

# A single man mise- en-scene essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

How has the mise-en-scene been constructed in the opening of A Single Man in order to communicate particular images to the audience? In the opening of the film, A Single Man, mise-en-scene has been used to communicate different images and messages to the audience. This has been done through the use of setting; performance and movement; and props and costumes. There are four different settings in the opening of the film. These settings are: underwater; 'the snowed over road'; George's bedroom and the communal areas in George's house (bathroom and kitchen). The shot behind the opening credits could give the audience the impression that the character, George, is having an out-of-body experience

In the shot you can see George slowly sinking under water, whilst he is naked. George is alone within the shot, showing that he is feeling lonely and isolated, which is a factor of an OOBIE. Being depressed can make you feel like you're drowning, which can come as a result of sinking and being unable to resurface. Which is why the water is an important element in this shot, as it would start to give the audience thoughts of how George is feeling and what genre it might be. On the 'snowed over road' setting, first the shot is black and you can hear a screeching of tyres before a large smashing sound. The shot then cuts to a car on its roof with tyre tracks leading up to it, just before the edge of a cliff. You can infer from this that the driver attempted to avoid going off the cliff by braking harshly to try and slow down enough on the slippery surface, and trying to steer away, making the car end up on its roof. In the snow you can see the body of a man and, behind his head, that of a dog. They both have blood on their heads, showing they were likely flung through the smashed driver's window.

The setting then changes back to George sinking, but now he has begun to panic. He attempts to swim to the surface but cannot do so, this suggests that the car crash has stirred him. He wants to be able to help, but he cannot do so as it has already happened. George then walks into shot in the snowed over road, also dressed in a black suit, suggesting that he was linked to the man involved in the car crash. The fact you can see George in this shot also builds on the idea that he is having an OOB, because you can see him in the shot. An OOB can also make you feel or see yourself outside of your physical form. George walks right up to the man's body, looking down on it and inspecting the pale, lifeless face against the cold whiteness of the snow. The third setting is in George's bedroom, where he violently awakes from having the dream/OOB/flashback of the crash.

The shot shows George laid to the right side of a double bed, leaving the other half free. This shows he is lonely and is expecting someone else to be there when he wakes up, and not the empty space. This would then give the audience the impression that George could be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in which he would experience flashbacks and OOBs. As George walks through his house you can see that it is immaculately clean and tidy. This shows that he tries to be in control of his life and keep everything around him clean and spotless, as if to create the impression that he has a perfect life to anyone on the outside. Performance and movement is obviously a key part in this film, due the character, George, being the focus.

The fact he is sinking shows that he is been put under pressure, making life difficult for him to try to keep afloat, and impairing his ability to move and function in a normal way. This re-enforces the idea that he could be having

an OOB as it can leave you with the feeling of being detached from your own mind and body, which if your ability to function normally is impaired then you can begin to feel detached from yourself. On the snowed over road, The fact you can see George in this shot also builds on the idea that he is having an OOB, because you can see him in the shot. An OOB can also make you feel or see yourself outside of your physical form. George walks right up to the man's body, looking down on it and inspecting the pale, lifeless face against the cold whiteness of the snow. Knowing that he couldn't have done anything.

This has an element of foreshadowing. As no matter what the man could've done, he was likely to die one way or the other in this situation. As he could've gone off the edge of the cliff, or be flung from the window because of not wearing a seatbelt. The reason this is foreshadowing is because that's how George feels, he can't do anything about how he is feeling, he just has to accept it and work around it. When George wakes up, he starts his monologue where he moves slowly and precisely, as not to mess anything he does up. His internal monologue of thoughts also starts during this scene. ' It takes time in the morning for me to become George, time to adjust to what is expected of George and how he is to behave. By the time I have dressed and put the final layer of polish on the now slightly stiff but quite perfect George I know fully what part I'm supposed to play.' This quote from his monologue shows that George wants to appear like nothing is wrong on the outside. When in fact he is dying, drowning on the inside. He's having to act out the life he had before, he knows how to do it, to be happy.

The difference is that George no longer knows how to be happy himself. There are no props or costumes in the first setting where George is naked underwater. His nakedness in this scene could represent that he is in a vulnerable and fragile state. This links to the idea that he is having an OOBIE, as during this episode he would be exposed to various dangers, due to not having as much control over his body. On the snowed over road, the man is dressed in black. Making him stand out from the snow that he is laying on, the car he crashed and the dog. This makes your focus be attracted to him so you can start to think whether his death would be a key event in the film. When George walks into shot, he is also wearing a black suit, suggesting that he was linked to the man involved in the car crash. The prop of the overturned car is important as it shows you how the man died and gives some context to the shot. In George's bed, next to him he has a notepad and a fountain pen which has leaked out onto the bed sheet.

This represents that George has unfinished business but he may not have the capacity to do it as his energy or ability to do so is running out. George also medicates himself which shows that he is incredibly unwell. The fact that he takes them in the middle of the routine shows he is using them to be able to function properly, showing his desire to conform and appear normal. George's determination to continue to appear normal on a day-to-day basis is shown when he looks in the mirror and tells himself to 'just get through the goddamn day'. George also keeps his clothes neat and spotless, without a crease in order to appear normal on the outside, however his facial expression when looking in the mirror says otherwise. He's far from being happy and far from being healthy. The ideas that this use of mise-en-scene

can give to the audience, is that losing someone close to you, or someone whom you love, can be life altering. George reflects back on how things have changed and how he feels he needs to keep up an act of the old him in order to please everyone around him.

This is because he feels they've already felt one great loss so he doesn't want to put others through the loss of his conscious because of the changes in his feelings. The uses of colour and lighting helped to show these feelings. As when George was doing his monologue the colours of his surroundings were drained and had dark lighting. The mise-en-scene also shows you how mental illness affects you. For example the underwater scene shows how he is lost and alone. The pace of that scene also shows you the dream like state that George has been left in after suffering the mental trauma of losing a loved one. The main idea that is trying to be put across in these opening scenes is that, death is a painful experience for those left behind.