

Physical and
emotional immobility:
parallel
characteristics in 'rear
window'



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In Alfred Hitchcock's enthralling film, *Rear Window*, set in Manhattan, New York in the 1950s, Hitchcock draws attention to the way physical immobility is simply an echo of emotional immobility as represented by the protagonist, L. B. Jefferies. Jeff's confinement to his wheelchair in his apartment initially reflects his emotional confinement to the events happening around him. He is thought to be trapped by his attitudes and values such as his outlook on marriage and commitment to Lisa, but his character seems to progress as the film goes on. Jeff experiences a drastic change as he learns to adjust to Lisa's 'new' behaviour and willingness to change herself for him to prove her faithfulness to him.

In the beginning of the film, Jeff is confined in his apartment to his wheelchair. He is physically immobilised because of his job as a freelance photo journalist. As a result of this, Jeff finds liberation in looking out of his apartment's rear window, a technique used by Hitchcock as a subtext to the audience that he is shifting his gaze from troubles he is currently experiencing, such as the constant nagging from those around him about marriage, to the issues of his neighbours.

Jeff's inability to grow emotionally and to have a meaningful relationship with Lisa is a form of his emotionally immobility. It is originally linked to his physical immobility as he is also 'trapped' in his thoughts as he is trapped in his cocoon. Jeff feels as though he isn't ready to commit to such a devoted lifestyle and stays distant from everyone, as shown by his little knowledge of his neighbours and their names. He is emotionally detached and not introspective as he does not learn from his experiences but rather learns from others. For example, he forms his opinion on marriage by looking at the

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newlywed couple whose relationship takes a turn for the worst because of the nagging wife and stressed out husband. Jeff implicates this on his life and assumes all marriages are like this, entrapping him in the idea that commitment to a relationship is bad. This is also evident when Stella and Lisa continue to pester him about marriage and the conversation between him and his publisher on the phone in which Jeff promises that if he doesn't leave his 'swamp of boredom' he will "do something drastic like get married", a negative connotation of marriage in Jeff's mind. Jeff fails to look beyond the surface when it comes to Lisa. He judges her on her outward appearance and therefore thinks she is 'too perfect' for him. Because of these quick judgements, Jeff is unable to emotionally develop and is therefore, emotionally immobilised.

The audience begins to see a shift when Jeff starts becoming connected to Lisa when she takes the risks for him. Her devotion to Jeff brings about admiration from Jeff as he did not expect this to come from her. He begins to fret for her and even stands up for her in front of Doyle when she chooses to stay the night, warning him to be careful about what he says. His protective nature is encouraged by Lisa's physical movements such as checking out the garden bed and climbing into the apartment. It is an unexpected surprise for Jeff as their entities begin to mesh in order to solve the crime of the Thorwald's. She becomes his ally even though originally, she had attempted to discourage him from doing such acts and being a 'peeping tom'. Hitchcock uses several camera angles such as a close up of Jeff's face to attest to his devotion and pride in Lisa's initiatives. Adding to this, towards the end of the film, the director also pans the camera on to the

thermometer, an attempt to show the audience that the temperature has decreased, symbolising the past tension in the room has simmered down as Jeff is now sleeping peacefully with Lisa on his side, unusually dressed in casual clothes, happily flicking through her magazine. This change over time suggests that Jeff is content and comfortable with her being his life now and shows the audience that he has made a significant progress emotionally in his relationship with Lisa.

Rear Window demonstrates the ease with which individuals can be deceived by their own judgement. Ironically, Jeff is clearly 'more' physically immobile, now having both his legs in casts, however the change in his emotional state is different as he is seen to be less emotionally immobile and more open minded. Hitchcock initially leads the audience, through the eyes of Jeff, towards the struggle of his physical entrapment that had represented an outward manifestation of his state of mind but not for the whole duration of the film. The connection between Lisa and Jeff is stronger than he reveals in the first part of the film and Jeff emotionally matures as he comes to term with his fear of being misled somewhat into a trap. However, he is now ready to settle down with Lisa who has shown she is willing 'to go anywhere and do anything and love it' for Jeff, contrary to his preconceptions.