

### Sample 1:

**Topic: How performance is used in 'The Greatest Showman' to present the overarching theme of 'blindness'**

#### How performance is used in 'The Greatest Showman' to present the overarching theme of 'blindness'

'The Greatest Showman' is an original musical drama film inspired by Phineas Taylor Barnum, an American showman who founded the Barnum & Bailey Circus. The film depicts the ambitious protagonist, P.T. Barnum, who rises to prominence from being badly off through his bold move of establishing his circus by borrowing a mortgage loan. Comprised of minorities in society, Barnum's circus is marginalized and held in disdain by the highly prejudiced society, especially the upper-class. Barnum is then motivated to invite playwright Philip Carlyle to join him. During a meeting with Queen Victoria arranged by Carlyle, Barnum meets a renowned Swedish singer, Jenny Lind, and convinces her to embark on a tour in America with him as her manager. The tour causes great controversy and Barnum starts to distance himself from his circus. He faces his downfall when he discovers that his circus has been burnt by a fire and his family leaves him. His circus troupe consoles and encourages him, leading him to mend his family relationships and rebuild his circus.

Blindness takes on many forms in the movie, from the blind pursuit of wealth to the blind discrimination against others. This essay will explore these two types of blindness revealed through the three performances in the film, namely '*Never Enough*', '*Never Enough (Reprise)*' and '*This is Me*'. Strategies include the use of lyrics and cinematic techniques such as lighting, types of shot, sounds and mise-en-scene.

Performances in the musical play a significant role in presenting different types of blindness. The overarching theme of 'blindness' can be seen through characters' blind pursuit of wealth, which is strongly presented through two performances of a Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind

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singing '*Never Enough*', one of which is the reprise. The first performance happens after Barnum meets Lind for the first time at the royal palace, where he invites her on the spot to perform in New York. Lind's performance is set in a grand concert hall with a full audience, most of whom are upper class. Besides their presence, Lind's sparkling, long white gown also depicts her high social status, as her extravagant costume provides the audience with a key to her identity (Timothy Corrigan, 1998). Far from satisfied with her already high status and popularity, she decides to perform with Barnum, her manager, in order to showcase her vocal talent in the US. She aspires to earn more fame, get richer and thus gain more respect. Once she has achieved these things, she feels happier since she equates wealth and success to happiness.

In the long shot showing the opening of the stage curtains (Fig 1), the audience is given the perspective of Lind standing in the middle of the stage with a full house stretching in front of her. Lighting allows the filmmaker to direct the audience's attention to Lind (Timothy Corrigan, 1998), complemented by the drastic contrast between her spotlight and the audience in the dark. Right in front of the singer is a strong spotlight symbolic of the attention and glamour she garners that make it hard for Lind to see the audience clearly. Thus, she keeps her focus on the spotlight, like how determined she becomes to follow Barnum's plan and perform in different places to accumulate more fame as she is blinded by Barnum's promises of making her '*the most famous singer not in Europe but in the entire world*' (Michael Gracey, 2017) and that '*[she] will sing in the grandest theatre with the finest orchestra in the greatest city on earth*' (Michael Gracey, 2017). Hence, she eventually lays her eyes solely on fame and money, supported by the fact that she embarks on a tour with Barnum afterwards. As a result of the satisfaction wealth and fame bring her, Lind spends

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more time with her manager and they grow intimate. She gradually loses herself as she tries to seduce Barnum, which is an immoral act, knowing Barnum has a wife. Thus, the harm that blind pursuit of wealth brings can be seen in Lind.



Fig 1: Long shot of Lind singing *'Never Enough'* during her first performance

Lind is the most well-lit in the whole scene, not just in the shot above. Fig 2 shows how the edges of her entire figure glow, and the contrast in colour between her white, gleaming gown and the dark concert hall shifts the spotlight and emphasis to her alone on stage, adhering to the fact that she has become the town's centre of attention. Simultaneously, the long shot also allows the audience to see Barnum in the wings and some of the orchestra members.



Fig 2: Long shot of Lind singing *'Never Enough'* during her first performance

The close up shot (Fig 3) below shows Lind smiling while singing, emphasizing her contentment and satisfaction of being on the big stage and performing for a high-class

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audience. Complemented by her glowing figure, it suggests how glamorous she thinks her life is now that she is given more opportunities to shine and to expose herself to more people. As much as how much more fame this opportunity earns her, she finally feels more accepted and loved, given that she has told Barnum about her inferiority and shame for being born out of wedlock during the after party of the concert.



Fig 3: Close-up shot of Lind singing 'Never Enough' during her first performance

Other than the general mise-en-scene and the use of shots and lighting, the diegetic sounds used also reflect the theme of being emotionally blinded by the pursuit of wealth. In *'Never Enough'*, which Lind sings during her performance, the lyrics say *'Let it stay this way, can't let this moment end'* and *'All the shine of a thousand spotlights, all the stars we steal from the night sky will never be enough, never be enough. Towers of gold are still too little, these hands could hold the world but it'll never be enough, never be enough for me.'* (Michael Gracey, 2017) Lyrics of the songs in film musicals make up part of the narrative as they serve the similar purpose of diegetic spoken dialogue, which allow the characters to express themselves directly (Plemenitaš, Katja, 2016) In the lyrics, Lind shows her greed and desires to have more than she is already enjoying now. Even though the spotlights are already on her, she enjoys wealth and that she is getting famous not only in Europe but the world, she is still

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not satisfied and yearns for more. As songs in films serve the function of strengthening the character's emotions (Plemenitaš, Katja, 2016), the lyrics of *'Never Enough'* is a clear depiction of Lind's thoughts and greed. She feels happy and superior for being famous and well-respected. Hence, she asserts that she does not want all of that to end as these sensations are the only bridges to her self-worth and remind her that she deserves a place in this world. This drives her to continue to pursue wealth and fame in order to sustain this feeling.

Besides Lind, Barnum's blind pursuit of wealth after the success of Lind's first performance ruins him. During Lind's performance, a medium shot of Barnum smiling (Fig 4) not only shows his admiration for Lind's talent, but also his happiness of successfully garnering the attention of the upper class after years of disdain and mockery. This lures him to continue to invest his time in the Jenny Lind tour and neglect his circus, which eventually leads to his downfall, foreshadowed by a close-up shot of his wife Charity Barnum looking worriedly at Barnum from afar (Fig 5) and followed by Charity's point of view shot of the stage (Fig 6). Charity's facial expression depicts her fear of Barnum falling in love with Lind due to their business relations and after seeing Barnum's admiration for her. Her reaction foreshadows Barnum and Lind's scandal, a major cause of his downfall.

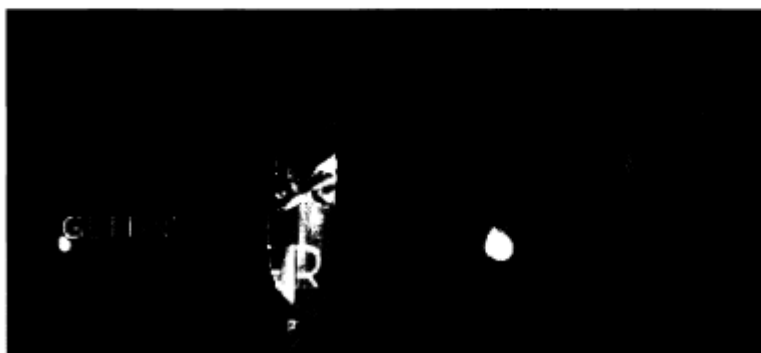


Fig 4: Medium shot of Barnum during Lind's first performance

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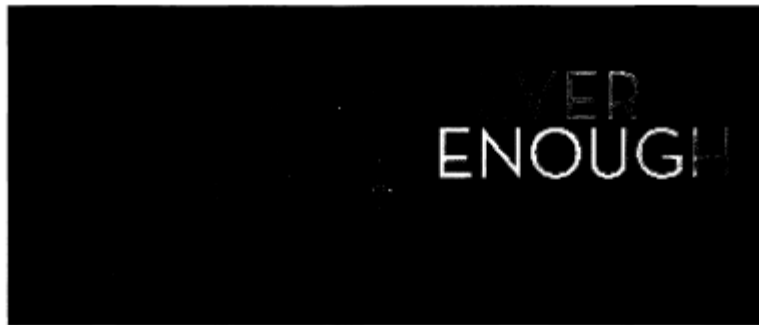


Fig 5: Close-up shot of Charity Barnum looking at Barnum during Lind's first performance



Fig 6: Point of view shot (Charity Barnum's point of view) during Lind's first performance

Unfortunately, Lind's blind pursuit of wealth and fame ultimately results in her downfall. After her confession gets rejected by Barnum, she realizes she has been deceived by the thought that wealth equates happiness. Instead, it is true love that leads to happiness, which is what she fails to pursue. Her self-defeat is suggested by the use of lighting and her facial expressions during her performance of '*Never Enough (Reprise)*', which she sings at her last concert with Barnum. Referring to Fig 7, the edges of her figure no longer glow, indicating her lethargy after her conflict with Barnum. In the reprise, Lind's facial expression hints no happiness as she no longer smiles. Her minimal makeup and the disappearance of shiny accessories reveals her haggardness after failing to pursue true love and deceiving herself into believing wealth equates to happiness. Even though the lyrics have remained the same, only

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Lind singing the last two verses of '*Never Enough (Reprise)*' is played on screen. The purpose of only showing the last part is that the same lyrics (Appendix 1 verse 4 lines 2-7) can be interpreted in a different way. Now that she has risen to international prominence like she has always wanted, ('*All the shine of a thousand spotlights*', '*towers of gold*' (Michael Gracey, 2017)), it is still inadequate for her, as she realizes that the thing she truly lacks is love, not fame and riches. Therefore, the performances of Lind depict the theme of blindness through presenting Lind and Barnum's blind pursuit of wealth in a negative light.



Fig 7: Long shot of Lind singing '*Never Enough (reprise)*'

The performance of '*This is Me*', mainly sung by Lettie Lutz, a bearded woman, best depicts the blind discrimination of the oddities in the circus by the majority of society. During the after party of Lind's concert, Barnum refuses to let his circus troupe into the ballroom as he believes that their appearance would inflict chaos, ruin his reputation after hosting such a glamorous concert and affect his admission revenue as he says to the troupe, '*Guys, who's gonna pay admission if you're out there? For all the world's here*' (Michael Gracey, 2017). Consequently, the performance starts with a close-up shot of Lutz looking low-spirited (Fig 8) after Barnum's words to them.

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Fig 8: Lettie Lutz looking low-spirited at the start of *'This is me'*

People's discrimination of the oddities is particularly presented through diegetic sounds, use of shots and mise-en-scene. In terms of diegetic sound, people's lack of acceptance of the circus troupe is shown in the lyrics Lutz sings. For instance, *'Hide away, they say, 'cause we don't want your broken parts'* (Michael Gracey, 2017) and *'Run away, they say, no one'll love you as you are'* (Michael Gracey, 2017). 'They' in the lyrics refer to people in society. Even though the troupe members have their own talent, people disregard and do not show appreciation for them, simply because they are physically different from other people. People's direct criticism of them can be heard through the protesters' rage, one of whom shouting *'Go home!'* (Michael Gracey, 2017) towards them.

The moment the circus troupe walks into the ballroom, medium shots of the upper class inside are captured from the perspective of the troupe (Fig 9 & Fig 10). The visual angle of the medium shots includes many people within the frame to emphasize the number of people in the ballroom and to highlight their fretful and disgusted facial expressions upon seeing the troupe, thus supporting the fact that they blindly discriminate against them because of their unorthodox physical appearance.

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Fig 9: Point of view shot (the circus troupe's point of view) and middle shot of the upper class inside the ballroom upon seeing the circus troupe



Fig 10: Point of view shot (the circus troupe's point of view) and middle shot of people inside the ballroom upon seeing the circus troupe

A close-up shot of a protester (Fig 11) is captured as the circus troupe emerge. In the shot, a drastic contrast between the protester's lit up face and the darker surroundings is established to highlight his outraged and infuriated facial expression, which is complemented with his dialogue, shouting, '*Go home!*' (Michael Gracey, 2017). This is representative of how people are unwilling to accept the oddities in society, which is a driving force for the oddities to hide themselves from others. For instance, how Lutz avoids contact with her colleagues by working behind a giant curtain at her workplace.

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Fig 11: Close-up shot of one of the protesters upon seeing the circus troupe

With regards to the general mise-en-scene, the protesters are seen holding up banners which contain the phrases 'No more freaks', 'Freak show', 'Boycott' and 'Why are they born!' printed on them (Fig 12). The majority of the public likens people with peculiarities, represented by the circus troupe, to 'freaks'. This is indicative of their attitude towards them because of their unusual appearance. The flaming torches that some of them are holding stand out in the darker surroundings to suggest their physical, emotional and verbal violence towards the troupe. Simply because the circus show constitutes the oddities, people are boycotting it, showing how they blindly discriminate against the oddities.



Fig 12: Protesters holding banners

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As the circus troupe dances into the square, it is seen to be snowing (Fig 13). The direction that the troupe is heading to is against the direction of strong wind and snowfall. Yet, the troupe still comes in fiercely with determination, as they no longer want to be ashamed of themselves because of their physical appearance. Nonetheless, the snow and wind are a presentation of the obstacles coming in their way towards achieving equality as the counterforce of abiding discrimination is all too strong.



Fig 13: strong wind and snowfall

To conclude, the performances of Lind's *'Never Enough'*, *'Never Enough (Reprise)'* and the circus troupe's *'This is Me'* assimilates strategies including mise-en-scene, use of shots, lighting, lyrics and sounds (both diegetic and non-diegetic) to illustrate the characters' experiences and consequences of blindly pursuing wealth, and the obstacles they face living in a society severely biased against the oddities. These three performances by the minor characters already effectively exhibit different types of blindness in society but the performances that reinforce the theme of 'blindness' explored in this essay are not exhaustive. *'The Other Side'* performed and sung by Carlyle and Barnum depicts Philip Carlyle's blindness towards new opportunities while *'Rewrite the Stars'* illustrates society's abiding

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belief of social class through Anne Wheeler and Philip Carlyle's trapeze and vocal performance which expresses their frustration towards society's disapproval of their forbidden love. Hence, *The Greatest Showman* shows an overarching theme of 'blindness', which is presented by a series of performances in the film musical.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

*Never Enough - Jenny Lind*

*I'm trying to hold my breath*

*Let it stay this way*

*Can't let this moment end*

*You set off a dream in me*

*Getting louder now*

*Can you hear it echoing?*

*Take my hand*

*Will you share this with me?*

*'Cause darling without you*

*All the shine of a thousand spotlights*

*All the stars we steal from the night sky*

*Will never be enough*

*Never be enough*

*Towers of gold are still too little*

*These hands could hold the world but it'll*

*Never be enough*

*Never be enough*

*For me*

*Never, never*

*Never, never*

*Never, for me*

*For me*

*Never enough*

Sample 1:

*Never enough*

*Never enough*

*For me*

*For me*

*For me*

*All the shine of a thousand spotlights*

*-All the stars we steal from the night sky*

*Will never be enough*

*Never be enough*

*Towers of gold are still too little*

*These hands could hold the world but it'll*

*Never be enough*

*Never be enough--*

*For me*

*Never, never*

*Never, never*

*Never, for me*

*For me*

*Never enough*

*Never, never*

*Never enough*

*Never, never*

*Never enough*

*For me*

*For me*

*For me*

*For me*

Sample 1:

Appendix 2

*This is Me - Lettie Lutz*

*I am not a stranger to the dark*

*Hide away, they say*

*'Cause we don't want your broken parts*

*I've learned to be ashamed of all my scars*

*Run away, they say*

*No one'll love you as you are*

*But I won't let them break me down to dust*

*I know that there's a place for us*

*For we are glorious*

*When the sharpest words wanna cut me down*

*I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out*

*I am brave, I am bruised*

*I am who I'm meant to be, this is me*

*Look out 'cause here I come*

*And I'm marching on to the beat I drum*

*I'm not scared to be seen*

*I make no apologies, this is me*

*Oh-oh-oh-oh*

*Oh-oh-oh-oh*

*Oh-oh-oh-oh*

*Oh-oh-oh-oh*

*Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh*

*Another round of bullets hits my skin*

Sample 1:

*Well, fire away 'cause today, I won't let the shame sink in  
We are bursting through the barricades and  
Reaching for the sun (we are warriors)  
Yeah, that's what we've become (yeah, that's what we've become)*

*I won't let them break me down to dust  
I know that there's a place for us  
For we are glorious*

*When the sharpest words wanna cut me down  
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out  
I am brave, I am bruised  
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me  
Look out 'cause here I come  
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum  
I'm not scared to be seen  
I make no apologies, this is me*

*Oh-oh-oh-oh  
Oh-oh-oh-oh  
Oh-oh-oh-oh  
Oh-oh-oh-oh  
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh  
This is me*

*and I know that I deserve your love  
(Oh-oh-oh-oh) 'cause there's nothing I'm not worthy of  
(Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh)  
When the sharpest words wanna cut me down  
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out*

Sample 1:

*This is brave, this is proof*

*This is who I'm meant to be, this is me*

*Look out 'cause here I come (look out 'cause here I come)*

*And I'm marching on to the beat I drum (marching on, marching, marching on)*

*I'm not scared to be seen*

*I make no apologies, this is me*

*When the sharpest words wanna cut me down*

*I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out*

*I'm gonna send a flood*

*Gonna drown them out*

*Oh*

*This is me*

Sample 1:

**Works Cited**

Timothy Corrigan. (1998). *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*, 3rd Edition. Longman, New York. 51.

Plemenitaš, Katja. (2016). Songs as Elements in the Generic Structure of Film Musicals. *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries*, 13(1), 34-35.

Sample 1:

**Comments**

The essay is fluent and easy to follow. The student attempted to provide definitions of the key terms used in the discussion and signpost the arguments in the introduction. However, the essay does not fully realise what is promised in the introduction. A much clearer context should have been provided to justify the importance of the notions of 'blind pursuit of wealth' and 'blind discrimination against others' to facilitate discussion. It is sometimes confusing to see the phrase 'blind pursuit of wealth' and 'blinded by the pursuit of wealth' (p. 4) used interchangeably.

The student makes an effort to show his/her knowledge of the film and of the use of mise-en-scene, music, lighting and shots in the film. The student did a fairly good job of analysing the director's portrayal of characters' emotions. The focus of the essay is well defined in the introduction. However, it falls short of showing how filmic techniques are used to reinforce the theme of blindness, particularly the characters' 'blind pursuit of wealth'. A few details are lacking and need explanation, notably 'Lind's confession' and 'her self defeat' on p. 6.

It is also unclear what the student intended to look at when s/he used the word 'performance' in the discussion. The part on 'performance' is more a section where the lyrics of three songs are scrutinised instead of the shows staged in the film. Though the discussion on the songs is clear and reasonable, the student should be aware of how the film is about a circus troupe and should be more careful with her/his choice of words to avoid confusion.

The pictorial illustrations are blurry and fail to adequately support the student's arguments.

The essay could have been better organised with more effective transitional sentences, especially on p. 3 and p. 7.

The scope of the essay is relevant and appropriate. With a better set topic and more carefully structured arguments, the essay could potentially score higher.

**Score: 20**

Sample 2:

**Topic: The breaking of gender stereotype: A study of female roles in Maleficent (2014) and Ella Enchanted (2004)**

**The breaking of gender stereotype: A study of female roles in Maleficent (2014) and Ella Enchanted (2004)**

**Introduction**

Emma Watson, an English actress, and the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador activist, once said, "Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong." She also said that "We need to live in a culture that values and respects and looks up to and idolizes women as much as men". A gender stereotype is about the society's descriptive components, or beliefs about how males and females typically act, as well as prescriptive components, or beliefs about how males and females should act. Emma Watson, as an influential activist, her words indicate gender equality today is being seen as burning importance, women's self-determination is getting higher, as women's status in nowadays society is rising.

Regarding gender stereotype, the idea of feminism risen to fight for equal rights for women, and gender issues such as gender stereotyping in society. Under the rising status of women in modern society, the female roles in Maleficent in 2014 have shown advancement, similar to Ella enchanted made in 2004. Both of the films are based on Disney's historical fairytale Sleeping Beauty, famous Disney cartoons but are now live-action films. The main female roles in both films, Maleficent and Ella are twisted from the original Sleeping Beauty plot. Although there is a 10-year difference between the making of the two films, both are seemingly portrayed as women who have rising power and authority, subverting the patriarchal culture social norm in the American culture. The idea of the rising of female roles is portrayed in both of films.

Angelina Jolie, who is the actress who plays Maleficent, once said "There is no greater pillar of stability than a strong, free and educated woman. And there is no more inspiring role model than a man who respects and cherishes women and champions their leadership." This has inspired me to link the female roles in the two films, in contrast with Disney's history of a collection of famous "princes and princesses" stories which often end with "living happily ever after", leaving a prominent influence on children to have a shaped gender stereotype. During the 19th century, women were controlled by a male-dominated society. Women's role in society was to be simply mothers and wives. Until the nineteenth century, the contour of a feminist political movement became visible. Women's power became an official concept. The spearheads of the women's movement were equality in education, labor, and electoral rights. Women's rights are much more emphasized now compared to the past, and the idea is even depicted in movie making.

In recent years, alternative fairytale movies are breaking the traditional gender identity and roles, due to the evolve of gender equality and the diminishing of traditional values. After putting the two movies together, I have chosen two aspects (i) Victim to victory (ii) visual and sound elements. Both films have commonly used these two aspects to depict the status of the female roles. Also, sound elements such as language is an important part in gender stereotyping as language is used to tell what women should do, how should they behave back in the man-based culture society. In this essay, I will therefore discuss the two aspects to show the changes and influences of the female roles in both films.

Sample 2:



Figure 1<sup>1</sup> and 2<sup>2</sup> Posters of *Ella Enchanted* and *Maleficent*

#### Synopses of the texts

In *Ella enchanted* (2004), A rearranged life action movie based on the famous Disney fairytale-*Sleeping Beauty*, the main character Ella is cursed with a spell which compels her to be obedient and do whatever was told by anyone, which was gifted to her by a stupid, sentimental fairy, Lucinda. Therefore Ella is always manipulating by her stepsisters and different people, she couldn't tolerate the effect of the spell anymore and she decides to find Lucinda to beg her to take back her gift of the spell, to have her voice back. However, Ella fails to convince her to take back the spell, and also falls in love with the prince. She knows that her obedience can be taken as an advantage by the enemies of the prince, so Ella decides to give up the love of her life. With the malicious plans of Sir Edga, uncle of Prince Char plans to use Ella to kill Prince Char, but Ella insists not to fall into Sir Edga's trap. At last, she ultimately liberates herself from the spell through compelling strength inside her without relying on anyone.

In *Maleficent* (2014), an American dark fantasy film directed by Robert Stromberg is a live-action movie made based on the same fairytale with *Ella Enchanted*, the Disney cartoon-*Sleeping Beauty*. A powerful fairy Maleficent meets and falls in love with a human boy Stephan, Stephan loves power more than Maleficent, so he fulfills his father's will to cut her wings down to be the king. she ultimately suffers a ruthless betrayal—an act that begins to turn her pure heart to stone. and she decides to curse the daughter of King Stephan for revenge, that Princess Aurora will prick her finger on her 16th birthday and fall asleep until true love appears. But soon, as Maleficent watches Aurora's growth, she realizes that she loves this girl and can't remove the curse. She tried to make Prince Philip kiss Aurora but it doesn't work and it's not true love. Later on, Maleficent finds out that the kiss which wakes Aurora is her kiss. When they are leaving the castle, a fight broke out and Maleficent long lost wings are finally free by Aurora, they win the battle. At last, Aurora was made the Queen and they live happily ever after.

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<sup>1</sup> "Ella Enchanted." *Amazon*, Amazon, [www.amazon.com/Ella-Enchanted-Widescreen-Anne-Hathaway/dp/B00005JMSQ](http://www.amazon.com/Ella-Enchanted-Widescreen-Anne-Hathaway/dp/B00005JMSQ).

<sup>2</sup> *Rappler.com*. "4 Things to Know about Disney's *Maleficent*." *Rappler*, [www.rappler.com/entertainment/53145-things-to-know-disney-maleficent-angelina-jolie](http://www.rappler.com/entertainment/53145-things-to-know-disney-maleficent-angelina-jolie).

## Sample 2:

### (i) Victim to Victory

Steve Maraboli, a speaker, bestselling author, and also a Behavioural Scientist once said that "I am not a victim. No matter what I have been through, I'm still here. I have a history of victory." Female is acted like a victim back in the old man dominant society before feminism movement even started. This suggested that women's act of being fragile, vulnerable like a victim should not be expecting to get a victory, unlike Disney's usual plot of archaic Prince Charming trope. Naomi Wolf, an American liberal progressive feminist contrasts victim feminism with power feminism. In her view, victim feminists presented women as "beleaguered, fragile, intuitive angels" thus preventing women from taking responsibility for the power they have. In both of the films, *Maleficent* and *Ella* are both proved to change themselves from victims to victors.

In *Maleficent*, Maleficent is a winged fairy who lives in The Moors who is betrayed by Stephen, her best friend, from being lovers to enemies. He drugs her with drink and cuts off her wings while she's unconscious so that he can bring them back to the humans to be crowned as the king. She is a victim in the world of greed which turns her pure heart into an unmanageable hate and seeks revenge by putting a curse on Aurora, Stephen's newborn daughter, that she will fall into a sleep like death on her sixteenth birthday after pricking her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel, her choices are driven at every turn by this moment of betrayal. With Maleficent watching over Aurora through her childhood, she slowly gains herself love and trust and emotions towards Aurora. She is a victim under the blinding hatred until she found herself the true love kisser, not necessarily from a man, but a steady, love, who has loved Aurora quietly and for a long time. With an ending of Maleficent beating Stephen down, reclaims what was taken from her. Her final fight with Stephan suggests that with the self-developed emotions and trust in herself, she can change herself from a victim to victory without relying upon any men.

Ella in *Ella Enchanted* has also proved herself to have the power to change herself from a victim to a victory. Ella is indeed a victim under the ignorance of fairy Lucinda, who is perceived as rather stupid, thinking that will make Ella kind. However, she turned Ella to the victim of her curse, forming the stereotype of women being submissive and obedient. However, we can see that the spell has not successfully turned her personality to obedience, she still holds on even though her step-mother and stepsisters are taking advantage of her curse. Also, what makes her a victory, even more, is that after she breaks the curse, she refuses to be a princess or queen, which these titles are usually what original Disney princesses end up with. Instead, she takes up the title "Court Linguist" and "Cook's Helper", showing Ella's insist on taking up responsibilities and jobs. This subverts the traditional norm of married women being jobless and a housewife and being taken care of by males.

The two female roles in the two films present how the two characters' independence of turning themselves from a victim to a victory, all on their own. No princess charming, but their confidence and strength. The shaping of Ella and Maleficent in the two films represents the rising of female status and power in modern society.

Sample 2:



<sup>34</sup>Young and Adult version of Maleficent's costume

## (ii) Visual and sound elements

Visual and sound elements also play an important role in both films to show the status and it is also a way to portray the image of the female in the film. Visual and sound elements such as costumes, use of colour and acting, film techniques like camera angles and music and dialogues are all pivotal components to deliver the characterization of the main roles. In both of the films, there are differences and also similarities when it comes to visual and sound elements.

In *Maleficent*, the portrait of Maleficent's appearance can clearly show the personality of the role. For the use of costume on the young version of Maleficent. In contrast with the dark and sinister costume she later dons, young Maleficent tends to be softer, feminine, having long brown hair and accessories around her neck. Eventually, after the betrayal of her lover, she is portrayed with a black gown and a walking crutch, also a pair of black pointy horns that make us linked them to demonic creatures like Lilith, a figure in Jewish mythology, who is often envisioned as a dangerous demon of the night, who steals babies in the darkness, with her appearance with horns on her head, suggesting a parallel with the demon. Also, High cheekbones, a sculpted face which makes her seem to be more wicked and more powerful. From a teenage girl who is in love with a boy to an independent and mature woman who strives to get back her power, delivering the idea of female evolution in today's society. The young version of Maleficent's way of acting and talking makes a huge difference with the adult Maleficent. The young Maleficent gives the audience a lovely, sweet, lively and friendly image of what a typical young girl should be like, and there is always a smile on her face and a sense of vitality. Compared to the dark, indifferent image of the adult Maleficent, Gender stereotype has broken through the change of young and adult Maleficent's image.

For *Ella Enchanted*, the use of costume for Ella has no big difference from traditional princess fairytale films where Ella wears a light blue cape, which is an innocent, feminine colour. Having long hair, natural makeup, and a bright smile on her face, making the audience unaware of Ella's compelling power. Fairy Lucinda, who gives the obedience spell is also shot using a mid-shot showing her pink outfit, symbolizing femininity. However, her rebellious attitude makes her refuses to take back Ella's spell, which breaks the society's stereotype of fairies being caring, innocent and kind in a typical fantasy movie plot. The use of supporting roles also highlights the

<sup>3</sup> "Maleficent Art Print." *Saatchi Art*, [www.saatchiart.com/print/Drawing-Maleficent/853786/2823607/view](http://www.saatchiart.com/print/Drawing-Maleficent/853786/2823607/view).

<sup>4</sup> "Young Maleficent Movie Costume : Maleficent Costume, Maleficent Movie, Young Maleficent." *Pinterest*, [www.pinterest.com/pin/426364289697970482/?lp=true](http://www.pinterest.com/pin/426364289697970482/?lp=true).

## Sample 2:

the despair of Ella. For example, Ella does not have the desire of marrying the prince like her sisters for the princess title. Instead, she relies on herself to work things out in her life. This shows that the traditional stereotype has broken.

Cinematography is also used and emphasized in both movies. In the opening scene of *Ella Enchanted*, the *Mise En Scene* (a catch-all for everything that contributes to the visual presentation) has provided the audience that they are viewing a typical magical fantasy film. The first opening shot of a castle with misty, foggy surroundings, camera tracking the castle like it's through a bird's eye view, the presence of a rainbow with sparkles along with old cottages instantly makes the fantasy genre even more explicit. The swerving movement of the camera also makes the audience feel disoriented as if something magical is going to happen just like what the audience thought that the prince and princess are going to live happily ever after. For the sound elements, The background music of the opening scene consists of a voiceover of a man, describing how typical fairytales are like, "There are romance and danger and plotting of schemes. ", but foreshadowing that there is a difference in this film, that "But our story today is different in theme, for our hero had no choice, or so it would seem.", intriguing the audience to expect the breaking of stereotyping.



<sup>5</sup>Opening scene showing the castle, old cottages and rainbow,sparkles with swerving movement

Similarly in *Maleficent*, the *Mise En scene* has used various sound techniques and camera angles. The way of shooting the opening scene is almost the same with *Ella enchanted* as it uses bird eyes view to capture the scenes of the moors and used non-diegetic sound in the form of a voiceover by Angelina Jolie, the actress of the *Maleficent*, hinting that the story will be presented through the point of view of Maleficent which leads the audience to experience the influence of her powerful affection to Aurora, without masculinity. In the scene where Maleficent gives the curse to Aurora, the orchestral instruments music is daunting which the audience can feel the intensity in her curse and feel the sense of wicked. Furthermore, close up and low angles are used when King Stephen begs Maleficent to take back the curse, she stands tall and as if she is taking over the whole kingdom, indicating her dominance in power over patriarchy.

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<sup>5</sup> "Watch Ella Enchanted (2004) Full Movie Online Free: M4ufree 123 Movies." *Watch Ella Enchanted (2004) Full Movie Online Free | M4ufree 123 Movies | M4uHD Net*, [m4uhd.net/watch-movie-iyww-ella-enchanted-2004-online-free-m4ufree.html](http://m4uhd.net/watch-movie-iyww-ella-enchanted-2004-online-free-m4ufree.html).

## Sample 2:



<sup>6</sup>Low angle shot of Maleficent looking down on King Stephen



<sup>7</sup>Ella scene of breaking the spell, with words of orders people told her before in her mind

<sup>8</sup>Ella being told by her stepsister to call herself stupid and don't know what she is talking about.

At the same time, language is also an important component in sound elements, delivering the thoughts and communication between the roles. There is a saying by a famous Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan, "Because you are women, people will force their thinking on you, their boundaries on you. They will tell you how to dress, how to behave, whom you can meet and where you can go." Language can be a tool to manipulate and control how others behave, like the society giving orders and restraint on women, which the characters in both films do also experience being manipulated by language.

Especially in *Ella Enchanted*, Ella would do what she is told uncontrollably, even though she doesn't want to in her mind. Ella represents the stereotype of women being obedient, listening to what men told them to do and having no autonomy. Ella is controlled by words, being asked by her sister, "Just admit that you are stupid and don't know what you are talking about." Then Ella just repeats what she said. In the scene where Ella is forced to kill Prince Charming, holding the knife but trying so hard to stop herself, the background sound effect is surrounded with orders, "Don't

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<sup>6</sup> "Watch Maleficent 2014 Full Movie Online Free: M4ufree 123 Movies." Watch Maleficent 2014 Full Movie Online Free

<sup>7</sup> "Ella-Enchanted-Online-Free-Streaming-Hd-with-Subtitles-Europix." europix.org/movie/ella-enchanted-online-free-streaming-hd-with-subtitles-europix.

<sup>8</sup> Ella-Enchanted-Online-Free-Streaming-Hd-with-Subtitles-Europix." europix.org/movie/ella-enchanted-online-free-streaming-hd-with-subtitles-europix.

## Sample 2:

argue, just do it.”, “take that!”, “keep your mouth shut.” All of these represent the oppress and control on women in the society. However, Ella still holds on and shouts “You will no longer be obedient!” and break herself free from the spell. This suggests the idea of stereotyping women shall no longer be existing.

For Maleficent, Language also plays an important role. We live in an age where people use words to gain trust from others so to take advantage of them. Moreover, It is often said that girls are more easily tricked, deceived, like how Stephen uses sweet talks to fool Maleficent. For example, in the scene where the young Maleficent shakes her hand with Stephen and burns by his rings, Stephen immediately throws away his ring for Maleficent and even admires her by saying “I like your wings!” and told Maleficent that their kiss is a true love kiss. After Maleficent has turned evil, she seems to be very powerful and feisty. Maleficent’s tough behaviour is being forced out by the betrayal of Stephen whom she trusts the most. This unveils women do not necessarily rely on anybody, and the stereotyping of women being weak no longer implies.

In conclusion, after exploring the idea of gender stereotyping in the two Disney films from the aspect of “victim to victory” and “Visual and sound elements”, It can be seen that how female status and image nowadays has changed and overthrown the previous perception of females by the society. Both stories are based on the story of the Disney Princess Aurora who is saved by the prince as a happy ending, but they similarly make a big twist of the story, bringing the audience a profound message of establishing and achieving personal, and social equality of both sexes.

Total Word count: 2949

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Sample 2:

**Comments**

The student attempted to explore the gender roles and the 'breaking of gender stereotype' (p. 20) in the extended essay but failed to sustain a coherent and convincing discussion.

The topic sets the student up to fulfil the task in an unsatisfactory manner. The films chosen, which are children's stories, provide little room for discussion as the characters are rather two-dimensional. Other than both being remakes of *The Sleeping Beauty*, the reason for comparing the two films is unclear. It is also unwise to assume a thorough discussion of the depiction of gender roles in two films in 2500 words. A sharper focus would have made the discussion more effective and potentially more insightful.

The visuals included in a paper should facilitate the discussion. Including the posters of the two films in question is unnecessary. An introduction to a discussion is expected to set the context, define the scope of the discussion and signpost arguments. Spending two pages on providing the background information of the actresses who played the main roles and synopses which are not tied to the intended arguments is unhelpful for the student in achieving the aims of the essay.

The essay lacks in-depth analysis of female roles and contains unwarranted generalisations. Little illustration is given to demonstrate in what way Maleficent and Ella are 'victims', and how they develop into 'victors'.

The section on visual and sound elements in the essay is far from satisfactory. Little understanding is shown in how the use of shots facilitate characterisation. Similarly, the discussion on the use of sound is flimsy. Apart from stating that 'orchestral instruments music' (p. 24) is used to create tension, nothing more about the use of sound or music is elaborated. Characters' use of language is also dubiously considered as 'an important component in sound elements' (p. 25), and the argument put forward is sketchy.

Coherence is lacking in the essay. It should be more organised and cohesive. Instead of using sub-headings, it might be better to use more cohesive devices and transitional sentences.

**Score: 14**

Sample 3:

**Topic: A Beautiful Mind (2001) - Explore the significance of the use of symbols in ‘A Beautiful Mind’**

**Choice of portfolio:** Analytical Essay

**Choice of text:** Films

**Chosen text:** A Beautiful Mind (2001)

**Thesis Statement:**

Explore the significance of the use of symbols in “A Beautiful Mind”

The use of symbols is sophisticatedly embedded throughout “A Beautiful Mind”. The painful psychological disorder of the main character, John Nash, an ingenious mathematician who suffers from schizophrenia, which is a chronic and severe mental disorder that affects the patients with delusions and hallucinations, affecting the patients’ daily activity and causing them to withdraw from social life. The disturbing mental states and the excruciating torture of John Nash is mirrored by the use of various well-designed scenes with symbols and colours. However, the unconditional love of Alicia Nash helps alleviate the pain of John Nash along his combat with schizophrenia. The symbols act as essential imprints of Alicia Nash’s ultimate power of love towards John Nash. The use of symbols is significant in this film, thus the sophisticated use of symbols and its significance will be discussed in this essay.

The use of symbols is significant in manifesting and visualising the inner imaginary world of John Nash along his journey of schizophrenia, which allows audiences to see his invisible “beautiful mind”. The presence of his fictional friend, Charles, helps spiritedly portray John Nash’s disillusionment. John Nash is portrayed as a mysterious genius who seems to be socially off-putting at the beginning and later subtly progresses to show how his schizophrenia haunts him. The movie begins with John introducing himself to other math graduate students, where he tries to make jokes with good intentions but ends up offending other students and leaving. He also offends the other graduate students by calling their work unoriginal and talking about how he will come with an “original” idea and solve it. The uncomfortable conversation reinforces his social awkwardness and his alienation that further highlights his disability in dealing with others. After this confrontation, he heads back to his room and meets his roommate, Charles who is supposedly a vulgar and rough graduate student studying English, who is contrasting with the mild and gentle personality of John Nash. However, the meticulous but subtle setting of John’s room has silently revealed clues

### Sample 3:

about John Nash's schizophrenia delusions to audience, since his room is apparently made for one person, with only a single working desk (Fig.1). It leaves a secret sign of the imaginary existence of Charles whereas to foreshadow the upcoming bittersweet relationship of John Nash with his fictitious friend, which actually symbolises his conflicting and excruciating experience with his delusions in the later part of the film. While his inner struggle and confusion about his duplicity due to schizophrenia are shown in the interaction of John Nash and Charles, John Nash expresses his dislike and unwelcoming to Charles in the beginning of the film which makes his refusal of the fact that he has invaded by schizophrenia to be seen on screen.



*Fig.1 Charles squats on John Nash's desk in his hall at Princeton University mirroring the invasion of John Nash's unwelcoming schizophrenia.*

Moreover, the use of billiards further allows the audience to see the torturing inner turmoil and tormenting mental struggles that due to the schizophrenia suffered by John Nash, which also shows the life of John Nash with schizophrenia. The inner imaginary world of Nash is shown vividly by the use of various symbols and colours throughout the film in order to present the hardship that faced by people with schizophrenia. The use of billiards brilliantly mirrors the stages of schizophrenia that John Nash enduring. At the beginning of the film, it features John Nash playing billiards in the bar and striking the preset balls by his cue. The different types of billiards balls are placed and packed in a regular uniform triangle shape at the preset of the game and then further struck by a white billiard ball in order to break off the balls and cause them scatter randomly on the billiards table. While symbolically, the colours of the billiards balls preset in the scene mirrors thousands of delusions and hallucinations that John Nash suffers in schizophrenia, as different colours of balls represents different delusions

### Sample 3:

and hallucinations in his head that highlight the complicity and complexity of the uncontrollable colorful voices which cruelly compress himself out of his self control on his own mind. The use of bright and vibrant colours creates a remarkable visual effect to the audience and further presents the mind of John Nash visually to show the world of schizophrenia and marks his journey of living with schizophrenia.

In addition, the form and the shapes of the objects contributes to showcase the stages and general development of John Nash's schizophrenia, regarding the seriousness of the delusions and hallucinations of his. The balls are at first packed in a uniform triangle shape, it symbolises all the delusions and hallucinations are merge and packed together inside John Nash's mind but he fails to realise and recognise the hallucinations and delusions at the early part of the film since the hallucinations are still kept stably in his mind under his control that the hallucinations are not scattered enough to be seen, like how the billiards balls are kept in uniform shape before the official start of the match. Therefore, the preset shape of billiards mirrors the early stage of John Nash's schizophrenia which highlights the pre-war which takes place in John Nash's mind and signals the start of his mad mission of decoding that assigned the spy that lives in his fabricated world.

The further striking of his cue symbolises John Nash's worsening stage of schizophrenia. The striking action towards the white ball to break off the preset 15 different colours of balls scatters every corner of the billiard table. It symbolically represents his schizophrenia has started to be out of control as he spills balls of troubles. The spread of his balls of hallucinations on his billiards table of mind drags him into the abyss of the severe stage of schizophrenia that consumes his mind. It foreshows the broad influences and obstacles that brought to his life aspects, affecting his studies, social life, marriage and career which contributes to his hardship in overcoming and combating the war within himself. Thus the use of billiards has evocatively illustrated the complicated inner struggles of John Nash and visualises the abstract mindset of Schizophrenia in order to reinforce the hopelessness and helplessness of John Nash. His desperation towards his psychological disorder is vividly shown to the audience.

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Moreover, the severe stage of Nash's paranoid schizophrenia and his conflicting internal psychology at the later part of the film is shaped by the complicated setting in the secret base that fabricated by John Nash. He believes that he is secretly invited to the Pentagon to crack encrypted enemy telecommunications, deciphering numerous complex codes<sup>1</sup> and finding out about a Soviet plot to blow up locations in the USA (Fig.2) . The miscellaneous numbers of codes on the screen mirrors the disordered mind inner world of John Nash that due to his schizophrenia. After that, John Nash discovers himself followed by a mysterious spy in black which he finds insecure about (Fig.3), it reinforces his dark insecurity in his own hallucinations and also highlights his emergence of paranoia in his severe stage of schizophrenia since the secret decoding mission and the black spy in black are all his hallucinations and are only fabricated by himself. Although he successfully decodes for the location in the mission, he fails to decode his own location in reality.



*Fig.2 John Nash is invited to Pentagon for secret decoding mission*



*Fig.3 John Nash is followed by a man in black when he is delivering a speech at Princeton University*

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<sup>1</sup> Flimsy. (2012, June 6). *Did John Nash decipher code from a large board in Pentagon.*

### Sample 3:

Although John Nash's hard time combating with his schizophrenia is shown by the use of symbols, the symbolic appearance of Alicia Nash with her love has brought him a flash of hope and changes his dull life. When she first enters the office of John Nash with her sharp and bright red colour dress (Fig.4) , it creates a great contrast with the plain and gloomy colour tone in the early part of the film.<sup>2</sup> It mirrors the enlightenment she brings to John Nash as it symbolically foreshadows her entering his life and brightens up the later life of John Nash.



*Fig.4 Alicia enters the office of John Nash with her red dress*

Furthermore, as time goes by, their romantic relationship and the power of love are imprinted by the use of symbols, through the use of paintings, stars and the glass display which represent the understanding and overwhelming unconditional acceptance of John Nash's wife, Alicia Nash, towards the uncontrollable psychology disorder of her husband. It further foreshadows the mighty loyalty and support of Alicia Nash towards John Nash's intimidating and insane behaviours that due to his schizophrenia. The symbolic significance of these symbols marks the ultimate growth and the power of love which given by Alicia along John Nash's battle with his illness.

While the abstract-style painting on the wall in the restaurant where Alicia first dates John Nash symbolises her compassionate discovery towards John Nash's schizophrenia. The painting portrays a man that made up of several pieces who is looking at another painting. The abstract man who is made up of several pieces symbolises the convoluted and scattered

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<sup>2</sup> Shabadoo, J.J. (2012, October 8). *A Beautiful Mind Analysis*

### Sample 3:

mentality of his, which is as abstract and hard to interpret as the painting (Fig.5). Besides, the painting within the painting also mirrors the duplicity of John Nash. However, Alicia mentions the painter who draws the painting “has so many colours” echoes with the colourful billiards balls, which symbolises the complicated mind of John Nash which filled with tremendous of delusions and hallucinations, she soon discover the colours in John Nash’s mind which marks the start of their love story.



*Fig.5 The colourful and abstract painting that Alicia stares at when dating John Nash at the restaurant.*

Furthermore, the stunningly shiny glass display represents John Nash’s trust towards Alicia, symbolising the power of love and trust. Since the stars and the glass display is like John Nash’s invitation to Alicia to enter and explore his inner world of mind, showcasing his ultimate trust and intimacy to Alicia, which marks their further intimate relationship. Since John Nash usually isolates himself from the crowd and refuses socialising due to the symptoms of schizophrenia, it foreshadows Alicia will be the most important partner and solace of his life. As John Nash gives the glass display to Alicia as a dating gift, he explains the scientific theory behind the refracted rainbow-coloured light of the glass, saying “if you look inside you can see” and replied by Alicia quickly “any possible colour” (Fig.6). The glass display suggests the inner heart and mind of John Nash, he gives the glass display to Alicia as if he gives his heart to Alicia and letting him to “look inside”. While before John Nash finishes his line, Alicia’s rapid reply of “any possible colours”, which foreshadows

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Alicia will soon see the true colour of John Nash, which is his schizophrenia that he personally doesn't realise at the beginning. Therefore, Alicia becomes the critical person in John Nash's life as she is the one who stay by John Nash's side during the medical treatment of curing his schizophrenia and the torturing married life that brought by John Nash's delusions and hallucinations in the later part of the film, highlights that she could look into John Nash's situation and be his companion and supporter as if she could look into the glass display and sees the "any possible colours", withstanding "any possible" peculiar behaviours of John Nash after they married. The use of glass display which is in diamond shape which perfectly symbolises the strong fortitude and imperishable passion of their marriage which also demonstrates Alicia's unconditional love and altruistic acceptance to embrace every piece and colour reflected by her lover, John Nash.



*Fig.6 Glass display to Alicia given by John Nash*

Meanwhile, the use of shimmering star images also symbolises Alicia's compassionately love, acceptance and understanding towards John Nash. When John Nash and Alicia gazes at the sky that scattered with millions of stars during their date, the millions of stars symbolises the different numerous uncountable delusions and voices inside the mind of John Nash. However, Alicia looks at the stars and says "I want to try to count them all", with a wide shot that slowly pans across the starry sky as to highlights the gentle and sedate love of Alicia and as to reinforce Alicia's determination to understand John Nash's psychological disorder that she still wanting to reach every part of John Nash in order to accept him completely.

### Sample 3:

Besides, John Nash's response further highlights his reliance and trust towards Alicia, as he catches her hand and points up to the sky with sea of stars, saying "pick a shape, an animal, anything" (Fig.7). As he takes her hand and links the stars above the sky in order to draw what Alicia requests, an octopus and an umbrella. The shape formed after the linkage of the stars also act as symbols. The octopus - shaped star<sup>3</sup> with eight legs symbolises differences and complexity, at the same time also symbolises deep-running emotions, echoing to John Nash's schizophrenia which gives him numerous delusion. While the umbrella-shaped stars (Fig.8) further mirror Alicia's protective love towards John Nash as umbrella gives protection against the drizzling rain, which echoes to the protection and shelter given by Alicia to John Nash from his rain of hallucinations inside his mind. The romantic action of pointing stars is not only flirtation, while the enduring stars also suggests eternity as stars do not dim easily, the action acts as a romantic promise made by them, hoping their trust and love do not go dim and will last shimmeringly forever. John Nash is willing to guide and lead Alicia into the sea of his complicated mind, opening up himself to Alicia, mirrors their eternity of love, as if the long lasting stars upon. The overwhelming love and care given by Alicia to John Nash during the tortuous and torturing treatments is completely conveyed and foreshadowed by the use of star images<sup>4</sup>.

With the love of Alicia, John Nash is empowered to combat his schizophrenia and pursue his dream in solving his mathematical problems, which are both equally demanding and difficult. While at the end of the film, John Nash who has once belittled by his classmates has become a Nobel laureate after years<sup>5</sup>. When he returns back to his alma mater, Princeton University, pens are ritualistically presented to him by the mathematics professors which is a prestigious custom ceremony of pens<sup>6</sup> that symbolises his accomplishments are accepted and acknowledged by the mathematics community that he has longed for this honourable moment when he is studying at Princeton University (Fig.9) . It further reinforces the unlimited love of Alicia that is mirrored by the use of symbols is essential for the ultimate success of John Nash.

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<sup>3</sup> Sanders, V. (n.d). *Octopus Meaning And Symbolism*.

<sup>4</sup> AskanAcademic. (2019, September 25). '*A Beautiful Mind*': how did Ron Howard use cinematography to communicate ideas about love, reality and mental illness

<sup>5</sup> Bauer, P. (n.d.). *A Beautiful Mind*.

<sup>6</sup> Bisquitlips. (2009, August 30). *Film: A Beautiful Mind. The custom of placing pens*

Sample 3:



*Fig.7 John Nash holds the hand of Alicia and guides her the star outside the restaurant*



*Fig.8 Umbrella- shaped stars traced by John Nash outside the restaurant*



*Fig.9 John Nash receiving pens from mathematics professors at Princeton University which symbolises the acknowledgments and respect he gains.*

To conclude, the use of symbols in "A Beautiful Mind" vividly paints up the tormenting inner thoughts and struggles of John Nash during his battle in combating schizophrenia. At the same time allowing the audience to experience the inner war of people who are suffering from schizophrenia. However, the film reinforces that the power of love can alleviate pain and heal suffering, the use of symbols spices up the bounteous romantic relationship between Alicia and John Nash.

### Sample 3:

Thus, the wonderful and tactful use of symbols helps conjure up the “beautiful mind” of Nash and contributes to a higher level of aesthesia and aesthetics to the film that laments audience emotions and reflection on life issues like marriage, sickness and relationship. “Mathematicians like to speak of it as an art, and having beauty and turning this beauty into a good way of proving and seeing something. And you do really get to the truth - there are unknown things that can become known - and it really is the truth. It is not political propaganda.”<sup>7</sup>, says John. Along John Nash's journey with schizophrenia and setting himself off to discover his identity and thought echoes to his research and study in Mathematics. Mathematics is as complicated as his convoluted mind, but after his journey in combating his schizophrenia with the companion of his lover, he has finally worked out that love is the most beautiful solution and answer is all that brings him something shimmering and makes his mind truly “A Beautiful” one.

(2618words)

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<sup>7</sup> The Irish Times .(2005, April 8).*Glimpsing inside a beautiful mind*.

Sample 3:

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Sample 3:

**Comments**

Relevant and appropriate in terms of scope.

The thesis statement in the introduction does not effectively signpost anything concrete. The student describes the use of different symbols in the portrayal of the main character's mind. However, s/he seems to lack a firm grasp of what symbolism as a literary term means, and fails to demonstrate convincingly how and why the symbols work in the way they do. For example, it is unclear why Charles, Nash's fictional friend, is considered a symbol. The comments on what the billiard balls represent (p. 30) are quite arbitrary, without support of any evidence. There is also no clear explanation as to how and why the "secret base" setting (p. 32) and Alicia's appearance (p. 33) function as symbols. In general, the essay is an unsuccessful attempt to show how symbols are used to enhance our understanding of Nash's inner world and his love relationship with Alicia.

Some information in the essay is taken from secondary sources without showing a comprehensive understanding of them, e.g. the discussion on the octopus-shaped stars and the umbrella-shaped stars. Her/his statements or claims often amount to mere assertions as they are unsupported by substantial evidence. The screenshots used in the essay also bear limited significance.

***Score: 18***

Sample 4:

**Topic: Presentation and examination of life and death in *The Fault in Our Stars* and *The Theory of Everything***

### Introduction

Some people live for a hundred years, while some unfortunately do not reach their 20th birthday. However, sooner or later, we all die one day. Most of the time, many of us are not aware of this fact. We live like we have plenty of time, and we waste time on unimportant, useless things or people, until we face critical situations, for example, when we are diagnosed with a life-threatening disease that we know that we don't have much time left on earth. Will our life value change? How should we face life when we realise it will come to an end one day?<sup>1</sup>

I came to ponder about such problems as I watched *The Fault in Our Stars* (TFIOS) and *The Theory of everything* (TTOE). The main characters of both movies were told that they don't have much time left in their teenage years. In TFIOS, Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters (Gus) are diagnosed with thyroid cancer and bone cancer respectively, meanwhile Stephen Hawking is diagnosed with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in TTOE. Through scenes of meaningful conversations, use of symbols and sets, the two movies present the topic of life and death and provides us insights to examine our own situations.

Despite the fact that TFIOS is entirely fictional, while TTOE is based on the true life story of the renowned scientist Stephen Hawking, there are a lot of similarities and and coherences between the two films. Both movies take place in western societies in the contemporary era, tell stories of teenage romance, and involve characters suffering from severe illness and physical inconvenience. Therefore, I think it is very interesting to make comparisons between the two movies.

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<sup>1</sup> Inspiration towards the topic of the review :

<https://www.indiewire.com/2014/06/review-in-the-fault-in-our-stars-shailene-woodley-will-make-you-cry-does-that-make-it-good-25769/>

<https://www.smb.com.au/entertainment/movies/the-theory-of-everything-review-stephen-hawking-loses-in-love-20150119-12tkrb.html>

Sample 4:



Film poster of *The Fault in Our Stars*



Film poster of

### Synopses of the films

#### *The Fault in our Stars*

Hazel Grace Lancaster meets Augustus Waters in a cancer support Group. Despite their almost opposite personalities, they become each other's best companion soon afterwards. Hazel is depressed as she is worried that her probable young death will cause a huge trauma to her loving family. Meanwhile, Augustus is not eager to die before leaving a mark in the world or do something which is extraordinary and making himself remembered by all. They share their stories of having cancer and exchange a book with each other. *An Imperial Affliction* by Peter Van Houghten is the book which Hazel gives to Augustus and it becomes their favourite book. Augustus uses his chance of 'Make-A-Wish'<sup>2</sup> to travel to the Netherlands to visit the author with Hazel as they wonder what will happen after the end of the book as it ends in the middle of a

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<sup>2</sup> Make a wish' is an organisation to grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope strength and joy.

#### Sample 4:

sentence. To their disappointment and anger, Van Houghten provides no answer. As Augustus' situation worsens drastically, he arranges his own funeral, and invites Hazel Grace and his other good friend, Isaac, to give their eulogies. After Augustus' death, Hazel Grace receives a reply from Van Houghten, she realises the answer she longs for is Van Houghton himself - how he has been dealing with her daughter's death as *An Imperial Affliction* is actually the biography of his daughter.

#### *The Theory of Everything*

*The Theory of Everything* is a biographical romantic film based on the autobiography *Travelling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen* by Jane Hawking<sup>3</sup>, the first wife of Stephen Hawking. Stephen is diagnosed with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) after hitting his head. It causes a degeneration of functions in his body and the doctor thinks he only has two more years to live. Under this circumstance, Jane insists to get married with him and they have two sons and a daughter. On the other hand, Stephen does not give up on deciphering his thesis on black holes. He has published a book about radiation. He is gaining fame of his theory while his sickness has deteriorated that he needs to use a wheelchair. Later, he needs a tracheotomy, which leaves him incapable of talking. He uses a voice synthesiser to write and published his second book *A Brief History of Time*. Jane and Steven also find that their marriage did not work so they divorced and become friends.

#### (i) Symbolism

To show that Hazel, Gus, and Stephen are struggling with their life-threatening diseases, the movies make use of various symbols to remind us how death is always shadowing them.

To begin with, both films use the motifs of books in different ways. In *TFIOS*, Hazel finds comfort in the book *An Imperial Affliction* by Peter Van Houghten whom she thinks is the person who 'understand what is like to be dying, but hasn't actually died.' Her description of the author also shows her feeling of loneliness and not being understood as a teenage cancer patient. Through her urge to find out what would happen to the mother and the pet hamster of a cancer girl called Anna after Anna's death in the novel, we could see how she longs to know whether her parents will be alright after her own death. This book ends in the middle of a sentence, which can be seen as an analogy of the life of everyone of us, especially the one who has a life-threatening disease as their life often end in a young age, in the middle of their life, and no one can really be prepared for that to happen. In *TTOE*, Stephen is having a lecture on black hole. With his interests of astrophysics, he had written a few books such as 'Hawking Radiation' and

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<sup>3</sup> References of *The Theory of Everything* <https://variety.com/2014/film/news/stephen-hawking-biopic-theory-of-everything-set-for-nov-7-launch-1201155537/>

#### Sample 4:

'A Brief History of Time' using the voice synthesised. He also explained his thesis to others in the University of Cambridge albeit he receives a lot of criticism at first. Despite that the books that Stephen Hawking writes cannot serve as a parallel symbol with Hazel's like *An Imperial Affliction*, it shows the strength and perseverance of Stephen when he is facing his illnesses.

Albert Camus once said that, 'There is only one really serious philosophical question and that is suicide'. And in the extreme pain experienced by Hazel, Augustus and Stephen, one would inevitably question even harder and demand a strong purpose of life so as to not opt for death instead. It is of utmost importance for us to find a reason to endure this otherwise 'just a shout to the void' life as Augustus once stated. Human life is short while books can contain ideas which can live for a lot longer, the use of books in *TFIOF* and *TTOE* can also show the love relationship between the two couples in the films that they can be remembered by each other even though they may pass away before their love ones. Still, they can remember each other from reading the book as it is immortal. The use of books in *TTIOS* and *TTOF* acts as the stillness in times when human live and die. Books can pass on love, knowledge, ideas of the authors generation after generation. In this way, love, or our effort, may be more than just 'a shout into the void' as books can last long after our deaths.

Through symbolism, we can also see that in their extremely difficult situations, they find family and friends the biggest, if not the sole reason, for them to strive to survive. In *TFIOS*, Hazel often uses grenade to describe herself by saying, 'I'm a grenade. One day I'm gonna explode and I'm gonna obliterate everything in my wake and I don't know, I just feel like it's my responsibility to minimize the casualties'. After she reads Caroline Mathers' online profile and sees the effect of Caroline's death had on others. Her greatest fear is injuring everyone nearby<sup>4</sup> as seen from her flashbacks of her mother crying when she was diagnosed with her disease. Therefore she chooses to keep a distance from Gus when she has a recurrence of her lung cancer saying 'I cannot let this go on any further, because I don't want to hurt you'. She also said 'That is my biggest fear, Mum. When I'm gone, you're not going to have a life anymore' to her mum. These shows that Hazel would rather be forgotten, than causing pain for others.

In contrast, oblivion is always Augustus biggest fear as he often wants to be remembered by others after his short life. He thinks that if he is forgotten, then his life would be meaningless. In the eulogy Augustus gives to Hazel through Lidewi, He said 'I got my wish, I suppose. I left my scar'. The notion of "scar" here doesn't mean the physical scar he has but the mental distress and affliction to Hazel because of his death as Hazel is deeply in love with him that she has to bare the pain of losing him. Augustus also said to Hazel, 'You don't get to choose if you get hurt in this world but you do have a say who hurts you.' It shows that in some cases, it is worth being hurt by others<sup>5</sup> referring to her idea of grenade. The line also shows the idea of heroism that

<sup>4</sup> Grenade symbolism <https://thefaultinourstay.weebly.com/the-fault-in-our-stars/grenade-symbolism>

<sup>5</sup> Scars <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/862267-here-s-the-thing-about-hazel-almost-everyone-is-obsessed-with>

#### Sample 4:

Augustus worships — being willing to get hurt for others which is different from the view of Hazel.

On the other hand, Stephen shares similar feelings with Hazel in *The Theory of Everything*. When Brian finds Stephens after he gets his diagnosis, Stephen tells him “Off you go Brian.” Also, when Jane comes to find him because Stephen doesn’t answer her phone call, Stephen said to Jane ‘I’m just trying to work out the mathematical probability of happiness, some inch to zero, not quite there yet.’ The mathematical probability of happiness can be symbolised as the happiness index when Jane dates with Stephen. He said ‘that is some inch to zero’ which indicate that Stephen thinks it is impossible for Jane to be happy with him. To further show Stephen’s feeling towards others, Stephen said to Jane “You just missed him, he is here earlier.” and ‘go’ when Jane tries to care for him. He keeps running away from her. There are similarities between Hazel and Stephen Hawking. They will break others’ hearts when they eventually die of the disease, so they want the people they love to go away and they would not like to leave a scar, a mark on the Earth. However, Stephen has actually left a mark on earth through his hard work on the research of science that influence the world. It serves as a good example to show the good side of being remembered - though those who love him will miss him terribly, they will probably choose to have encountered him in the first place because it is all worth. There are people who accompany us throughout different stations in our life, we may not be able to influence the world like Stephen did. However, we will always leave a mark on those who treasure us after our death from the memories when we are still alive which has symbolised in the films.

#### (ii) Setting and Music

*The Fault in Our Stars* and *The Theory of Everything* create the atmosphere of the characters’ situation by the use of setting and music shows how they struggle in between to live and to die.

From the perspective of the use of music in *The Fault in Our Stars* and *The Theory of Everything*, contradiction of the vibe of the music is used to display the status of the characters.

The music used in *The Fault in Our Stars* is often heavy and slow when the scene of their illness shown. For example, when Hazel has a sudden occurrence in her lungs before going to Amsterdam to visit her favourite Author with Gus, the music used is *strange things will happen*. The name of the song collides with what actually happen in the film. When Hazel and Gus think they can finally meet Peter Van Houten, the author of the book *An Imperial Affliction* hopefully and excitedly, strange things has happened that Peter Van Houten is hostile and truculent. He insults their terminal disease and shut them off, hence it shows that the scenes in the film is match with the name of song. Also, when Hazel knows that she cannot visit Amsterdam due to her illness as a stage four patient, she is in sorrow. She is facing the swing that her father made for her with the music *Long way down* played. These can emphasize her feeling despondency which she may not be able to meet her favourite Author due to her disease. However, when her

#### Sample 4:

parents allow her to visit Amsterdam with Gus, the music used is *Bloom Clap* which is bright and melodic like the name of the song. The music shows how blissful when Hazel and Gus can accomplish their dream as they can finally visit the author of *An Imperial Affliction* after the sudden occurrence of Hazel that her doctor doesn't allow her to go due to her health status. In TTOE, when life seems normal at the beginning, the music used is Cambridge, 1963 with the sound of fireworks that shows the celebration. However, When Stephen Hawking falls down, the background music softens, and a high pitch sound emerges that reminds us of the electrocardiograph. The sound of electrocardiograph hints us that he has got a serious disease and his life is threatened. When their life back to normal, with the wedding of Jane and Stephen, there is no audible dialogue but only background music. The wedding scene shows the joyful life of Stephen. The use of different kinds of music creates the moods of the scenes which help us understand more about the emotional journey and contrasts feelings when the characters achieve their dream and struggling with their life-threatening disease on the edge of death which maybe difficult to put in the conversations.

From the perspective of background setting, it helps to bring out the emotional journeys of the characters as face the difficult situations in their lives.

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, the biggest fear of Augustus is oblivion. He's afraid to be forgotten by people on earth when he passes away. In the film, he loves to display all his football trophies and prizes in his house (Fig.3), reading books and sticking posters about heroism, bravery and honour. It shows how he wants to leave a mark and makes people to remember him after his time on Earth. On the contrary, Hazel's house is simple with a few pictures on the wall.(Fig.4) The contrast of Gus and Hazel can show the differences of their views towards life and death. Beside, Gus takes Hazel Funky Bones for picnic. It is a place with a sculpture of decrepit and deteriorating skeleton bodies.(Fig.5) The park of Funky Bones represents the teenagers in the film who are tortured by their illness in their prime years that is related to their status in the film. In *The Theory of Everything*, when Jane and Stephen are dancing in a celebration, there are lights around the tent for people dancing with some bands performing.(Fig.6) The setting of scene has displayed a hyper and festivity atmosphere. However when Stephen feels gloomy after he knows about his disease, he sits in a room which is dark with lots of brown colour furniture. He sits down in between the tall and dark furniture(Fig.7) create a vibe that he is constrained by his disease. Also, the spiral staircase that Jane goes to find Stephen when he diagnoses ALS can be seen as once Jane enters the vortex, she can't get away from Stephen. The setting in the film has greatly helped to portray the feeling between life and death.

Sample 4:



(Fig.3)



(Fig.4)



(Fig.5)<sup>6</sup>



(Fig.6)<sup>7</sup>



(Fig.7)

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<sup>6</sup> Funky Bones photo by <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2017/10/06/scarv-funky-indy-work-art-made-pop-sugars-bucket-list/739015001/>

<sup>7</sup> Celebration photo by <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/theory-everything-reveals-stephen-hawkings-personal-side>

Sample 4:

### Conclusion

After exploring the presentation of 'symbols' and 'setting and music' in *The Fault in Our Stars* and *The Theory of Everything*, it can be seen how people live through their lives with terminal disease.

When time seems eternal and our lives is just a blink, and as Augustus said, "oblivion is inevitable, and that we're all doomed and that there will come a day when all our labor has been returned to dust, and the sun will swallow the only earth we'll ever have,"<sup>8</sup> how should we lead our lives, when the fear of oblivion haunts us every now and then? Hazel Grace suggests us that 'If the inevitability of human oblivion worries you, I encourage you to ignore it.'<sup>9</sup> Augustus eventually overcomes his fear of oblivion and asserts the value of his short nihilistic life hugely troubled by Osteosarcoma. Stephen makes the best out of his condition and outlives the two years his doctor predicted. We can never know when we will demise. There are always a lot of ordeals and trials or abrupt situations in life causing us to fear for certain things. The fault may or may not lie in our stars, but either way, the best we can do is just grazing at them. We may have different ways to live, all we can do is to go with the flow, focus on now in order to accomplish our goals and destinations we set to achieve as we cannot change the circumstances we are born into.

### Bibliography

#### Definition

'Make a wish' is an organisation to grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope strength and joy.

<https://makeawish.org.hk/?lang=en>

#### Website

Inspiration towards the topic of the review :

<https://www.indiewire.com/2014/06/review-in-the-fault-in-our-stars-shailene-woodley-will-make-you-cry-does-that-make-it-good-25769/>

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/the-theory-of-everything-review-stephen-hawking-loses-in-love-20150119-12tkrb.html>

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Grenade symbolism <https://thefaultinourstay.weebly.com/the-fault-in-our-stars/grenade-symbolism>

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<sup>8</sup> Quote in *The Fault in Our Stars*

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/480596-i-m-in-love-with-you-he-said-quietly-augustus-i>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1242874-if-the-inevitability-of-human-oblivion-worries-you-i-encourage>

Sample 4:

Scars <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/862267-here-s-the-thing-about-hazel-almost-everyone-is-obsessed-with>

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<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1242874-if-the-inevitability-of-human-oblivion-worries-you-i-encourage>

#### **Image**

Funky Bones photo by <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2017/10/06/scary-funky-indy-work-art-made-pop-sugars-bucket-list/739015001/>

Celebration photo by <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/theory-everything-reveals-stephen-hawkings-personal-side>

Sample 4:

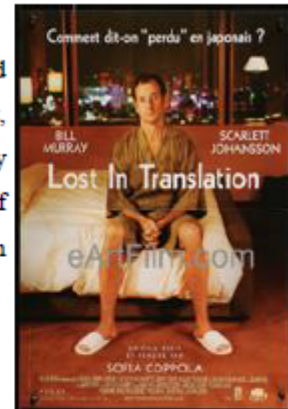
<b>Comments</b>
<p data-bbox="199 331 279 365">Weak.</p> <p data-bbox="199 427 1396 651">The topic of life and death seems too broad for a 10-page essay. Instead of providing plot synopses that prepare the markers/ readers for the argument, the synopses are very general. The term ‘symbol’ is used very loosely in the essay. The discussion does not really provide any insight into the topic of life and death as presented in the films. The definition of and discussion on life and death are rudimentary.</p> <p data-bbox="199 714 1396 938">The analysis is simplistic. The student observes that the couples can remember each other even after one dies by reading books as books are immortal. It is not clear what other symbols, apart from the books, are covered in the “symbolism” section. The analysis of the use of music and setting is also superficial and brief. How they are related to the topic or theme of life and death and the complexities surrounding this are not explored.</p> <p data-bbox="199 1001 1396 1135">The comparison of the two films is not presented well. The comparison, if any, is not at all meaningful. One gets the impression that the student is discussing each film in isolation without any real attempt at comparing or contrasting. The images included do not facilitate discussion at all.</p> <p data-bbox="1273 1193 1396 1227"><i>Score: 12</i></p>

Sample 5:

**Topic: How do the use of camera, lighting and colour convey the protagonists' emotional states in Sofia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation*?**

### Introduction

*Lost in Translation* is a 2003 romantic comedy-drama film directed by Sofia Coppola, centering around two lonely characters who are lost, literally, in an alien Japanese culture. Symbolically, it depicts how they feel disoriented in their lives and relationships but find a sense of connection with each other amidst a sense of isolation in a foreign country.



I chose this film for critical examination because its understated visual aesthetics intrigue me. The use of contrasting colours, evocative lighting and carefully composed framing contribute greatly to its effect. These film techniques visually help convey the protagonists' feelings, which will be examined in depth in this essay. Additionally, for me the film has a unique plot about a platonic romance between Bob and Charlotte (played by the talented duo Scarlett Johansson and Bill Murray) who ooze genuine longing in a way that tugs at the viewers' heartstrings. Most importantly, despite the fact that this indie film was produced on a budget of \$4 million, Coppola manages to create a stunning visual experience through her mastery of minimalist cinematography. It results in the film being, in my opinion, an aesthetic delight and it also resulted in a \$119 million-grossing success.

What brings Charlotte and Bob together is not only the mere coincidence of staying at the same Park Hyatt Hotel in Tokyo, it is also a shared struggling experience of "abject loneliness" and "existential ennui".<sup>1</sup> Through the externalization of their inner thoughts, viewers glean an insight into their emotional landscape and subsequently empathize with them. This essay will focus on how these dominant emotions are depicted visually by the use of camera, lighting and colour.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Backman Rogers, *Sofia Coppola: The Politics of Visual Pleasure*

Sample 5:

Body of Essay

The protagonists arrive in Tokyo feeling alienated by Japanese culture. Their dissatisfaction and disorientation caused by cultural shock is compounded by a sense of emotional disconnection with their loved ones and physical isolation from them. Looking at **frame composition**, the protagonists are frequently placed in shots which convey a sense of alienation. This is noticeably evident in the still-shots at the beginning. In one hotel elevator



shot, the prominently taller Bob is placed at the centre of the shot among a crowd of serious-looking businessmen who are much shorter than him. His taller stature makes him appear out of place and the fact that he is in a full lift also conveys a feeling of suffocation.

Bob stands out, almost awkwardly, visually conveying his sense of displacement in a foreign land.

In fact, the elevator scene is a recurring shot, like a visual motif, serving to symbolize the protagonists' loneliness. It is also a turning point in Bob's search for a deep bond as we see him share a moment of eye contact with Charlotte. However, the imbalance of their positions in the elevator implies that they are still disconnected individuals who merely share a feeling of loneliness.

The first time Bob shares the frame with Charlotte, they stand diagonally opposite each other, creating a sense of imbalance.



Similarly, a shot of Charlotte staring at Tokyo's night view conveys her emotional loneliness. We only see her in profile which creates a sense of emptiness and makes her a passive spectator of Tokyo's beauty. The use of bokeh<sup>2</sup> in this shot keeps the cityscape blurred and out of focus so that Charlotte seems even more physically isolated in this dazzling city.

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<sup>2</sup> *Rules of Shot Composition in Film*

Sample 5:

She is placed at the centre of these windowpane shots, inviting viewers to feel her aloneness and depressing dreariness.



Window shots act as a visual motif of Charlotte's sense of loneliness and vulnerability.

Coppola also cleverly utilizes **space** to convey a tone of isolation. For instance, the static wide shot of Bob alone sitting on a twin-sized bed in a vast hotel room makes viewers wonder about the existence or whereabouts of his family or loved ones, which creates viewer sympathy for this forlorn figure. Leaving out space in Bob's shots evokes a sense of emptiness, as if he is missing something. This lonely hotel room shot is echoed in the shot of Charlotte after her husband left for work. Her lone figure only constitutes 1/14 of the frame and occupies very little space in the lower half of the frame. The composition of both shots are almost mirror images and serve to convey the sense of disconnection from the world that Bob and Charlotte share, which stems from mutual dissatisfaction in their respective marriage.



A sense of boredom and imprisonment exudes in both shots to convey their confinement to personal space.

Looking now at the use of **lighting** by cinematographer Lance Acord, he employed "artificial lights as little as possible and placed more importance in employing ambient and natural lighting."<sup>3</sup> This is most obvious in the hotel scenes which are naturally lit to provide a conducive environment for the protagonists amidst a sense of seclusion. In addition, there

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<sup>3</sup> Alex Ballinger, *New Cinematographers*.

## Sample 5:

are more dark tones than light in this film so that the primary use of low-key lighting reinforces a sense of alienation. Shadows are especially emphasized to convey a character's feeling of despondency or separation.



Morning shots do not seem harshly bright.



Note the contrast between dim light of dusk and silhouettes of Charlotte & her husband, as opposed to bringing them into focus. This helps communicate the insubstantiality of their relationship.

A **muted, cool colour** palette of mainly slate blue and grey dominates the daytime part of the film, helping to convey the protagonists' "lacklustre spirits and despairing solitude."<sup>4</sup> The pale



hues in the cityscape in daytime from Bob and Charlotte's point of view reflects their inner stagnation and loneliness. Even natural sunlight fails to lift their mood. As most of the daytime scenes depict the protagonists being alone, the cool hues also create

a calming atmosphere which is conducive to the personal reflection that the protagonists are shown to experience. This is especially true for Charlotte, as shown in her curiosity about the CD podcast *A Soul's Search*. Cool tints also create a sense of space which reinforces the lonely ambience surrounding the protagonists.



The predominant colour shading in the first part of the film.

<sup>4</sup> Daisy Woodward, *Sofia Coppola's Colour Palettes*

Sample 5:

Bob and Charlotte's shared loneliness prevents them from engaging with the glamour of Tokyo's vibrancy. For instance, this passivity is emphasized in the juxtaposition of glowing neon lights with the dim interior of the taxi which Bob takes after his arrival in Tokyo. The segregation of colour tones symbolizes a psychological barrier which prevents Bob from responding to the excitement of the city.

Bob arrives in brightly-lit Tokyo to shoot a commercial.



The film explores the existential theme of an identity crisis. Bob is a washed-out actor struggling with his career and unstimulated by his job of endorsing Suntory Whisky when he "could be doing a play somewhere". His feeling of unfulfilled disappointment is aggravated by his failure in the role of husband and father, as evident in an emotional disconnection with his wife and son. And to convey this Coppola intentionally creates an imbalance in the frame composition. For example, when Bob first arrives in Tokyo "he is emotionally unbalanced and unsatisfied as he is away from his family and appears to be having a midlife crisis."<sup>5</sup> This lack of personal fulfilment is mirrored in a close-up shot of him in the same taxi from the airport, his shadowy face, created by low-key lighting, constitutes one side of the screen with nothing distinct to counterbalance it except for a blurred cityscape.



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<sup>5</sup> V. Renee, *An Analysis of Lost in Translation*

### Sample 5:

Later at work in the photoshoot sequence, he is placed at the centre of many shots set against a grey studio backdrop as he impersonates the 'Rat Pack' or other famous entertainers. This series of medium shots again infer again his struggles with the role of father, husband and actor.



These headshots of different impersonations are symbolic of Bob's struggle to fulfil his roles in life.

Then, when Bob and Charlotte first meet each other, we note how the light grey palette shifts to warmer colours such as brown and blue tones to convey the possibility of emotional warmth. The understated colours in the cozy hotel bar interior decor against the evening shots of Tokyo's landscape aid the creation of an increased tone of security and comfort, foreshadowing the refuge they will find in their emotional connection with each other.



Bob makes brief eye contact with Charlotte who playfully smirks back at him.



### Sample 5:

Two-thirds into the narrative, the emotional attachment developing between Bob and Charlotte introduces sexual tension for the viewers. Initially, we see a careful balance in the **framing**. For instance, when they first speak together their figures make up either side of the frame but we gradually note how this visual distance diminishes as they develop a mutual connection.



A visible distance between Bob and Charlotte during their first conversation at the hotel bar.

Meanwhile, Charlotte feels more distant from her husband than ever. She tags along reluctantly with him to catch up with an old friend called Kelly. But the framing constantly separates Charlotte from her husband and Kelly. The two of them are actively engaging in a conversation about Kelly's anorexia, which Charlotte clearly isn't interested about.



Note the sense of seclusion created by the blocking in this frame.

Gradually, viewers note more symmetry within each frame. For example, after Bob and Charlotte sing karaoke lyrics (which is an implicit confession of their attraction to each other), the shot depicts Charlotte leaning on his shoulder, creating a balanced frame composition which conveys the positive effect of an emotional connection. From here on, this pervading balance in the framing of shots gives a sense of fullness "as if Bob and Charlotte have restored

Sample 5:

in each other a sense of hope and purpose.”<sup>6</sup> The balance communicates the fact that their romantic attraction lessens their own personal emotional imbalance. “They are each other’s anchor in a place where they have no one else to confide in.”<sup>7</sup>



They find comfort in each other’s company and we note the lack of screen space between them.



This shot of their last night together achieves perfect balance to communicate an emotional connection.

One of the most striking sequences in the film occurs when they are both out on a night on the town. The visual motif of omnipresent neon lights represents vibrancy and romance, which facilitates the sense of escape by enjoying a fun night together, putting their crippling loneliness aside for a while. This is the first time the protagonists actually explore the excitement of Tokyo’s night life, symbolized by how a window no longer separates them from the diffused neon lights but now physically surrounds them.



Predominantly wide shots are used here to depict Tokyo’s cityscape as the protagonists wander around with their Japanese acquaintances.

The use of chiaroscuro lighting contrasts with Lance Acord’s use of dominant dark tones to heighten the moments of humour and romance. Accord compared this to the technique

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<sup>6</sup> Daisy Woodward, *Sofia Coppola’s Colour Palettes*

<sup>7</sup> Rita Santos, *Cinematography: Lost in Translation*

Sample 5:

employed by the painter John Singer Sargent.<sup>8</sup> The dark tone gradually lifts as they develop an emotional attachment, reflecting the newfound happiness they share. Acord does not employ any high-key lighting and this decision helps to visually convey to the viewer that Bob and Charlotte still retain a sense of loneliness as their connection cannot be permanent, given the fact that they are both married to other people.



A tone of wistful longing seeps through the farewell scene, conveyed in the choice of lighting and colour.

The muted colours of the city views contrast with the luminescent neon lights. Sharp colours such as a red, indigo blue and violet constitute the neon lights, all of which are colours with a subliminal connotation to love, passion and comfort. The diffused city lights act like a motif of Bob and Charlotte's private tenderness for each other. They also evoke a dreamy tone which is just as illusionary and transient as their brief yet spiritually fulfilling connection. It is also worth noting that every time Bob and Charlotte meet it is at nighttime. We then watch them wake up the next day to engage in individual activities that do not involve each other. So, whereas the vibrant colours in the nighttime shots suggest the possibility of romance, this is contrasted with the dimmer colours and lighting used in daytime shots, representing unpleasant reality.



Medium shot of Bob and Charlotte wandering around Tokyo against the shimmering lights.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Hahn, *Dancing in the Dark* (153–154).

Sample 5:

### Conclusion

The use of colour, lighting and framing beautifully work hand-in-hand to create a visual representation of the emotional landscape of the protagonists. In terms of colour, the stark contrast between muted tones and the arresting shades of diffused neon lights delineates the impact of their blossoming romantic friendship from each of their originally empty emotional states. The use of natural lighting against low-key lighting, to create shadow, helps to convey the repressed loneliness shared by Bob and Charlotte. The balance within frame composition or the lack of it externalizes their internal sense of Self to the viewer.

Through the director's masterful cinematography of *Lost in Translation*, viewers get a vivid picture of her protagonists' emotional complexity. This is what resonates with viewers and enables them to fully engage with Sofia Coppola's characters to such a large extent.

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Sample 5:

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Sample 5:

**Comments**

This is an interesting essay on how filmic techniques are used to reveal the emotional states of the characters in *Lost in Translation*. In particular, it provided a close and meticulous study of the film's camera work, especially the ways different shots are taken, framed and juxtaposed to reflect moods and feelings.

Its analysis of the use of colour and lighting is adequate, but could have been enhanced. For example, it is unclear why natural lighting helps provide 'a conducive environment for the protagonists amidst a sense of seclusion' (p. 54). It is also uncertain why blue is sometimes regarded as a cool colour (p. 55), and at other times a warm colour (p. 57).

The weakest part of the essay, however, seems to lie in its thesis – to examine characters' emotional states through filmic techniques is quite general, and can be applied to almost any film. To make the argument stronger, the student could show why this is particularly important in *Lost in Translation*. What the essay lacks is a clear rationale or context, which puts matters in perspective: *Lost in Translation* is a film which prioritises characters' feelings, emotions and experiences over plot, and thus the importance of the notions of connection and disconnection, the sense of loss and empathy, etc. A tighter and richer argument could have been built showing how these themes and moods have been conveyed through cinematography and/or other filmic techniques.

**Score: 24**

Sample 6:

**Topic: How is nonlinear time expressed in *Arrival*?**

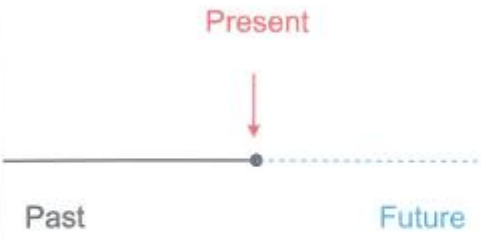
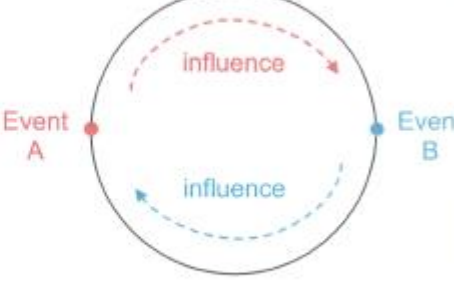
### **How is nonlinear time expressed in *Arrival*?**

*Arrival* is a film that looks into the possibility of understanding time in a nonlinear way, more specifically, a loop. This essay will look into how the film explores the characteristics of this concept using film techniques and plot device. For film techniques, the visual and auditory elements will be examined, while for plot device, the plot and structure of the film will be discussed.

The film is about Louise Banks, a linguist working as a professor in a university. She is invited by the US military to help communicate with aliens after twelve spaceships landed in different countries on Earth. In the process, she meets theoretical physicist Ian Donnelly and they investigate the alien language together. Through multiple encounters with the aliens, she makes progress and establishes effective communication with them and gradually learns their language. At this point, she begins inexplicably to see visions of herself with a child, but she does not understand them. Increasingly hostile tensions between China and the aliens that landed there leads China to declaring that she will mobilize to attack the aliens. In the midst of this crisis, Louise finally realizes that the visions are from the future and the child is her daughter, she understands that the tool offered by the aliens is their language and it enables humans to learn about the future because time is nonlinear. She uses the ability to infer from the future to defuse the tension. Her new ability gives her the means to contact the Chinese military leader, General Shang. Quoting the dying words of his late wife which Louise knows using her powers, she is about to persuade General Shang to demobilise and encouraged international cooperation. In her personal life, Louise chooses to have a child with Ian despite knowing that in the future their daughter will die of a rare disease.

Before analysing the film, it is important to understand the nonlinear form of time proposed in the film. The common understanding of time can be represented in the form of a timeline, where events are listed in chronological order as time passes. This creates the perception of the past, the present and the future.

## Sample 6:

Linear time	Nonlinear time
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually represented by an extending line where there is a beginning and end <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Causality is unidirectional with the past influencing the present or future</li> <li>◦ The past, present and future are distinguished</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually represented by an enclosed loop where there is no beginning or end <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Causality is not unidirectional, therefore uncertain</li> <li>◦ There is no concept like past, present or future</li> </ul> </li> </ul>


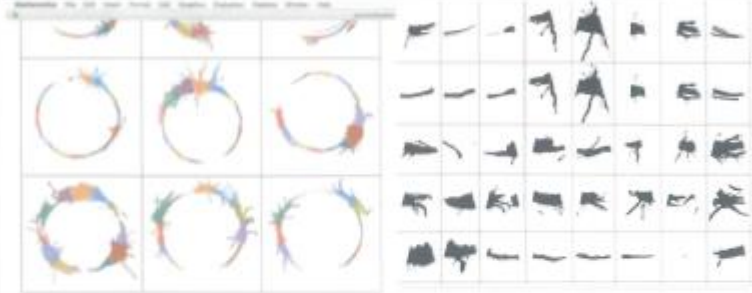
On a timeline, the present is a specific point, anything before the point is regarded as the past, and anything after it is the future. We have the ability to know the past and the present as we are able to remember events and perceiving new events at the current time. However, the future is a concept where events cannot be known, although we can predict some of the events. Past and present events can influence the future, however the future does not directionally affect the past or present. As the future is uncertain, unlike the known past and present, they are distinguished as the three elements of linear time, each with their own characteristics.

However, after gaining the ability to see visions of the future, Louise is able to experience nonlinear time. The nonlinear form of time can be seen as a loop where all events (represented by points on the line) can be viewed and known at once. All events can influence one another without the constraint of time. For

### Sample 6:

example, in the case of making a decision (Event A), one who has the ability to perceive time as a whole can look into the perceived future to know the result (Event B) of making the decision. In this process, the decision made in Event A is influenced by Event B, but Event B itself is also influenced by Event A as Event B is the result of Event A. This loop-like cycle shows that it no longer matters which event is perceived first since in a loop, they constantly affect each other. Since all events in time can now interact with one another constantly, the causality of events can no longer be established unidirectionally without chronological time. Since causality no longer works in nonlinear time, there is no need to distinguish between the past, present or future. This essay will therefore look into how film techniques and plot structure reflect the three characteristics of non-linear time, its loop-like form, the uncertain direction of causality and irrelevance of relative time concepts.

## Sample 6:

The loop in nonlinear language	
Different logograms created and used in the film	
Dividing the logograms into sections and analysing each section	




In terms of film technique, the film makes use of various visual details in the film to symbolise the loop. The first most prominent element is the language of the heptapods (aliens), which is a type of logogram that uses circular ink symbols to represent a message. As a linguist, Louise works to decipher these ink symbols and through learning their composition and meaning, suddenly gains the ability to perceive nonlinear time. The structure of the aliens' language as a circular logo is in fact a reflection of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which suggests that the structure of a language can influence one's perception of the world (Lucy). In the case of most sentences in modern languages, they are often linear and read from left to right. While they have different compositions and order for parts of speech, they are read linearly. It is suggested that this linear structure reflects our linear perception of time; however, since the heptapods' language is circular, their perception of time also adheres to this structure. They can perceive time nonlinearly as their language is also circular. As explained by one of the creators of this logogram language

## Sample 6:

system, Christopher Wolfram from his live stream, the logograms are analysed by dividing them into equal sections and looking into how these chunks make up a full meaning of a message (Wolfram). This can be viewed as an equivalent of events in a nonlinear timeline, where different events are arranged in a circle without a particular order, but in the case of the alien language, the chunks are different words arranged in a circle. The way their language is structured adheres to the way nonlinear time is structured and shows that their language itself is in fact a visual representation of nonlinear time, thus presenting the loop as a central motif in the film.

Another visual element in terms of film techniques that help show that causality is not unidirectional in nonlinear time is Louise's daughter, Hannah. Her name is a palindrome, which is a word that is read the same backward as forward (Peacham). This structure is just like nonlinear time, where all events are the same backward as forward since there is no need to differentiate order or causality. Hannah's name not only reflects the idea of nonlinear time, but she herself is also a reflection of nonlinear time. Before her birth, Louise has already had future visions of her and knows that she will die prematurely of a rare disease. However, Louise chooses to have Hannah as Louise understands that her daughter's death is unavoidable. She fully understands the fact that even if she does not give birth to Hannah, at some point in the future, Hannah will still come to her eventually, and Hannah will still die. Hannah's existence reflects the central idea of nonlinear time, which is that all events interact with each other and all events are already fixed. There is no straightforward causality between giving birth to Hannah and Hannah's death, with Hannah's death being a fact that cannot be changed either way. Hannah's name and Hannah's life reflect the idea of nonlinear time in which causality does not matter anymore.

## Sample 6:

Use of similar lighting and colour to show nonlinear time throughout the film	
Beginning of the film:	
Middle of the film:	
Ending of the film:	

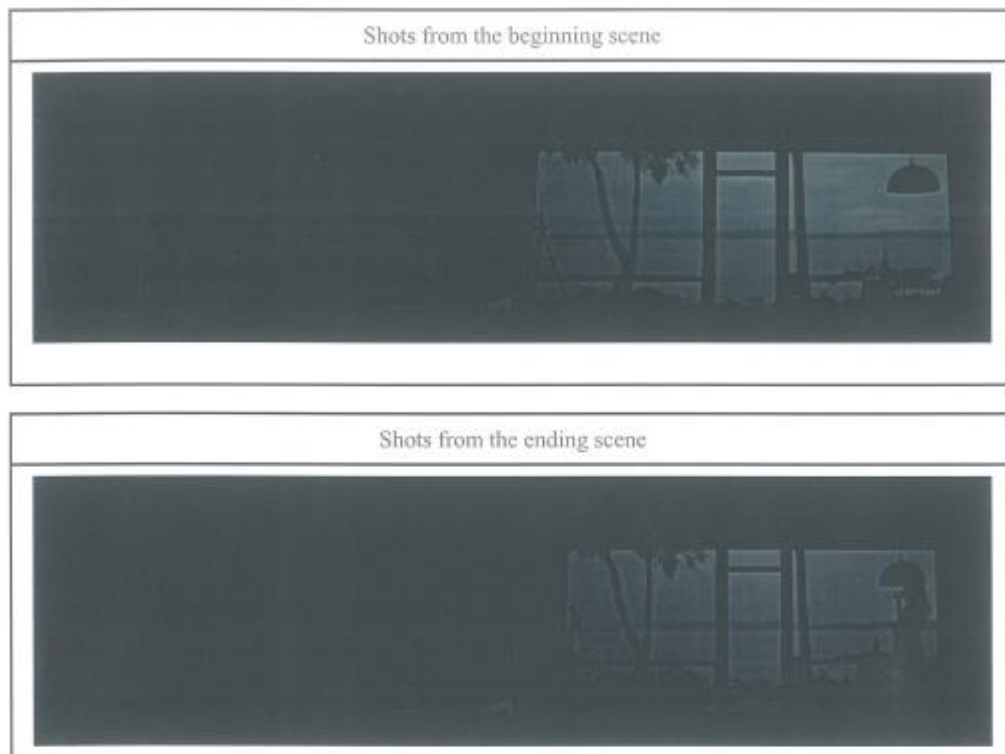
In terms of film techniques, the use of similar colour and lighting reflects the idea of the past, present and future being the same in nonlinear time. Most scenes in the film share a similar blue dimness. According to director Denis Villeneuve, this is an intentional choice to portray a new genre which he named “dirty sci-fi”. They wanted to create a feeling that “this was happening on a bad Tuesday morning, like when you are a kid in a school bus on a rainy day going to school and you dream looking at the clouds” (Villeneuve). This consistent use of colour and lighting reflects the idea of a nonlinear time as this visual characteristic is repeated in the film. It is futile to separate the past, present and future in a nonlinear timeline as everything can be known and perceived at the same time, and in terms of visual imagery, the overall dimness and blueness prevails in the past, present and future of the film’s story. Through creating similar colours and darkness in different parts of the film, the events of the plot are connected and their visual similarity is immediately recognised, instead of defining each moment in different time periods through a distinct colour. This brings out a message that the past, present and future in fact are inherently similar in nonlinear time as there is no longer a distinct chronology.

## Sample 6:

In terms of auditory devices, music in the film reflects the loop-like form of nonlinear time. The non-diegetic part of the ending scene has the same soundtrack as in the beginning scene. The effect of this repetition reminds the audience that the opening scene, is in fact the ending of the film's plot and upon arriving at the end of the movie, viewers are back at the beginning of the film. This reflects the loop-like structure of the film's timeline. The music itself, "On the nature of daylight", is a minor string quartet which features a four-note pattern (Richter). It also features a loop-like melody within the piece. The first section is composed of four chords that is repeated in the same pattern; although there are slight differences in the four chords, this structure remains the same. The second section features a viola solo over the four-note chord pattern. The solo has a different melody that is comprised of two repeating notes, and the solo progresses into different arpeggios while having the same melodic structure, which again, resembles a loop. The third section features a violin solo overlaid on the viola of the second section, with a four-note melody that progresses while staying in the same structure. The musical notes form a loop, which is the continual repetition of a similar melody. Like the lighting effect, this sound effect resembles the nonlinear form of time, which is at the heart of the film.

Other musical elements also reflect the characteristic of nonlinear time. The piece ends with the three layers of music ending at the same time, just like a particular point of a loop where the beginning and ending meet. In fact, the structure of the piece that is divided into three sections echoes the usual perception of time as the past, present and future, but the overall looping structure dominates the whole piece to show that ultimately, time as a loop is portrayed throughout the piece.

Sample 6:



In terms of its plot, the order of shots portray the loop-like structure of non-linear time. Both the beginning and ending scene start similarly with a completely dark shot that slowly pans down from the ceiling of a room, only that the room is empty in the opening shot, but in the closing shot, Louise appears as a dark silhouette in front of a blue sea view. This repetition in the ending reveals the fact that the scene is actually a vision of Louise of the future, after the Louise realises her power to see the future. This structure of the film reflects the nonlinear perception of time. Most films follow Freytag's pyramid of dramatic structure (Freytag), beginning with the exposition, rising action, reaching the climax and then resolving with the falling action, and ending with the resolution. However, the exposition of *Arrival* is in fact the resolution of the plot, causing the beginning and the end of this film to be almost the same. What this means is that the plot is in fact a loop, and the nonlinear perception of time is suggested against.

## Sample 6:

The climax of the film reveals that causality is not unidirectional between events in nonlinear time. After Louise realises her powers of seeing visions from the future, she tries to use this ability to stop the Chinese military general, Shang, from launching an attack on the aliens. She uses her ability to look into a future event and finds herself at a meeting with General Shang in person. He thanks her for calling him and shows a confused Louise his private number with her call. Louise in the present does not know his telephone number until this happens. Immediately she uses this number to call General Shang to stop him from attacking the heptapods. Here, it is impossible to identify the direction of causality. On the surface, Louise is able to stop General Shang after she calls his number, but in order to obtain that number, Louise has to meet General Shang in person for him, a stranger actually, to tell her his number. However, the reason he meets in person is to thank her for stopping him from starting a war. Here, the direction of causality is flows both ways: events mutually influence each other. This scene shows how under nonlinear time, it is impossible to distinguish a unidirectional causality since future events may influence the past.

The climax of the film also reveals the idea of nonlinear time. As Louise utilises her powers to glimpse the future, she is able to transfer her consciousness into the future event and interact with General Shang in her vision. Different from the past visions she has seen, she no longer sees herself from a third-person's point of view. In the past, Louise sees herself playing with her daughter Hannah and is confused by it as she is detached from her present consciousness in the visions. However, in the climactic scene, Louise's consciousness in her future vision is that of the present Louise. That is only and she is confused when General Shang tells her that she has called him on his private number. She does not know his number until he shows it. Although the future Louise should know this, Louise in the present only knows the number through this future vision. In this case, while the vision itself is a future event, Louise's consciousness in that vision is from the present persona. Therefore, she is confused when General Shang thanks her. This interaction effectively blends the present and future together, not only through showing the vision and the present alternately, but also through inserting Louise's present consciousness into a future vision. In this case, it would seem like Louise is able to travel through time on a consciousness level, and is able to

#### Sample 6:

accommodate the past, present and future at the same time in her mind. The three time periods are now interconnected in her mind, and by entering them using the present consciousness, Louise has broken the barriers separating the different time periods and they are now conjoined in her mind. The three time periods are now a single entity of time in Louise's experience, and nonlinear time is therefore reflected.

In conclusion, *Arrival* is able to express the three characteristics of nonlinear time (its loop-like structure, the uncertain direction of causality, and the irrelevance of the three time concepts) through film techniques and plot device. The visual and audio aspects of the film show the nonlinear concept artistically while the plot and its structure focus on the logic of the story. Hence, nonlinear time is effectively represented in this film through the loop, palindrome, musical echoes, and events and outcomes that mutually influence one another.

Sample 6:

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Sample 6:

**Comments**

An engaging and insightful analysis of how *Arrival*'s key theme – non-linear time – is revealed through its plot structure and filmic techniques. What the student sought to do basically is to illustrate how form equals content in the film. S/he did an excellent job doing this.

The brief plot summary that s/he provided at the start, together with the explanation of the concept of non-linear time as opposed to chronological time, effectively sets the scene for discussion. S/he was also able to demonstrate with clarity how difficult concepts such as time, language and perception are presented in the film. This was enhanced by the support of illustrations on time provided by the student.

The essay also discusses a range of filmic techniques, offering persuasive evidence as to how lighting, music and the order of shots are used to reflect the film's non-linear structure and perception of time. Comments were also made about the dominant presence of 'blue dimness' in the film, but this was a point worth developing further. Apart from enhancing the film's circular view of time, how does the use of this colour help, for example, reflect Louise Bank's emotional state and the overall mood of the film?

Nevertheless, a strong essay.

**Score: 28**

Sample 7:

**Topic: An Analysis of the Functions of Voyeurism in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954)**

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**An Analysis of the Functions of Voyeurism in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954)**

The unknown always excites and makes us wonder. In the *Rear Window*, L.B. Jefferies, the adventurous yet injured protagonist, is confined in his wheelchair. He is isolated from his exciting life as a photojournalist. It is the murder case that allows him to become a voyeur and escape from his mundane city life of Manhattan. The pleasure of voyeurism is displayed when looking into his neighbours' private world throughout the movie. As detective Doyle comments, 'people do a lot at things in private that they couldn't explain in public.' Even the voyeur cannot explain to Thorwald the murderer what he wants from him; he only admits that his peeping is driven by sheer curiosity. This thesis is exploring the luring power of voyeurism and how curiosity is used as a façade to drive the characters to become 'a race of Peeping Toms' who pry into others' private lives. While inviting the audience to experience this tantalising peeping journey through Jefferies' eyes, Hitchcock leads us to explore these voyeurs' inner thoughts and desires, and ponder whether curiosity kills the cat.

Jefferies resorts to voyeurism to find the spark of his life. The movie opens with the *mise-en-scene* to introduce why this photojournalist gets hurt in a race car accident. The twisted old camera and the close-up of the framed photos of his surviving in the riot, volcanic eruptions, and wars are the symbols of Jefferies' sensitivity in finding the best camera angle, the nostalgia of his job excitement and his bravery. The close-up of his plaster cocoon explains his confinement to a wheelchair, loss of masculinity, boredom and helplessness. To express his exasperation towards his immobility and mundane life, the wheelchair-bound photojournalist complains to his editor Gunnison about spending 'Six weeks - sitting... nothing to do but look out the window at the neighbours!' He grumbles that he is 'half-killed' for his job and is 'reward[ed] by stealing [his] assignments', while ignoring the fact that Gunnison never asked him to 'stand in the middle of that automobile race track'. His immobility also relinquishes his male power over women as shown in his reliance on the daily caring of the

Sample 7:

insurance company nurse, Stella, and his fashionable fiancée, Lisa. The way he scratches an itch inside his cast brings humor and ironically presents his existential crisis (Image\_1). He is desperate to prove that his heroic role is not self-assumed but irreplaceable. By becoming a sensitive eagle-eyed voyeur, Jefferies seizes to accomplish his self-fulfilling prophecy of him being a successful detective. His obsession and pleasure with watching others' private life at a dark and secret position through the night is highlighted by his glass of wine and his watch (Image\_2a-2c), making audience question his unreasonable prying from a moralistic perspective. It is not until Thorwald's ongoing quarrels with his wife that enables Jefferies to justify his sheer curiosity and 'craving for an experience that will re-activate his environment' (Toles 228) as a photojournalist. As he smells the danger of Thorwald's abruptness, he immediately equips himself with binoculars and even telephoto lens to better his view. Such concealed crime is so contagious (Toles 225) that it allures him to play the role of a voyeuristic detective who cares less about the privacy issue and sexual pleasure, and resumes his identity as the masculine adventurer.



Image\_1: A medium shot of Jefferies scratching his itch inside his cast.



Image\_2a: A medium close-up of Jefferies enjoying wine while peeping.



Image\_2b: Close-ups of Jefferies' watch.

Sample 7:

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Voyeurism further explains Jefferies' fear of commitment in his relationship with Lisa. Being criticized by Stella as a 'window-shopper' who ignores Lisa, he complains that his self-sufficient girlfriend is 'too talented... too beautiful... too sophisticated... too everything but what [he] want[s]'. Contrasting with Jefferies who resorts to a dark position for peeping, the motif of Lisa switching on the lights in his place suggests that she brings light into his environment, creating a bright and almost inviolable image. Her perfection and lifestyle give him pressure, as she demands for commitment and stability while he yearns for freedom and excitement. Lisa, who 'never wears the same dress twice', finds his career ridiculous as it is 'only done by a special, private little group of anointed people'. Jefferies, in response, shuts her up twice. This free soul sees Lisa and their relationship as 'an encumbrance [and] a threat to his freedom' (Wood 102) as he fears having a dreary life, listening to 'a nagging wife'. Jefferies prefers to gain 'a sense of power over those he watches... without any accompanying responsibility' (Wood 102). Though Lisa criticizes his voyeuristic behaviour as 'diseased', Jefferies employs to seek evidence to resolve the suspected crime, and to conceal his own fear of marriage with Lisa. Voyeurism provides a gateway for Jefferies to project his problems onto his neighbours' struggles. He comfortably distances himself from the world, including Lisa, through the camera. When Lisa associates the songwriter's enchanting song with their relationship, Jefferies scorns that the songwriter has 'probably had an unhappy marriage' and wonders if he is 'having so much trouble with it'. Watching Miss Lonelyhearts '[finding] her happiness', Jefferies believes that 'some man will lose his [happiness]'. He projects himself being a victim if he is to commit in a relationship, as if Lisa is 'marriage-hungry' and 'finds the apex of their glory in the diminution of a man's happiness' (Fawell 94). Even when Stella suspects that Mr. Thorwald is 'probably running away' like a 'coward', Jefferies resonates with Thorwald's situation empathetically, confessing that sometimes 'it's worse to stay' than to run away from the relationship, though it is what 'a particularly low type of man' would do. His

Sample 7:

devoted voyeuristic behaviours reflect his lack of responsibility and commitment in a relationship.

Lisa, on the contrary, uses voyeurism to pacify Jefferies. Instead of waiting for his peeping passion to die out, Lisa takes the initiative to reconcile by diverting his attention. She seduces him by modelling a silky negligee for him and drawing the blinds for the first time for more privacy and intimacy (Image\_3a-3c). However, the fact that it is quickly drawn up due to a scream from the neighbourhood suggests Lisa's failing attempt is to be interrupted by voyeurism. His concern and emotions for Mrs. Thorwald, Miss Lonelyhearts and Miss Torso all represent 'ironic counterpoint to his cruelty ... towards [Lisa]' (Fawell 89). Facing his indifference, Lisa uses her growing voyeuristic tendencies to become closer to Jefferies, as shown from the forward tracking medium shot (Image\_4a-4c) that transits to a close-up of her face. Having witnessed Thorwald's suspicious acts of rolling up the mattresses and packing the square trunk, the socialite participates the risky investigation by asking Jefferies about everything he sees. Lisa no longer switches on the lights; she immerses herself in a dark position to peep too. The infectious power of voyeurism compels Lisa to become Jefferies' counterpart.



Image\_3a-3c: Shots of Lisa modelling a silky negligee and drawing blinds.



Image\_4a-4c: A forward tracking medium shot and close-up of Lisa.

Sample 7:

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Knowing that Jefferies is only comfortable when distancing himself with a camera, Lisa continues to display her wisdom and bravery proactively. Though Lisa's fashionable styles equates to a superficial 'fairy tale' in Jefferies' and Doyle's eyes, she proves the opposite through her 'women's intuition', using Mrs. Thorwald's clothes and jewelry at the apartment as the clues to overthrow Thorwald's explanation that she is 'out of town', which both male detectives failed to notice. Her adventure in Thorwald's apartment satisfies Jefferies' desire to gaze her from afar (Image\_5). Her proactiveness is highlighted by the 'ironic touch' of the jewelry scene, which symbolizes a 'double victory' (François 223) to Lisa, as she is able to both find the evidence to prove Thorwald guilty of murder and prove herself capable of winning Jefferies' heart. Having survived and escaped from the hands of a murderer, Lisa earns recognition and admiration from Jefferies, who beams at her for the first time (Image\_6).



Image\_5: A medium long shot from Jefferies' point-of-view.



Image\_6: A medium close-up of Jefferies beaming towards Lisa.

Though Stella sees herself 'not educated' nor 'sophisticated', voyeurism highlights her calmness and wisdom as she helps resolve the murder mystery. She initially recriminates Jefferies' voyeuristic behaviours as 'a race of Peeping Toms' that could be sentenced. Upon hearing that Jefferies has approached the police for the suspected murder, Stella outplays Jefferies' wisdom by making the accurate hypothesis that Thorwald murdered his wife 'in the bathtub... [so] he could wash away the blood.' Furthermore, when the vocational voyeur is casually gazing over the rear window, it is Stella who breaks the stagnancy and passivity of

Sample 7:

peeping by suggesting that 'what people ought to do is get outside ... and look in for a change'. Voyeurism offers Stella a chance to show care and initiate changes for others, such as shifting Jefferies' focus from Lisa's safety to the neglected Miss Lonelyhearts through his lens (Image\_7a-b). She quickly spots her suicide attempt and unprecedentedly overrides her boss, urging him to call the police and stop the potential suicide. From Stella's perspective, voyeurism, when given the correct purpose, can be used to achieve the greater good. That also explains why Stella initially disagrees with Jefferies' voyeuristic behaviours but she still passes him the binoculars; she believes Jefferies may help resolve the suspected murder.



Image\_7a: A medium close-up of Stella holding the telephoto lens.



Image\_7b: Stella's point-of-view of Miss Lonelyhearts pouring a handful of capsules.



Image\_7c: Jefferies' point-of-view; Lisa's search in Thorwald's apartment.



Image\_7d: Stella's point-of-view shot; Miss Lonelyhearts' suicide attempt.

Voyeurism activates the role reversal among the characters and depicts Jefferies' passivity and helplessness. Lisa and Stella transform into active voyeurs and Jefferies' assistants. Their involvement validates his initial assumptions; Thorwald indeed murders his wife, hides her corpse under his flower bed, and kills the dog that sniffs around it. Parallel editing contrasts Jefferies' inferiority with Lisa's bravery. Lisa's search in Thorwald's

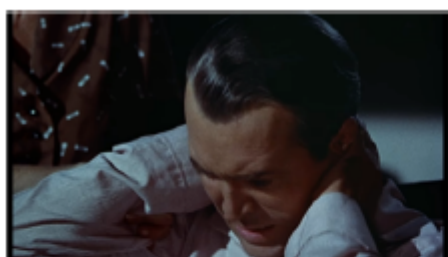
Sample 7:

apartment and his return to his apartment are presented simultaneously (Image\_8). The fact that neither of them know each other's presence creates dramatic irony. Presenting the dramatic irony from Jefferies' point-of-view highlights his passivity effectively, as he can only silently witness the two scenes converge and Thorwald's assault. The alternating shots from Jefferies' fixated point-of-view over Thorwald's apartment and the close-ups of Jefferies (Image\_9a-9b) depict that such voyeurism and unpermitted entry is violently punished. Ironically, the low-angle shot does not show masculinity, but inferiority of retreating from the observation. Meanwhile, Stella functions as the heroine that offers him security, telling him the cops' arrival when he utters helplessly, 'Stella - what can we do?' Jefferies' agitation and emotional vulnerability is contrasted with Stella's calmness when witnessing the 'displaced rape' (Walker 161), his fear and panic reinforcing his dependence on women. His helplessness and passivity are also contrasted with Lisa's bravery and wisdom to do the hero's job: climbing into Thorwald's apartment, collecting evidence, and surviving from the hands of a wife-murderer. The role reversal of Lisa and Stella transcending from fashion model and nurse to detectives depicts the juxtaposition of the man's inferiority and the women's boldness and independence, and ironically conveys Jefferies' impotence as he fails to realize Lisa's capability and independence at first. However, he now becomes a passive observer, showing his admiration towards Lisa's flair for adventure.



Image 8: Parallel editing presented from Jefferies' point-of-view.

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Image\_9a: A close-up of Jeffries' despair when witnessing Thorwald's assault.



Image\_9b: A low-angle shot of Stella towering over Jeffries.

Voyeurism, however, also brings danger. Thorwald's haunting presence at Jeffries' place reminds the audience of Stella's earlier comment that Jeffries' curiosity kills the cat: 'I can smell trouble right in this apartment...You see things you shouldn't. Trouble.' Photographic vignetting and point-of-view shots both signify the principle of voyeurism: a voyeur never exposes himself. Jeffries' obsession in voyeurism puts himself and Lisa in danger. The vignettes give hints to resolve the murder, such as Thorwald's suspicious behaviours (Image\_10a-c). However, the blocking of the background in the vignettes also visually presents Jeffries' blindness to the danger surrounding him, shown from his obsession on the vignettes that he fails to remind Lisa about Thorwald's return. Similarly, the transition from the photographic vignette of Lisa showing Thorwald's wedding ring to the vignette of Thorwald staring through Jeffries' lens (Image\_10d) also allows us to resonate with the tension of getting caught while peeping. The interplay of light and darkness, diegetic sound of Thorwald's footsteps and the overhead shot (Image\_11) also de-power Jeffries' from the omniscient position to show his passivity and anxiety, and portray his failure to escape. The darkness of Thorwald's apartment (Image\_12a-b) echoes the earlier scene of Thorwald switching off the light to violently assault Lisa without being witnessed. The darkness of Thorwald's apartment also creates uncertainty that forces Jeffries to make assumptions during the waiting, foreshadowing their confrontation. Jeffries' silhouette (Image\_13a) indicates his helpless retreat to darkness for security. The light focused on Thorwald's eyes (Image\_13b)

Sample 7:

resembles Jefferies' loss of his edge as the self-assumed omniscient voyeur. Audience becomes the voyeurs who witness his desperation for help, as presented by how he uses flashlights as weapons, and the change of camera's perspective. The bird's-eye view shot of Jefferies' fall from his window (Image\_14) denotes the violence of the crime story and concludes that his 'illusion of voyeuristic separation from life' is brutally shattered (Nichols; Schaeffer 125); he has to face reality: the dangers of voyeurism.



Image\_10a



Image\_10b



Image\_10c



Image\_10d

Image 10a-10d: Photographic vignettes.



Image\_11: An overhead shot that de-powers Jefferies before Thorwald's arrival.

Sample 7:



Image\_12a: A medium long shot of Thorwald switching off the light in his apartment and assaulting Lisa.



Image\_12b: The darkness of Thorwald's apartment.



Image\_13a: Jefferies' silhouette.



Image\_13b: A close-up of lights on only Thorwald's eyes.



Image 14: A bird's-eye view shot of Jefferies' fall.

*Rear Window* is a movie that both criticizes and encourages looking. Hitchcock manifests the camera to maintain the voyeuristic point of view from Jefferies' apartment, inviting the audience to see what the voyeur sees, resonating with Jefferies' interest in voyeurism, and gradually becoming voyeurs ourselves. Voyeurism has a luring power as it excites us by presenting us what cannot be seen in the public, drawing our curiosity and pleasure.

Sample 7:

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Indulged in voyeurism, we are able to escape from our personal problems temporarily. However, through narrating the story of Jefferies' failing attempt in manifesting voyeurism to escape from his personal problems, Hitchcock is inviting audience to explore our weakness, our inevitability to separate ourselves from real life. Being confined in the cinema, we like Jefferies, Lisa and Stella as they are not passive voyeurs but active participants, going one step further to initiate changes for others.

Sample 7:

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Sample 7:

**Comments**

The topic: Hitchcock's *Rear Window* is a good choice of a classic film, which lends itself to multiple levels of analysis. A discussion of 'voyeurism' is a theme that lends itself to a discussion of related film techniques and this provides the essay with a clear focus.

The discussion is clearly defined at the beginning of the piece. The essay is clearly written and well organised, logically presented and examines a range of functions that voyeurism has in *Rear Window*. The discussion shows Hitchcock's complex portrayal of femininity through the characters of Lisa and Stella. The comparison of Jeff, Lisa and Stella is supported with reference to cinematic techniques, which shows evidence of the student's originality and insight. The student demonstrates knowledge of film language with occasional use of relevant screenshots.

However, not all the roles that the student offered regarding voyeurism are convincingly presented. The discussion about voyeurism as a means of explaining Jeff's fear of commitment to a stable relationship ( p. 78) is a case in point. It gives the impression that because of his fear of marriage, he becomes a voyeur; which is a doubtful point that needs clarification.

An even more serious problem is the student's superficial and biased analysis of Jeff's character (pp. 81-82). Indeed, Jeff may strike one as passive because he is confined to a wheelchair. However, is he truly that passive and helpless? Isn't he the one who takes the initiative to organise Doyle, Lisa and Jeff to do all the leg work? While Lisa is the brave heroine who undertakes to find out how Thorwald kills his wife, Jeff also participates extensively in figuring out the why and when of the murder. He is the one who pieces different bits of information to form the big picture. Unfortunately, the student failed to take these into account and simply chose to reduce complex characterisation into an easy dichotomy between female superiority and male inferiority.

Generalisations like the opening and closing sentences also have no place in a formal academic essay.

**Score: 25**

### Sample 8:

#### Topic: How is the complex father-son relationship presented in the film Big Fish?

How is the complex father-son relationship presented in the film Big Fish?

The father-son relationship in Big Fish (2003; directed by Tim Burton) has been presented by the different types of misunderstanding between Will (son) and Edward (father). They have

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In Big Fish, William Bloom, the son of Edward Bloom, returns to his childhood home after receiving a phone call from his mother, Sandra, asking him to stay with his father for his last days. As Will reconnects with Edward after three years of estrangement, both of them start understanding each other all again.

First and foremost, the complexity of the father-son relationship is suggested by Edward and Will sharing different definitions to the credibility of Edward's stories, leading to the dissatisfied emotion of Will towards his father.

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The dissatisfied emotion of Will towards Edward is first shown by the rapid shift of shots from Will's point of view. In the beginning of the film, there is a continuous of shots focusing on Will's dissatisfied feeling towards his father telling his own adventurous story of catching the "beast" fish on his day of birth at several occasions throughout his growth. Edward's narration goes on from the very opening scene telling about the "beast" fish, keeps continuing throughout several shots featuring Will's different stages of maturing as an adult, including listening father's bedtime stories at 3, camping as Indian Guides at 7, going to the homecoming dance with a date at 17, and eventually getting married at 28 years old. His expression of his dissatisfaction towards his father's stories intensifies step by step as he matures. Starting from sitting his chin on his hand, expressing his boredom of hearing the same story for several times at the age of 7, to complaining to his mother, "Make him stop.", as Edward obstructing his time with his beautiful date when he is 17 years old, and to leaving the dining hall of his own wedding eventually as expressing his frustration towards Edward's act of ruining his son's wedding by telling the guests the same adventurous story of himself. It implies the fact that Edward has been telling his own stories repeatedly throughout Will's life and finally Will ends it with having a face-to-face argument with Edward which leads to their three years of estrangement.

(quotations of argument)

(quotations of argument)

(capture of scenes)

Their 3 years of estrangement

Sample 8:

Mother's letters.

Mother's description of Edward in phone calls with Will (was out driving or swimming in the pool)

Will and Edward both share different expectations of love and care. In Will's perspective, his father

The discontent emotion of Will towards Edward is based by their different expectations of love and care.

Different expectations of love and care

Edward was not present during the birth of his own son.

Edward bragging about his own stories during every events in his son's life. Eg. camping, dating, wedding

Deviating people's attention from Will with his own adventurous stories and personal charisma

EDWARD : What, a father's not allowed to talk about his son?

WILL (disbelieving) : I am a footnote in that story. I am the context for your great adventure. Which never happened! Incidentally! You were selling novelty products in Wichita the day I was born.

WILL : For one night, one night in your entire life, the universe does not revolve around Edward Bloom. How can you not understand that?

Gap between their relationship

## Sample 8:

Will's misunderstanding of his father's stories — different definitions of the credibility of the stories

Will: "The truth is, I didn't see anything of myself in my father, and I don't think he saw anything of himself in me. We were like strangers who knew each other very well."

Will: "In telling the story of my father's life, it's impossible to separate the fact from the fiction, the man from the myth. The best I can do is to tell it the way he told me."

Will: "It doesn't always make sense, and most of it never happened."

1:30:17

Will's suspect of Edward's adultery further intensifies his suspicion and misunderstanding of his own father's traits. In the scene in which Will searches for evidence of Edward's possible affair with

In the scene of Will's visit to Jenny, he exposes his suspicion of his own father by asking Jenny whether Edward and her were having an affair. "I've seen him with women. He flirts. He always has. On some level, I presumed he was cheating on my mother. I just never had proof." Due to Will and Edward's distant relationship, he does not have a deep understanding in his father's traits. His distrust of his father easily brings him into the suspect of his father's affair. He adds his own perception on a matter of

Scenes related:

1. Will found some suspicious documents while he was tidying the house.
2. Will considering whether or not to tell Sandra about his investigation on his father's possible affair.
3. Will's visit to Jenny.

Will: "I've seen him with women. He flirts. He always has. On some level, I presumed he was cheating on my mother. I just never had proof. (stuttering and hesitate ) not using an accusing tone, full of hesitation, not confronted to the result of his own investigation

Sample 8:

"My father talked about a lot of things he never did, and I'm sure he did a lot of things he never talked about. I'm just trying to reconcile the two." — in an accusing tone — related to his distrust to Edward, lying, making up stories but never talk about what he really did

The way of presentation  
literal/ factual  
figurative /metaphoric

On the other hand, they do show understanding towards each other.  
(Will)

Give way  
Shows concern  
Alleviate ed's suffering  
Attempt to communicate

Will finishes Edward's can of Ensure

(Edward)

Their similarity

Will: The truth is, I didn't see anything of myself in my father, and I don't think he saw anything of himself in me. We were like strangers who knew each other very well.

The ending shows reconciliation through William's adoption of Edward's expression.

Realization of his father's love towards him.  
(from Dr. Bennet)  
(from the guests of the funeral)  
(from his mother)  
(from Jenny) \*\*\*\*

Next stage of life.

Sample 8:

Will: becomes a father himself

Edward: death - as a return to where he belongs (to the sea) after a lifelong journey of adventures

Let the "beast" fish returns to the sea - symbolic meaning

Earlier: in Edward's story of catching and releasing the "beast" fish back to the sea

Later: in Will's story of bringing Edward back to the sea as a final farewell

Earlier: Edward mentions he wants to keep the chance of catching the "beast" fish for his son

Later: in Will's story he releases the fish (his father) back to the sea just as what his father did (as an inheritance)

Sample 8:

**Comments**

The title would have been better phrased as an open-ended discussion to allow for multiple levels of discussion. As it is, it invites a rather straightforward account, and a descriptive approach.

The essay, if indeed can be termed an essay as it is not in paragraph form, lacks many of the conventions of an academic essay. Fragmentary in nature, the paper shows no attempt or effort to present a structured extended essay. It is more like an outline of ideas or at best a working draft.

The content is limited, showing little evidence of any basic understanding of the film. The student cites some scenes which are relevant and provides some quotes relating to the father-son relationship. However, the discussion lacks cohesion and any attempt at an intelligible analysis.

Furthermore, the essay contains both factual inaccuracies and demonstrates little sensitivity towards cinematic techniques. For example, it would have been more appropriate to use the term 'flashback' rather than 'Will returns to his past' when Will recalls his childhood experiences with his father.

***Score: 5***