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## The Cow Who Sang a Song into the Future

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## The Cow Who Sang a Song into the Future

### Abstract

This is a film review of *The Cow Who Sang a Song into the Future* (2022), directed by Francesca Alegría.

### Keywords

Environmentalism, Pollution, Death

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### Author Notes

John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska Omaha. He has been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



**The Cow Who Sang a Song into the Future (2022), dir. Francisca Alegría**

Magdalena drowned herself in the River Cruces decades ago, but she emerges from the river unaged, still with her motorcycle helmet. She is not a ghost; she is fully corporeal, able to eat and drink and take a shower to wash off the mud, once she finds her way to her family home. But her appearance does seem supernatural, somehow linked to the dead fish that have turned up in the river, a result of dumping from a pulp factory. Her subsequent encounters with her family suggest her own painful history with them, but also larger issues of environmental destruction.

There are few explanations offered in this metaphorical film, but we do get the sense that Magdalena was a free but troubled spirit. Her grandchild, a trans woman named Tomas, connects with her, but her daughter Cecilia is afraid of her. Magdalena's husband Enrique feels guilt for not having cared for her properly. Perhaps they fear that she is there to take revenge on them for their

neglect. But the fact that her reappearance coincides with death in the river does not seem coincidental; there are portents when the bees and birds disappear, and the cows drink from the river and die. Before their demise, Cecilia hears the cows singing, “death is coming, the end is nigh. Let us die, we will return one day.”

The actual river where this was filmed really did have dead fish in it after a pulp factory polluted it; environmental degradation is not imaginary. The film treats this theme poetically, however, through the presence of Magdalena which seems to accompany death but also hope. When Cecilia almost drowns herself as she rescues a calf, Magdalena saves her; the calves survive the devastation, and the bees and birds return. Magdalena is still in the world, bringing life, just as we can if we decide to care for it. Like Mother Nature, Magdalena may be angry at our neglect but can also be forgiving, if we respond to her with love.

The indirect and symbolic ways in which the film makes its point cause it to be somewhat incoherent or difficult to follow, but giving artistic license for that, it provides a thoughtful meditation on our need to care for the Earth in order to survive and live in peace with her.