Spike Jonze’s solo screenwriting debut film “Her” begins with a black screen and an awkward thumping noise. Heartbeat or machine, it’s a bit unclear. The audience is introduced to Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) a somewhat introverted writer whose job is to write love letters for clients who are unable to for various reasons. Theodore uses a voice activated computer to compose the letters, choose music according to his mood as well as simple everyday tasks such as read emails and enter chat rooms when he is unable to sleep.

As the movie progresses the audience discovers Theodore is going through a difficult divorce with his childhood friend and sweetheart Catherine (Rooney Mara). One day Theodore comes across an advertisement for a new Operating System or OS that is hyper-intelligent with the ability of artificial intelligence. Like any future-oriented consumer Theodore buys immediately and thus begins a tale as old as the industrial revolution: man falling in love with machine.

The love is slow at first and almost unnerving to Theodore who finds himself constantly questioning whether his affections for his OS are equivalent to affections for a human woman. Samantha, as the OS, whose voice belongs to Scarlett Johansson, refers to herself, is unlike any other OS in that she is self aware and capable of analyzing what we call “complex human emotions” as well as using logic to work through these emotions, all in a matter of seconds.

Theodore and Samantha talk about life, love and generally everything without reservations of what is socially acceptable conversation. Their relationship is powered by pure intellectual stimulation without the physical wreck of first-date-jitters or social awkwardness. Phoenix is award-winningly convincing in his plight to decipher the subtle differences between man and machine and whether a machine created by man is inferior or not. From Theodore’s internal struggle the audience questions their own relationships and whether they could be seen as normal or socially acceptable.

The greatest message of the movie comes from Theodore’s best friend Amy (Amy Adams) who also winds up going through a difficult divorce. Amy tells Theodore she was tired of her overbearing husband and being told how to try harder in the relationship. When Theodore discusses this with Samantha she gives perhaps the most memorable line of the movie in stating, “The past is just a story we tell ourselves.”

The film, often a roller coaster of emotions, is laced with musical montages containing an amazing score composed by: Arcade Fire, Karen O of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Owen Pallett and Aphex Twin. In traditional indie-film fashion the montages help to expand the relationship, set the scene and display the sci-fi workings of a not-so-distant future.

“Her” will have the audience questioning what constitutes a real relationship. Can machines learn to develop human emotions and are we enthralled with making connections we can control regardless of how these connections are formed? “Her” is a must see for those who find themselves looking for a way out of a vapid relationship, town or existence.