

# *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

## *Analysis*

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**1.)** The canonical state of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is based in New York city, around a man Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) before Valentine's day. This is a world of typical every day routine that crowds the thoughts, and emotions of the protagonist. In this world of yearning and desire we find in the protagonist's narration. This world is standardized and strict to the everyday re-occurrences, and few out-of-the-normal incidents that seem far from sight in the protagonist's life

In this world, we find despair, and emotional distress within many areas of the Joel's (protagonist's) life. In the protagonist's life there seems to be something missing due to the narration over, and the feel of depression for the protagonist as he makes his way to his everyday priorities, with slight view of any hope in the future.

**2.)** *Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind* may have a variation of inciting incidents that occur throughout the film as we are told the story in reverse. Though we are brought into a specific time in this story to gain a bigger, and more desirable narrative. The protagonist awakens and the more plausible inciting incident occurs within a few minutes. Joel (protagonist) decides to leave on a train to Montauk. He breaks away from the canonical state that he knows, and this is the breaking point into the narrative.

The way this story is told it could be argued that the ending of Act II is an inciting incident as well. The ending of Joel's memory wipe of Clementine (Kate Winslet) takes the story back to when they first met, without their first encounter this whole story would have never taken place. Being as we are told the story in reverse this could be a creditable argument for a relation to the inciting incident.

As we are introduced into the canonical world that surrounds his character, we as the audience have no knowledge of such events, until the film furthers. Leaving the train for

Montauk and skipping work is the more dominant inciting incident due to how the narrative is established. This is an aberration from the canonical state of the protagonist's life.

**3.)** *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* tells a story through imagination/alternate reality of memories of the main protagonist's relationship. This film approaches the story in reverse. Beginning when all of what we come to find as the narrative as previously occurred.

Though, the film does time lapse throughout the entire film the Act structure is placed within three Acts. Entering the story the viewer grasps the canonical world, and within the first few minutes we are taken to the Inciting Incident that takes us off the foundation of the stories narrative.

This inciting incident is the disruption of the choice of the protagonist's decision and embarks him on a new path. Act I contains time lapses from the present and flashes back to the occurrences that lead us to the film's more technical inciting incident. The audience comes to see this as time has passed from the technical inciting incident and the two of them meeting on the train were in fact related, but actually aren't.

Though, Act I has combinations of non-linear time and we are taken to both conjunctures of the story line within the Act. Act I comes to a conclusion when Joel (protagonist) comes to the knowledge that Clementine has had him erased from his mind, and he decides to have the same procedure done.

Act II the audience is taken through the memories of the protagonist, as the "Scientists" in reality attempt to erase all memory of his girlfriend (Clementine). The audience is taken back and forth between memories of the relationship, and too sub-plots that involve the scientists, and the present actions of Clementine during Joel's procedure.

While Joel relives his memories of Clementine he realizes that he does not want to lose them, this gives the base for the narrative in the story. The memories of Clementine in Joel's mind are reversed starting from the last time Joel had seen her to the moment they met for the first time, which is the climax of Act II. As we come to the end of Act II Joel's last and first memory of Clementine is being erased.

Act III starts as we were at the beginning of Act I. Joel awakens and in bed with no memory of Clementine proceeds as life would without her. Leaving for Montauk we are time

lapsed back to the beginning of Act I. The climax of Act III is the discovery by both Clementine, and Joel that they previously have had a relationship together, and agree to start again after being given the benefit of the doubt.

**4.)** At the end of Act III, when Joel is reliving his last memory of Clementine before losing recognition of her completely the audience is shown this through a formalistic stance. The audience is brought back to the house on the beach in Montauk. The reiteration of this house dominates the narrative, bringing the viewer back to this particular location, gives a metaphor that true love will find away, and a sense of destiny between the two characters.

In this Scene, Joel has come to the realization that this is the last memory and that he will soon have no memory of Clementine, and have to accept the obstacles may prevail. As the two enter the house on the Montauk beach, the non-diegetic sound of music playing in the background introduces an emotional and important theme for this scene.

The lighting is low-key; with the only direct light that is placed on the characters is a flash light. This hints at the underline meaning of fading away, and sense of loss. The cuts jump from Joel to Clementine as if we were feeling the loss of her existence, and trying to keep up and not lose sight of her.

As the beats of this scene begin with the low light of the flashlight, to the diegetic sound of her voice slowly fading away, to the deterioration of the buildings structure, and the waves that rush in. These all show and support the scenes formalistic view of losing the memory itself.

The shots are medium close, long, and are not static, the camera is moving with the characters. It is closed frame with the darkness that is seeking in giving more meaning to the idea of loss. These shots are objective, being constructed from the side and low angles, that are guided by low-key flashlight for lighting.

Joel's blocking in this scene gives the impression of acceptance to of the actions that are going to occur. While still trying to save what memory Joel has left of Clementine, he enters the composition standing by the window static, and then turns to run away, while then being lured back in by Clementine.

The tempo of this scene is quick, jumping from characters in different locations in the house. The tempo is enroled with the deterioration of the house itself, with it slowly getting worse at each moment, leaving the audience gaining suspense with the rising action.

The house and even Montauk itself becomes a metonym to the audience, we see the first meeting of Joel and Clementine, and the last memory that Joel will have of her. But this house is a symbol of hope, and endurance to the viewer. As the scene comes to end, Clementine leans into Joel and says in a suspended state "Meet me in Montauk".

This line gives the viewer and beacon of home for the two, and supports the metonym that it holds in this oneiric state. Leading us back to the beginning of Act I, the audience receives the answer that Joel asked himself, "Ditched work today, and got on a train to Montauk. Why did do that? I am not a compulsive person."

This scene is subject to formalism, as well with most of the scenes in this film. The abrupt editing techniques, shot selection, diegetic and non-diegetic sound and transitions, to the low-key light and the dark shadows the consume the mise en scene.

**5.)** *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* falls between three main genres in film. The film is a dramatic romance with equality of science fiction. The audience is placed into this reversed world of the characters memories and obstacles he must overcome through the choices that he has created himself.

We have dramatic notions through the relationship between Clementine and Joel, as well as sub-plots that are romantically dramatic as well between other characters. We perceive the hard ship of the relationship world, and the lows that bring the characters doubt, but romantically have the incentive of new beginnings, and sure destiny.

The film falls under the science fiction genre most definitely. The story is based on the oneiric (dream-like) state that Joel perceives as memories. The audience relives these memories along with the protagonist. Growing with the protagonist, we come to find his motives change, and romantically driven to prevent the loss of Clementine from his memory.

Comedic stature shows through when we are taken to Joel's memory as a child while trying to divert from losing memory of Clementine. Though, this film and a stronger dramatic overview, we do have hints of comedic relief.

The audience is well introduced to the tragic and difficult world of the protagonist, and the actions he must attempt to fulfill his motives. The cruelty of the story is shown in Act III when they come to the knowledge of the events they had forgotten, this delivers harsh reality climax of Act III.

Joel is a Low-Mimetic hero with romantic determination. We the audience see Joel has a man with troubles of life and relationships. Joel to us is not superior in this way. The audience feels a sense of remorse, but feel relation to the characters position.

The viewer may have relations to Joel in a sense that they have felt the desire to erase past events if it was possible. While we embark with Joel through the story, we gain a common feeling of separation, loneliness, and the wanting to forget. But again, we come to find our motives to change as well as our desires, and mistakes we come to reflect on this through the protagonist.

One may perceive when Joel relives his memories in his own mind could be accounted as realism in a sense of how dreams may be interpreted by the viewer. This gives the audience a sense of realism to the character himself. Joel is passive and the beginning only wanting to let go and forget. But comes to realize that he wants to keep those memories more than anything, in which he becomes an active protagonist against his own remembrance.

**6.)** *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* sits within the boundaries of all structures in the McKee Triangle. Joel is our main protagonist, beginning the film with a narrated introduction. One will argue with this introduction to fall within an Arch plot. Joel begins and follows in Act II as a passive protagonist with internal conflict (Mini-plot) that defies all else, but quickly changes motives and becomes an active protagonist (Arch plot) facing external forces after realizing his true desires.

Yet the film falls much into the Anti-plot. This film constantly has time lapses and flashback between Joel's memories, Clementine's reality, and the sub-plots of the scientists and their relationships with each other. This plays deep into the inconsistent realities area of this structure.

Coincidence shines through the Act Structures and how they are placed in the film. Joel and Clementine keep arriving back at the place the first met; one may find this to be

coincidence within the film's structure. Time as well is non-linear throughout the entire film, coming and going from one place in time to another. Anti-plot is a major structural component to this film.

Though this film has sub-plots throughout between characters such as the main scientist (Dr. Mierzwiak) of Lacuna and his receptionist (Mary), which is a major sub-plot that strengthens the climax of Act III. Without Mary discovering about her past with the doctor, the notes she sent to the clients would haven't been sent in the first place. Other sub-plots build the story's structure with Clementine and her side relationship with Patrick, to Mary and the other scientist Stan.

The story builds off of these other sub-plot relationships, and give the film of Mini-plot. The film ends with an Open ending, giving the audience their imagination of what was to come of the two and their story. The audience knows that they are pursuing their relationship again, but the audience does not know if they succeeded or not.

One may see this as a closed ending because their actions will just keep repeating. But with the ending of the doctors and Mary's relationship, one could interpret that the practice was over, and the two of them would not return to have the memories wiped again. But it is more of credible open ending leaving the audience to determine the possibilities.

Joel has both internal and external conflicts throughout this film. Though, we have these combinations as well an active protagonist, those are the only two areas where it falls within an Arch-plot. Where we have an open ending, sub-plots, internal conflict, and a passive protagonist we lean toward Mini-plot, more than Arch.

We have every element of an Anti-plot, but this film cannot only be categorized as one absolute structure. This film leans towards Arch with the active single protagonist and external conflict but has no relation to any of the other areas of that structure.

This film has all elements of Anti-plot, with a few elements of Mini and Arch-plot, but with tendency of Mini-plot rather than Arch. This film if were to be pointed in an area on the Mckee triangle would be right below Arch, in Anti-plot, leaning towards Mini-plot. This film would best be described with in the Mckee triangle as an minimalist anti-plot.

