

Sympathy for the wronged: comparing "in the name of the father" and "amnesia"



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Jim Sheridan and Peter Carey, director of the film *In the Name of the Father* and author of the novel *Amnesia*, respectively, have both lived through many world events surrounding an abuse of power that have a major effect on the central characters involved. Sheridan's film is based upon the conflict and wrongful imprisonment of Irish travelers in England during the peak of the IRA terror attacks. In the mid-1900's, Carey was involved in the advertising media from a relatively young age and was dumbstruck by the censorship of the Battle of Brisbane, where drunken Australian and American Armed forces rioted in Brisbane during the Second World War - a central event in the novel. He was a public advocate against government censorship of news and draws constant parallels between himself as a writer and Felix Moore, the protagonist. This relationship is critical, as these narratives are based on real events and are presented with style of narration, characterization and motifs that Sheridan and Carey use throughout to show victims of abuse of power utilizing narrative perspective, theme and tone, characterization and motifs, allowing audiences to feel compassion and sympathy.

Authors utilize an elaborate and highly complex style of narration to convey central ideas in their texts to the audience, switching between perspectives and time frames but remaining focused on the central characters Gerry Conlon and Felix Moore. In the opening sequence, Sheridan uses close up shots of Gareth Pierce, a Human Activist Lawyer, listening to tape recordings from Gerry Conlon, an innocent Irish man framed as an IRA militant, recounting his life, along with what he knows of the remaining four accused terrorists and his father through voice overs. Generally Gerry's recount follows a linear narrative pattern, however there are certain jumps in both

time and location in order for Sheridan to convey the feelings of Gerry, his family at the time and the view from the general public by switching of narrative perspective. Further, this then can be accompanied by editing, in the way the director utilizes quick cuts between a group of people to show the previously mentioned chaos and the slowing and lengthening of shots to show relaxation and bliss. These changes of perspective occur sporadically and without warning, through the use of quick cuts to transition between different characters and different time periods. The result of this editing is foreshadowing to the audience the chaos or order that is within a scene - providing insight on the unspoken, unjust emotions of Gerry. This draws immediate comparisons to Amnesia whereby the story is retold by the main character Felix as a semi-omniscient narrator. Carey uses an elaborate and highly complex style of narration to convey his idea to the reader, switching between perspectives, time frames and targeted character. For example when Felix is listening to tape recordings from Gaby Baillieux, an underground hacker sought for extradition and execution from Australia to America, giving a recount of her life. Sheridan develops a change of this perspective occur when Gareth agrees to take the case and Sheridan cuts to the courtroom representing the new hope on Gerry's life. Logically this presents itself as the only possible narration pathway for the situation as Gerry cannot be talking about the court proceedings while locked away in a cell hunched over a tape recorder. However, the main reason is doing so allows Sheridan to create tension and a chilling atmosphere in the courtroom which is crucial for the build up of an effective final resolution. Similarly, it is logical that Carey's characters tell their stories from their perspectives, and hence these excerpts of the women's lives are presented from a third person

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recount perspective, presented often in current tense, " the next morning Gaby went to school as normal recounted her mother". The time frame changes are caused by long winded passages which acts as context for the narration. As a result of this, the audience is exposed to a several different perspectives of the same story, highlighting the misunderstandings and hence evoking sympathy due to simple errors snowballing - an appeal to the emotions of family in the reader.

The theme of ' beauty within chaos' presented through the conflict with order leading to the construction of underlying tones and is explored throughout the film to influence the audience into feeling sympathetic towards Gaby or Gerry. The film opens with a long shot of Gerry stealing scrap metal off the roofs of houses, resulting in British soldiers firing upon him believing he is an IRA sniper. These gunshots bring together an otherwise unassuming neighborhood, with the wives and children banging trash can lids against walls to warn the men, who come out and stand side by side to fight the heavily armed riot squad that has since arrived. The long shot showing the riot squad and the small town facing off appeals to a patriotic and emotional aspect of the audience as a group of people come together to protect each other despite having no idea the cause - a motif that occurs throughout the film. Similarly, Gaby Baillieux - a central character of Amnesia - one of the main antagonists was born the moment that the Australian Government was overthrown, " As the baby slithered into the midwife's brown hands, both parents heard the governor-general's secretary state: ' God Save the Queen' ... the elected government of Australia had been overthrown". This moment sets the tone and a recurring

theme for the rest of Gaby's life, with chaos being paired with something beautiful - identical to Sheridan's film. Carey pairs Gaby's mother falling in love, only to be raped by a murderer - the same night causes small suburbs on Brisbane's outskirts to be thrown into chaos; the miracle of childbirth, tarnished by the overthrowing of the government - causing chaos for all of Australia. This shows the audience that the odds have always been against Gaby and Gerry Conlon which assists the evoking of sympathy.

Sheridan and Carey compel their audiences to feel sympathetic by exposing the sheltered innocence of central characters. Sheridan opens early scenes by featuring quick cuts representing the chaotic nature of Gerry's life.

Sheridan's utilization of a zoom to a closeup of Gerry stealing scrap metal gives context to the following shot; whereby Gerry is being fired upon in a pan shot. This initiates a riot in the streets of his small Irish community. He goes home to a dominant father and proceeds to live a very secluded life; shown by the dim lighting and spacial distance between him and the rest of the family in the quick contextual shots taken around the home. Similarly, Gaby is growing up in a quiet family that has a deep love for her, "buying the impossibly affordable Mac IIx" computer - a recurring motif throughout the novel. That said, the Conlon family are shown to be making an attempt to connect with Gerry, with closeups of his father and mother reaching out to try help the boy, only to be rejected by Gerry. When Gerry is caught and threatened by IRA militants, his father risks the family's reputation to help the boy and ensure his safety. Similar to Gerry, Gaby also refuses to accept the family's love, as she tumbles into a world of crime despite her mother's concerns. Once again when Gaby is in international trouble with America

seeking her extradition, her mother does everything in her power to save her, in this case hiring Felix Moore to present Gaby's case to the public in an attempt to stop her extradition and in turn execution. Both are designed to show these characters want to be independent, whatever the result of that may be. It is clear that because of the characterization of both the central characters and their families that the authors of the texts can effectively build sympathy when they experience an abuse of power. Sheridan develops Gerry's story as a reverse tragedy in the sense that because of the terrible life that Gerry has forced himself into when he reaches a turning point and realizes just how fragile he is - highlighted by the varying extreme close up shots of Gerry crying and screaming for help while being interrogated. However, when his father arrives once again to try help him the audience is led to feel sympathetic for the boy who despite appearances, simply did not understand the consequences of life. Meanwhile Gaby's independent and overpowering characterization is shown to simply disappear. Once she is in trouble, she " for the first time, listened" to her mother and went into hiding, following every order. Similar to Gerry, this shows the realization of her mistakes and reveals her true innocence that has been suppressed for so long. Since both characters have been built up as being independent, strong and egotistical characters, when their world is flipped upside down and their true nature is revealed the audience feels compassion and sympathy for the characters who simply did not see the consequences.

The appearance of motifs - often symbolic and foreshadowing in nature, plays a critical role in both texts as they separate the sections of the texts, and therefore the parts of these characters' lives. In early shots, Sheridan

presents the Conlon family home presenting they are of Catholic faith, typical of an Irish family, with a cross in the background of the family living room - symbolic of the way that the family looks over Gerry and protects him. However, once Gerry moves to England and lives with a group of hippies in a derelict house, the cross disappears entirely from Gerry's life, along with the watchful and protective eye of his family. At this point, the cross also assists in foreshadowing trouble occurring in Gerry's life, despite the long shots showing him living the happy and free life of a hippie. When Gerry's father allows his imprisonment to help Gerry, the cross reappears; which Gerry rejects, calling it all "pointless". Due to the apparent power of the cross within the Conlon family and the fact that Gerry becomes so desperate for help that he turns to prayer with his father - something he previously regarded as pointless. This contrasting applications of a symbol enables the audience to build sympathy for Sheridan's character. In a way, this also foreshadows and symbolizes the resurrection of the legal battle revolving around the supposed terrorist which begins to swing in Gerry's favour, resulting in his release with all charges dropped against himself, his family and his friends. The importance of the dropping of charges scene is highlighted by the close ups, highlighting the emotion of Gerry and hence a further appeal to emotion.

While Carey employs the Mac Iix is a stand-alone symbol and motif, it serves to assist forming a far larger motif in the novel being technology itself. As Felix's life spins out of control as a result of pursuing Gaby's case, the technology he has access to beings to degrade, going from using a brand new Macbook, to a typewriter, then to pen and paper - clearly a symbol. This

symbolism of technology contrasts Gaby whose life began simply, with no access to computers other than those at school, to accessing a friend's personal computer, to owning her own to finally having a 'lair' of highly advanced and powerful machines. This becomes symbolic of the way that she is forced to become increasingly influential and powerful in the underground hacking scene in order to protect herself and her family. This also shows a distinct difference between the age of the characters, where Felix is old and begins to feel that, he becomes associated with older forms of writing, and Gaby being young only sees technology as the answer and therefore puts herself in a further compromised position in the future to fix her issues of current - a symbol of the knowledge carried by these characters, used to create empathy. This once again ties into her inexperience and innocence, which is explicitly outlined by the experience of Felix who recognizes all the ways of writing that he is given, often breaking into a story of his first experience with that exact model. This innocence, as discussed previously, evokes sympathy in the audience who begin to feel for the unaware Gaby. While the motifs used widely differ, with one being seemingly old aged and religious and the other being a relatively newer symbol; both Sheridan and Carey use selected objects to act as recurring motifs, as symbols to enable sympathy for these characters who are at the center of an extreme abuse of power.

Jim Sheridan and Peter Carey, creators of *In the Name of the Father* and *Amnesia*, respectively, generate sympathy for central characters through the narrative techniques they employ. Because these events are based on real occurrences, both Sheridan and Carey can appeal to real-life ideological

sympathies to show victims of abuse of power, allowing audiences to feel compassion and sympathy for Gaby and Gerry, who both become victims of abuses of power and victims of a serious injustice.