
ENGLISH 345: WOMEN FILMMAKERS

COMPILED GROUP WORK NOTES: *A HOUSE DIVIDED*

Question: How does the film's form shape meanings (explicit, implicit, symptomatic, intertextual)?

MOTIF OF NOTES AND PAPER (NOTES FILL CAMERA FRAME)

- Explicit meaning of communication or the disjointed communication to which the couple resorts.
- Explicit meaning of dual interaction and third-party intrusion (confusion.)
- Implicit meaning: Throughout the film, paper is repeatedly used to symbolize the relationship between the couple. The final scene ends with the couple ripping the paper to shreds, showing that they are no longer divided, but rather a cohesive couple.
- Dual function of the notes: The notes convey dialogue and contribute to the film's humor. The notes made the couple's domestic dispute seem ridiculous. The notes' humor rendered the film light-hearted and the couple's behavior immature.

MOTIF OF PERFUME AND GLOVES

- These are the root of the problem. The couple's lack of trust stems from a misunderstanding connected with perfume and gloves.
- Repeated appearance/reference to gloves or lapel conveys an explicit meaning: don't jump to conclusions. These items either caused a fight or resolved it (narrative function).
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MOTIF OF COUPLES AND INTRUSION OR INTERRUPTION BY THIRD PARTIES

- Implicit meaning: The lawyer is used to show the divisive nature of the couple and is a form of repetition throughout, appearing as a reminder that the couple are separated and have "laws" to abide by.
- Implicit meaning: Third-party intrusion on couple brings them together.
- Narrative function: Frequent interruptions create difficulty in trying to resolve issues.

PARALLELS

- Couples reactions and actions parallel one another. They both get suspicious and angry; both make assumptions, both visit the lawyer and make the same resolution (even though they're fighting, they remain married). Both throw the pen after they sign the legal document.
- The husband and wife have parallel motivation for their behavior: suspicion of cheating. The parallel reveals an explicit meaning that communication is vital to a partnered relationship.
- The husband and wife both jump to the same conclusion regarding the "burglar," and both realize their assumption at the same time.
- All male/female couples at the party do not communicate; an explicit meaning is that lack of communication between the sexes causes unnecessary conflict.

CONTRASTS

- Contrast in behavior of older and younger people. The young are sporadic, while the older lawyer is more stringent and sticks to the formal document.

SYMPTOMATIC MEANINGS

- Taboo of divorce; the couple upholds their image as a married couple because divorce is not acceptable or respectable. Public appearance is the most important thing to the couple, who decide "to live separately together."
- Film touches on social issue of infidelity.
- Class issues in the interactions between the family and hired help. One group noted the nice clothing the couple wears in the final scene.
- Male and female main characters depicted as equal. Both think that the other is cheating; both have the same expectations for one another's behavior.

CHARACTERS

- Secretary could be an autobiographical portrayal of Guy Blaché. She could function as a mother figure for the man.
- The cook contributes to the couple's fight and their make-up (narrative function).
- The male and female leads need one another to solve the "burglar" problem.

THEMES

- Relationships are sacred or secret. True feelings revealed.
- Lack of communication. The disjointed nature of the scenes mirrors the division that results from lack of communication.
- Separation of private and public life.

STYLE

- Fast paced emotional exchange, with the narrative pacing expressing anger or strong emotion.
- Over-dramatized acting, playing to the camera.