

EVALUATION ANALYSIS OF SCREENPLAY: 'MY GUARDIAN ANGEL'

For A Level Film Studies, I was given the option to produce a short film or a screenplay, I was interested in writing a screenplay. This route made sense for me to go down as I had no prior experience meaning I was willing to experiment. My ideas for the narrative came after reflecting on creating a story from real-life experience as well as my love for both TV / film dramas and watching short films in class. I was interested in particular on the topic of medicine, cancer in particular. My initial idea was built upon splitting the visual style into combining social realism with strong cinematic techniques that exaggerate certain aspects of said realism to capture the genres of non-fictional drama and tragedy, but also the truth to the subject, absorbing audience engagement. I would recommend the screenplay for 12-year olds and up due to the substantially complex nature to the topic's entirety. Nikki, a woman in her 40's, is a former breast cancer survivor, but when she is diagnosed for the second time with a more serious, life-threatening form, she falls into a downwards spiral, hope fading rapidly. Destruction cannot begin to rationalize her world. It's not easy for those in it either. My aim with this synopsis was to capture cancer in its detrimental form, encouraging emotional response from spectators; empathy and sympathy. My goal for the structure was for it to occur chronologically/linearly, so we witness the day by day struggle.

I was inspired by works of director, Andrea Arnold and cinematographer of *'Fish Tank'* (2009), Robbie Ryan. Ryan created a snapshot of the authenticity of realistic topics whose visual style was something I wanted to pull from; such as the hand-held camera, jump-cuts and hard high-key, lighting. Also, her short film *'Wasp'* (Arnold, UK, 2003) inspired me. The day in the life narrative is what I wanted to achieve in my film. The desaturated colour palette creates dull ambience, something I replicated in my storyboard photos. Also, the unique cinematic and editing style influenced me, for example, through the slow-motion editing in key scenes which I used in the final scene of the sequence as people walk past Nikki and hand-held camera. The cinematographer behind *'The Fault in Our Stars'* (Josh Boone, 2014), a fictional drama romance, Ben Richardson created emotionally provoking scenes through the plausible use of cinematic technique such as: slow motion, point of view shots, blurred shots and sounds diegetically and non-diegetically, to show the characters isolation in her illness. However, the most influential aspect to the film is my mum and

family's experience going through cancer. I have first-hand, personal depth to the very raw subject and draw from this in my opening sequence. The short film *'La Jetee'* (Marker, France, 1962) has an interesting cyclical narrative structure but didn't add to my particular creative idea.

In this opening sequence, cinematography, was an important aspect to consider. The opening shot is high-angled, looking down on Nikki's hands in which she holds a phone in her right and a letter in her left- demonstrated as the first step in my storyboard. This immediately sets the scene up, identifying us with an idea of what is going to take place. The juxtaposition of the two props in close range of one another symbolize their link in significance; there will be a phone call regarding the letter. By not showing Nikki straight away or using a conventional wide shot, for example, encodes that the 'objects' are to indirectly devastate her life, adding to the drama. It creates an enigma to the narrative, stimulating spectators to wonder why these props have significance. The seemingly 'normal' objects have unnerving tension. A hand-held camera then pans up to Nikki's face, with no cut, to a close-up on her face, showing her drained-looking expression in her dark eyes and pale skin. The uncut shot adds to the apprehension, establishing events in real time, aligning the audience with Nikki. We view that there is some instability in the situation. Finally, in the car scene, when Nikki is observing the 'angel charm', she holds it above her, looking up at it. This low-angled shot in shallow focus highlights it is a key moment. It contrasts to the opening high-angled shot. The angel is looking down on her like a real guardian angel, finally foreshadowing some hope and protection for Nikki, embracing my screenplay's name. The most notable cinematography, however is at the end. I used a shot from Nikki's point of view, in which was one of two photographs I took from the internet for my storyboard. I edited it to show everything becomes blurred and hazed for Nikki at this time, other than a couple and new-born baby walking past. I wanted to signify the irony in the joy and future they are leaving with in contrast to the fact hers is unclear, her life could be ending.

Mise en scene played a big part in expressing emotion in my screenplay. By setting it in a house and bedroom makes this a familiar reality. This is where I wanted to really focus on the realism. The normality of this shows how it can happen to anybody, it is drilled into everyday life. The weather, which can be seen when Nikki gazes out of a window is mild and

cloudy demonstrated in a shot from my storyboard. The weather is a form of pathetic fallacy; aligning the dull, blank clouds with the disconcerting disposition of the atmosphere the protagonist is in. This is continued through it getting dark outside too. Darkness is parallel to grief. The car ride represents the coarse journey Nikki is about to embark on. Ending the sequence in the hospital not only leaves the audience on a cliff-hanger as she awaits to hear the exact diagnosis, but it is also where that 'journey' begins. In addition to the 'normal' setting, Nikki and the supporting characters are dressed 'normally' too, however make-up has been used to express the strain on Nikki through a pale face and dark under-eyes. As referred to in the previous paragraph, the two props; the phone and the letter have key meaning, particularly resembling the pain they will bring her indirectly. Similarly, in the short film; *'Meshes in the Afternoon'* (Deren, US, 1946) we watched in class; props are used to create meaning. Although there's more ambiguity to them as well as having an ambiguous narrative as a whole, a knife and a key connote the female protagonist is being threatened and locked within her marriage to inferring into how her dreams spew into her reality. The woman's face is not introduced until a few minutes in. I took slight influence from these factors. The phone and letter foreshadow that they are linked to something negative forthcoming in the narrative. I also decided to wait to show Nikki's face until straight after the props were shown in order to highlight their significance to her fate. Introducing her children also stimulates sympathy as they are oblivious. The lighting matches the intended visual style of my screenplay; desaturated and drained of colour. It alludes to the eerie nature of realism. I want the lighting to be natural; hard and predominantly high-key. Hard lighting captures emotion, particularly in the close-ups and high-key lighting shows little artificial contrast between dark and light which is realistic. However, in some scenes such as in the car, lowkey lighting would be useful to capture Nikki in slightly illuminated light to stand out from the darkness to show her fighting a battle, achieved through passing orange streetlights that'll illuminate her. I displayed character performance in the stage directions of my screenplay to emphasize their emotional gestures.

For editing, I wanted my screenplay to conform to the traditional continuity rules. Social realist films typically follow this as it resembles a much more smooth and straightforward narrative, depicting realities of everyday life. The average lengths of the shots in the film,

stated on the storyboard are quite long. By using medium-long shots, it allows the audience to grip the surroundings in the background and the foreground such as Nikki and the other characters facial expressions to prop significance. It emphasizes the harsh reality that much of the experience of being re-diagnosed causes her to be 'in her head' and thoughts a lot, taking her away from the world around her, feeling isolated. Although she has family and friends around her, she still feels agonizing seclusion. In the scene between Phil and Nikki as they exchange a phone call, the technique of parallel editing is present to establish the two points of views of the scenes happening simultaneously. It identifies with her devastation being like a domino effect, impacting the people around her, hence why Phil's raw emotion can also be visually seen when he's told. At the end of the opening sequence, the final shot crossfades to the title sequence leaving the audience on an ongoing cliff-hanger just before Nikki gets called for her consultation. Slow motion is present in the end scene when the point of view shot from Nikki focuses on people walking out the hospital, reminding her that her journey has just begun. *'Swimmer'* (Ramsay, UK, 2012) uses slow motion frequently to encourage cinematic appreciation from spectators, inspiring this.

For sound, I decided to use both diegetic and non-diegetic. The diegetic is prominent in the first scene. Nikki breathes heavily, conveying her anxiousness battling the sound of intense ticking from a clock, conveying the expense of time. A note-worthy use of ambient sound is in the final, hospital scene when muffled talking can be heard in the background as Nikki zones out from reality. It is rather overpowering making it disorientated for both her and spectators. I chose only to include one piece of non-diegetic sound as it can easily take away from realism. I included the song 'Wind Beneath my Wings' which can be heard initially diegetically from the TV in the distant background, however becomes non-diegetic when the camera pans out of the car and into the night. It is parallel of the mood and ironic as it references angels- just like her charm. However, the long take is abruptly cut to the hospital scene. The editing throughout is slow-paced with several long takes but is juxtaposed here. A snap back to reality. The dialogue was key in me portraying the narrative. The blunt responses from Nikki at the beginning show her shock, contrasting to the doctor who is doing his job in explaining to her. The taboo language is uncensored and typical of realism films as well as the rather unstructured sentences which show the candid reality to it.

Overall, I am happy with my complete screenplay as I have captured my initial genre and narrative wholly within the dialogue and stage-directions. The harsh reality to the subject is portrayed like a message through this and will leave the spectator with a lasting effect of how relevant of an antagonist cancer is and how it impacts lives mentally as well as physically. I feel like this truthfully comes across. Creating a tense atmosphere through film techniques was important, and I think I achieved it successfully, both built into my screenplay and my storyboard photos.

Word Count: 1881