

A critical analysis of tree of life by terrance malick essay

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Tree of Life Directed by Terrence Malick In the thirty-eight years Terrence Malick has been developing his craft, and in many ways revolutionizing the world of film and cinematography, “Tree of Life” has been the fifth feature release to be garnished with his directorial efforts. As is usual of Malick, “Tree of Life” is no usual film. The story is told throughout in a very impressionistic and episodic manner, with all the images and events seeming almost irrational and random on the surface, but like most of his, perfectly cohesive, with dense substance, and incredible beauty. The film moves the story along like a river. With no beginning, middle or end, the images and music stem out from a main idea that take the viewer on a journey of life, and the different ways people deal with it and are affected by it – much like he does with “Thin Red Line” (1998) and “The New World” (2005).

The Editing of the film is quite unconventional, straying away from the typical three-tiered story telling. The film begins with a biblical quote, which then fades out and back in to a shot of an abstract image of orange-yellow “light” alongside a voice narrating. Malick then begins to introduce characters.

He is very careful so as to how he does this, given each character is used to symbolize a face of the way people confront life. The first character introduced is Mrs. O’Brien (Jessica Chastain). She is first shown as child, filmed playing in nature, as a voice over, talking about how in one must follow the path of either grace, or that of nature. There are shots, then, of trees, flowers, and flowing grass tying her character to nature, tranquility. The colors focused on are light, soft pastels. During her introduction,

melodic, beautiful music is played, and yet, it also holds an unsettled and eerie quality about it.

Her character, throughout the film is always shot in a manner that paints her as if in tune with her natural surroundings, which Malick does in order to give her character a sense of peace and also to contrast her from her husband. In one particular scene, she is seen feeding a prisoner water from her own thermos, further strengthening her love, humanity and compassion. Brad Pitt's character, Mr. O'Brien, is first seen in the film merely walking in and out of frame, with his face never even shown. The first time any real focus is given to Mr.

O'Brien is right after his wife receives a telegram denoting their son's death. He receives the news while at work, and his first introductory appearance is given with a loud, unsettling noise of a jet engine in the background. The scenery is uncomfortable and very stiff. His character is usually seen wearing very monotone colors of browns, grays and other earth tones. All these qualities distance Mr.

O'Brien from emotion as much as possible, given he is shown to be the quintessential "man" of the 50s and 60s, playing the role of a "stoic, strict, man-of-the-house. Again, Malick continues to splice the film with shots that represent the personal inner-feelings of his characters. At one point, Mr. O'Brien even sees his son crying as a kid, to which his father's reaction is to merely walk away into the woods.

As we walks into the woods, Malick shoots Pitt's character in a wide-shot angle, very far away from the camera, showing him as a very small figure in the midsts of the trees and nature surrounding him. Not only does Malick use this to contrast the personalities of his and Mrs. O'Brien, but he also uses it in connection to the way he feels about himself and his life. He later verbalizes this by saying he only ever wanted to be a well respected man, but that he has instead surmounted to nothing. The introduction of the characters are merely the tip of the iceberg to the complexities that compose this film.

Malick ties the film together by way of the orange-yellow " light," which is shown thrice throughout the film: in the opening sequence, during the middle of the film, and at the end, in order to give the audience a sense of structure. He also interweaves within the film a number of scenes depicting space and the evolution of the planet through it's primordial times. This can easily be taken as random and incoherent, but when put into place alongside the themes moving the rest of the film along, the fit perfectly in. The expand on that instinct of life that lives within all living things, and again, it gives the audience a sense amalgam of ways in which the puzzling matter of life is dealt with.