett miss their connecting flight and thus will be unable to make it to the state fair on time, the focus of the quest shifts slightly for Mrs. Hoggett: her goal becomes returning Babe safely to Farmer Hoggett. But Babe is different. He continues looking for ways to make money and save the farm. This motivates his willingness to perform in the clown’s act, for which he (erroneously) believes he will be paid. Babe also takes on an additional mission of saving his fellow animals when they are captured. This turns out to be a good instinct, not only because it saves the animals’ lives, but also because it brings together Mrs. Hoggett and the hotel owner, which in turn facilitates the saving of the farm.

Illustrative moment: The seriousness of Babe’s quest is apparent from very early on in the film. When he and Mrs. Hoggett set out in the truck to begin the journey to the state fair, multiple animals shout to Babe, “Save the farm, Babe!” The flock of sheep is particularly vociferous; it is thus with a loud chorus of “Save the farm, Babe!” behind him that Babe departs on this journey that he would rather have avoided. It is very clear that the Hoggetts and all of the animals are counting on Babe to earn enough money to keep the farm in the Hoggetts’ possession.

Life Stages

Coming of age One of Babe’s central characteristics is his naivety. This characteristic is a little bit diminished over the course of the film. One of the film’s chapters is called “A Pig Gets Wise.” In this sequence, Babe agrees to perform in the clown’s act with the primates because they tell him he will be paid for doing so. Eager to save the farm, he submits to the indignity. But after the clown is injured and the animals are all back at the hotel, Babe says to the chimpanzees that he is beginning to think the promised reward was a lie. They confirm his suspicion, telling him that the city is a “dog-eat-dog world.”

However, even though Babe's knowledge of the world increases, he does not necessarily change his behavior in response. He continues to trust others too readily. Even though a dog literally tries to eat him some time after the "dog-eat-dog world" line, Babe escapes pursuit and then turns right around and tries to help the dog when he is in trouble. But since the dog then helps Babe, the lesson of the "dog-eat-dog world" is that kindness, not cynicism, is the most effective tool for achieving happiness in the community.

Illustrative moment: Near the beginning of the film, Mrs. Hoggett calls Babe to the car in an attempt to take him to the state fair. Babe, still feeling guilty for causing Farmer Hoggett's accident, is hiding in a pile of hay. When Farmer Hoggett takes up the call, he emerges. The sheepdogs, Rex and Fly, encourage him to go on, as it is better to help than to mope. Babe begins to go but tries to get Fly to come with him. She says that she cannot, and that he must do this on his own. Although frightened and unsure, Babe acquiesces.

Ethics

Solidarity Although Babe often acts as an individual, solidarity is crucial to the film's happy ending. The whole trip is an act of solidarity on the part of Mrs. Hoggett and Babe, who are not particularly close but are motivated by their shared love of Farmer Hoggett and of the farm. After Babe and Mrs. Hoggett are separated, Babe is most at risk whenever he is least in solidarity with other animals. He is captured by the clown because he is detained for so long in the clown's room, being questioned by the primates, who refuse to return the suitcase of Mrs. Hoggett's that they have stolen. Babe is of course also at risk when being chased by the bull terrier. But after Babe makes the decision to show solidarity with the terrier by saving his life, the bull terrier returns the favor by declaring eternal solidarity with Babe. Subsequently, all the other animals fall in line, and they work together to feed each other and, later, to escape captivity.

Illustrative moment: The end of the film is the culmination of the theme of solidarity. The hotel owner's problem—the illegality of housing the animals in the hotel in the city—and the Hoggetts' problem—the need for money to pay the bank—are solved when Mrs. Hoggett and the hotel owner decide to join forces, having the hotel owner and all the animals move to Hoggett Farm while sharing the money from renting out the hotel in order to pay the bank.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think this movie is appropriate for children? Why or why not?
2. Miller has stated that he sees Babe and Max Rockatansky of the *Mad Max* films as very similar characters. What do you think about this comparison?
3. Some people have seen the treatment of animals in *Babe: Pig in the City* as an allegory for the treatment of immigrants. What arguments would you make for and against this interpretation?
4. In many ways, *Babe: Pig in the City* is essentially an action film, with elements of slapstick comedy. Compare and contrast the film with another action film you have seen.
5. Some viewers have suggested that the strange city in which the film is set reminds them of Oz, while others see it as an even darker dystopia. What do you think of the film's setting?
6. Many viewers who had previously seen *Babe* were surprised by what they saw as the darker tone of *Babe: Pig in the City*. If you have seen both films, do you share this feeling? Why or why not?