

Rhetorical Criticism Paper on 'Bird Box': Ominous Unseen Presence

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Introduction

A ominous unseen presence drives society to commit suicide after characters see the 'presence.' Just by seeing the creatures, people get into a hypnotic mode and die immediately by committing suicide. *Bird Box* was so important because the birds in the bird box represent the way she has carefully kept her own feelings caged, and so the movie's final shot is an image of hope, openness, and faith that things will get better. The birds symbolize freedom and hope which is shown throughout the film as Malorie constantly uses the birds as a guide away from the 'monsters' that someday they would make it home. It was an apocalyptic story that highlighted the ways in which humanity could endure while also showcased just how unpleasant society could become when faced with the end of the world. An estimate of 27.5 million tickets sold in its first three days, and Netflix revealed more than 80 million subscribers watched the movie. This led to great recognition of the movie as a whole. Using these amazing actors/actresses set a good tone for the movie months before the release on December 14, 2018.

Rotten Tomatoes scored *Bird Box* at 64% and the audience score was 57%. Many viewers agreed that this was a very intense psychological in-depth thriller about how most people live in society today, blind folded and guarded in order to avoid real emotions, real connection, and with perpetual fears. The real principle here is this movie reflects the world we are in today. People trying to run the rat race pushing one another, always trying to stay on top and yet alone lonely, isolated and guarded. They guard their hearts, minds, bodies and spirit in so many ways afraid of what might be or could be or what ifs that people have stopped feeling anything real and live a life of depression bleakness suicide anxiety panic isolation from monsters n demands that although seem very real for the most part we create them. An award for "Most Frightened Performance" was won by Sandra Bullock for her performance in *Bird Box*.

Description of Artifact

Sandra Bullock, who plays Malorie Hayes, has Netflix viewers on the edge of their seat in the thriller *Bird Box* directed by Susanne Bier which is based on a novel by Josh Malerman. *Bird Box* sensitively tackles the question of mental health in society. It delves into how it is perceived from those directly affected, to those who view it and how those attitudes are communicated. The movie suggests a split in society, an ‘us and them’ situation. Through clever symbolism, director Susanne Bier subtly gets her point across. In *Bird Box*, we are told an unseen force has the power to cause people who stare towards it to become unbalanced and overwhelmed with the suggestion of suicide. There is a repetitive saying of “it’s beautiful” or “take off your blindfold and look” as soon as the presence takes over. Malorie, and two young kids, ‘Boy’ (Julian Edwards) and ‘Girl’ (Vivien Lyra Blair), are in desperate need to find safety. She earlier on gives birth to a child, who she calls Boy, during this difficult time while in a house where she is safe. Malorie later on has to take care of Girl because of her biological mom committing suicide. This thing came from Eastern Europe and Russia and rapidly showed up in the United States. The only way out is to not see it at all. Which leads to the majority of the movie of people in blindfolds or inside with all the windows covered. Trust, loyalty and determination are three characteristics that define this thriller in a unique way. Would you put yourself at risk to save others? Or is it every man for themselves?

It swings back and forth between the 1st time the attack (calamity/ mass suicides) happened and 5 years later where Malorie is living a survivor's secluded life with Boy and Girl and her boyfriend Tom. Five years after an ominous unseen presence drives most of society to suicide, a mother and her two children make a desperate bid to reach safety. In the wake of an

unknown global terror, a mother must find the strength to flee with these children down a treacherous river in search of safety. The trip, which is set-up via scattered radio communication, which Malorie constantly tries to talk through but hardly works.

Malorie Hayes, a sadist who's gone through a lot of downs in her life and doesn't trust in the concept of human attachment. Trevante Rhodes as Tom will be making great support to Malorie, although he has a small screen span. Early on in the movie Tom compliments Malorie as they take a trip to the store blindfolded. Tom calls Malorie "hot" and her response was, "You're just saying that because we're all gonna die." Malorie's faith was slim to none right from the get go, but evolves over time as she continues to grow with Tom. Another example is when the birds were first seen in a cage in the grocery store and Malorie whispers, "How did you guys get so lucky?" Implying that being human wasn't good enough. When we first meet Bullock's character, Malorie, she is living with her sister, Jessica, who is played by Sarah Paulson. Paulson is best known for her recurring (and various) roles in the anthology series *American Horror Story*. Another main character is Tom, played by Trevante Rhodes. Tom frequently goes on missions outside of the home to gather supplies. They have a romantic relationship that lasts for five years which inevitably makes Malorie have a sense of affection she needed, until a group of infected survivors show up and kill him.

Sandra Bullock was the world's highest-paid actress in both 2010 and 2014. After making her acting debut with a small role in *Hangmen* (1987), soon after Bullock received attention. Her charismatic humor and utter dedication to the film industry does not go unnoticed. Bullock can pull off the 'serious but humorous' act in *Ocean's Eight* released in 2018. Or the 'heartfelt true story' film, *Blindside*, released in 2009. From 1987 to present day, Bullock still remains an

actress. You could say hiring Sandra Bullock, a high paid actress can change the whole movie in seconds with her outstanding personality and experience in the film industry. Trevante Rhodes, who played Tom, was a very charming, and resilient character who intrigued me early in the movie. Jessica, Malorie's sister played by Sarah Paulson has been present in the film industry since 1994. Having well known actors/actresses can actually increase the value of the movie itself.

After a long and difficult journey, all the divisions into two segments, the rowboat, the present, and a flashback slot before 5 years, Malorie and the children finally make it to the sanctuary, which is actually a former school for the blind, and the community has opened itself up to fellow survivors. As the birds begin chirping louder and the wind starts blowing harder, Malorie and her children are finally allowed into the building they traveled to find. The building belongs to Rick (Pruitt Taylor Vince), a man Malorie had previously spoken to via radio.

Metaphorical Criticism

Besides mental health, facing fears, overcoming adversity, and other themes you can see easily in this film, there is one important aspect of this movie viewers may have missed. Being blind from birth, those circumstances allowed them to develop other senses in order to still experience life without eyes but still see that which those who have sight often miss. Most of the time the answers are right in front of you.

Mom shielding her kids from the monster or suicide thing in the movie is like how parents try to shield their kids from all the bad things in life while growing up. Bird Box represents the fear of becoming a parent. Mentioned earlier Malorie went through a lot of downs

in her life and doesn't trust in the concept of human attachment. In other words, scared of something to call her own. She called these kids 'Boy' and 'Girl' throughout the whole movie because to call them anything more would suggest a level of ownership, that they belonged to her. While she's been tied up to these children for years, she is still not ready to say anything more encouraging than, "If you take off your blindfold, I will hurt you" when preparing them for their journey. She is not ready to say her own future is tied in with their survival. Malorie wanted to survive, and now it is her job to protect these kids, but not necessarily become a family. Essentially by the end of the movie they are family. Metaphorically, this film is about accepting the responsibility of motherhood, which requires more than providing food and basic safety. As well as finding a reason to persevere in a world where it feels like we're destroying ourselves.

Analysis/Evaluation

Bird Box has symbols to represent ideas or qualities, in other words, symbolism. A very important aspect throughout the movie stuck out to me immediately. The birds' chirping indicates the presence of danger. Since people are blindfolded, the bird sounds come as their only warning to get inside. Birds symbolize freedom and hope which is shown throughout the film as Malorie constantly uses the birds as a guide away from the "monsters" that someday they would make it home. The birds in the box were the colors of blue and green which symbolize healing. If a bird goes silent or worse yet dies the air has been compromised, and people should escape as soon as possible. The birds in the box were the colors of blue and green which symbolize healing.

Another artifact of symbolism is the blindfold. Just as when they are outside, needing to have their blindfolds on because their fate would rest in the hands of seeing one of those creatures, they base their trust in the box of birds, like I said above. The blindfold represents the

power of blind faith. The kind of faith that Malorie had when she chose to take on the rapids with both herself and her children blindfolded. Blind faith single handedly led Malorie, Boy, and Girl successfully to the safety of a blind school which has become a sanctuary where people are safely living away from the evil outside. Most of the movie they were literally blindfolded, but it had a much deeper meaning. They had loved ones take their own life in front of their eyes. They had temptations and heard voices telling them to take off their blindfold. During the intense river scene a man's voice in the distance is heard. "Hello! Do you guys need some help? Its okay to take your blindfolds off." Malorie instantly demands Boy and Girl to not take their blindfold off. This is strictly blind faith. They don't know the man, they can't see the man, but their faith in humanity is gone and all they can have faith in, is themselves.

The birds represent hope, and the blindfold represents blind faith. The river was dangerous, had intense white waters. The man hollering at Malorie, Boy and Girl showed strength and adversity because they didn't believe what they heard, they believed their circumstances and the likelihood of the man being someone who could actually help them, not likely. That river was their road to freedom, so they thought. It inevitably was a symbol of precarious hope and of an unknown future because they weren't quite sure how it would end up. For God's sake it was not in their favor at all but they made it alive. Their purpose is survival, they do not want to end up like society and their loved ones. No one knows the future and life may throw out moments where we have an uncertain hope. Everyone goes through their own rough river, but what separates you from everyone else? Are you going to fall into temptation? Or are you going to have faith even when sometimes you can't see it.

Sandra Bullock's character changes orientation throughout the beginning, middle and end. A detailed examination of the way Malorie was developing throughout the movie was very noticeable in a sense where she evolved as a character and took 'Boy' and 'Girl' under her supervision to escape the presence. Starting from the beginning, the suicides are getting out of hand. Malorie tells two kids, Boy and Girl, that they are going to take a dangerous trip across the water, and she stresses how urgent it is that they keep their blindfolds on as they head outside. The rapids are harsh, the boat tumbles. Surprisingly they all survive—even the birds in the box. They get to shore and try to follow the sound of birds coming from the safe haven. Malorie, Tom, Boy and Girl are left trying to survive while it seems like their world may be coming to an end. The story moves rapidly from one safe hiding place to another, disrupting each of them in different ways, and keeping its central family on the move. Like so many other things about Malorie, it's a tactic that seems designed for the screen. The story doesn't get much downtime as it shifts from one setting to another.

Tom has been on the journey for 5 years now with their little group. Tom, the obvious leader of the group who frequently goes on missions outside of the home to gather supplies, takes care of them. This relieves Malorie and makes her feel some sort of love and connection she's been desperately needing. A new stage in life has brought Malorie a new perspective, but, one may argue that was it earlier when she began to protect her 'kids' – Boy and Girl. Finally after 48 hours on a deadly river and 5 years fighting off these creatures, Malorie, Boy and Girl make it to the sanctuary. Malorie decided to wholeheartedly name Boy, Tom after her romantic relationship with her Tom. Then named Girl, Olympia after her fallen friend who died from the creature after giving birth to the baby. Olympia mentioned to Malorie, "If something happens to me, I want you to take care of my baby okay?" Malorie's initial response was, "No no no its your

baby. Olympia made her promise she'd take care of her baby. "Malorie is ultimately afraid of allowing herself to openly love her children, for fear that she will make them too soft or that it will hurt too much when she loses them. She overcame all of this and showed the integrity in her character.

Conclusion

In conclusion *Bird Box* was one of the biggest post-apocalyptic horror thrillers this century. This movie was deeper than just the creatures. Everyone is so afraid of being alone that they don't open themselves up to be vulnerable. At first Malorie didn't want any sort of connection. The death of her sister Jessica by suicide, the constant movement and treatment she's been giving for the past 5 years dragged her down. She's realized the most beautiful gift we've been given is life. Boy and Girl was her family right from the start, she just had to accept it. Therefore, what "Bird Box," is saying is that the apocalypse comes from ourselves, we destroy our own minds. Bird Box sensitively tackles the question of mental health in society. It is perceived from those directly affected—the loved ones of those who committed suicide, to those who view it—who committed suicide by seeing the creature, and how those attitudes are communicated. Malorie keeps her feelings caged, but learns to have faith in things unseen.

"I told you to stay on the boat. You don't think! You do exactly what I say or you die. Do you understand me? If something happens to me do not try to help me. Forget about me and try to save yourself, do you understand? Say it!! If something happens to me what do you do?? You save yourself! SAY IT SAY IT. I can't trust you," Malorie yells at Girl after wandering off once they arrive on shore during the river trip. This kind of emotion was only one out of many examples I could have talked about. Malorie wanted nothing but cold blooded emotion but

inevitably it was her way of showing protection. People don't realize this was her way of coping. She mentioned to Olympia at the beginning of the movie that she was raised by wolves and she hated her father. Mental health is so important now, and even for our future generations. What this movie is about is that our mind can destroy us. Malorie fought over the hate and turned it into love in the end. She believed just because she was never loved, that she wasn't ready to love. Love, hate, and life itself have deeper meanings. Malorie proved to the audience life isn't about being happy, it's about controlling your emotions. She paved the way for the whole movie and gave us perceptiveness Netflix viewers and society can relate to.

Citations

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