

I am sam movie review

Literature, Russian Literature



How does Jessie Nelson use a range of film techniques to portray the conflicting ideas of competence in parenthood in relation with disabled parents in the movie 'I am Sam'? Jessie Nelson's 'I am Sam' directed in 2001 tells a story of a mentally-challenged man, Sam Dawson, and his relentless fight with the legal system for custody of his daughter, Lucy Diamond Dawson. Nelson forces the audience to question Sam's capabilities and limits of being a 'good parent' through symbolism, characterization, use of camera and editing techniques. Social security services bring their attention to Sam and Lucy as her 8th birthday approaches.

They are doubtful that Sam will be able to provide Lucy with the education and resources she deserves to reach her full potential as she slowly surpasses her father's intellectual capabilities with the mentality of a 7-year-old. 'All you need is love' is the central quote of what the film's message is built upon. Nelson's use of a contradictory contrast between the two main characters sparks a conflict about what defines a good parent that challenges the viewer to ask themselves if love is enough. Sam is a very simple man. He is unexpectedly the dormant character in the film.

Sam's happiness solely relies on the happiness and security of his daughter Lucy alongside the support of his also mentally challenged close friends. On the other hand, Rita Harris who is Sam Dawson's pro-bono lawyer, is materialistic who measures happiness by the items she has in her life as she uses her successful career to mask her dysfunctional, collapsing relationship with her young son and unfaithful husband. Startlingly, Rita is the active character who learns from Sam. Both characters experience a loss of the relationship with their child but in completely opposing ways.

To Sam, even though he is unable to pass down knowledge and support his daughter to an academic level, he devotes his time for her whilst Rita is a direct contrast. In doing so, it creates tension as a battle of strength and the idea of perfection fluctuates between them. Nelson also uses editing techniques by creating different hues to portray Sam's struggles with new experiences. Warm filters are used when Sam is with Lucy to symbolise the joy. However, cold blue shades are used in courtroom scenes, the hospital and supermarket scene.

This was done for the purpose of displaying the uncomfortable environment for Sam as new experiences and change gives him fear. Children, particularly teenage girls, encounter great changes in the earlier stages of their life. In court, the question was put forth of how Sam would handle such situations such as puberty if he himself has no knowledge about the topic. In using this effect, it vividly illustrates to the viewer the struggles Sam will face in the years to come for Lucy, but are they challenges that any other 'ordinary' father would struggle with as well is the question put forth for debate in the courtroom.

Throughout the entire movie, hand-held cameras are used to film. Using this film technique gives a more documentary feel that enables the viewer to feel more part of the action. The audience views the film through the perspective of Sam Dawson and the use of hand-held cameras allows an emotional attachment to develop with Sam's character as we witness his love and devotion to Lucy. Consequently, the viewer is manipulated to side with Sam's viewpoint that he deserves custody of Lucy and has enough to offer her despite all the testimonies against Sam's will.

Along the film we are a bystander and observe the ongoing battle of beliefs of the needs of a child. Symbolism is an important film technique used that reflects the character's emotions at certain points in the movie. The scene with Sam and Lucy on the swing towards the beginning of the movie incorporates white birds flying over their heads which signifies the freedom they had, their blissful smiles and shared laughter alongside the slow and peaceful music express their happiness with one another.

The loss of freedom is a strong theme explored which is evident in the use of symbolism throughout. Paper cranes appear repeatedly as they represent happiness, good luck and peace- primarily seen during the beginning of the movie. The paper plane Sam subtly throws to Lucy before the final court hearing shows his carefree, child-like personality whilst foreshadowing the freedom to come for these two characters which informs the viewer Sam is not ready to give up.

The joy they share with each other is put to test when we are questioned if love is really all you need to raise a child to their full potential. The butterfly origami Lucy presents to her class is a subtle representation of her growth and development as she describes the changes a caterpillar goes through. This mirrors the conflict raised because Lucy's intellectual abilities will exceed her 7-year-old minded father.

The disparity of the use of symbolism between growth and development in contrast to happiness and freedom forces the viewer to question which is of greater importance. Jessie Nelson's use of film techniques have shaped I am Sam into a very powerful and emotional film despite its touching storyline. The emotional attachment between the audience and characters develops

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greatly that makes the viewer connect with Sam through camera and editing techniques, characterization whilst symbolism reflects the swaying values of happiness, freedom and intellectuality.