

Approaches in Media Studies

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince Textual Analysis

For this essay, I will focus on textual analysis of the Harry and Hermione scene from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (dir. David Yates 2009), where Ron kisses Lavender, and Hermione runs away. This unique film's genre is fantasy. I will be going over the relevant stylistic elements discussed in class and in *Film Studies*, the textbook. The following stylistic elements that I will be going over include mise en scène: what the director put into frame/character placement, wardrobe/lighting, and set design; semiotics, cinematography, and sound. I will prove how these elements establish a certain mood throughout the scene: sadness.

Starting off with mise en scène, there is a lot to discuss. The director of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, David Yates, first places Ron in the camera frame alongside Lavender to establish that they are together. He then bounces back to Harry and Hermione to show their presence and again back to Lavender and Ron. The camera then cuts to Ron kissing Hermione and then back to a horrified look across Hermione's face. The placement of these characters in the room was crafted very carefully so that the audience could better understand what Hermione had just witnessed. This was done to establish the shock of sadness. The scene continues, and the characters are placed at the bottom of the steps inside another room of Hogwarts. This is important to notice because sitting at the bottom of the steps signifies that Hermione is at a low and not a high point. If Hermione were happier, it would make more sense for her to be placed at the top of the stairs with the rest of the world below her. However, Hermione is at her lowest point, and that needs to be shown with the level of the staircase she's at.

Moving on to another part of mise en scène: wardrobe. Wardrobe doesn't seem to be as important in some aspects because the characters all appear to be wearing normal clothing. However, it is important to distinguish that between all characters, Hermione is wearing the

darkest outfit out of everyone. The darkness of Hermione's clothes (and maroon shirt) is meant to hint at the darkness she is feeling after witnessing Ron (her crush) kiss Lavender. The lighting also plays an important part in the scene's mise en scène as well. The scene is dimly lit, like the wardrobe's colors, and it creates a feeling of sadness due to unrequited love. The quality of the lighting was low, as was its source, and one could argue that it follows some rules of low-key lighting as it used little fill.

The set design in this scene plays a crucial role in the overall mise en scène of it as well. While there is the establishing shot of the Gryffindor common room where Ron and Lavender kiss, which is meant to originally portray happiness and an attitude of upbeat energy, there is also the shot of the nearly empty corridor as well to contrast what is shown earlier. The nearly empty corridor shown before the steps Harry and Hermione sit at symbolizes loneliness and is left intentionally empty. Yates could've placed lots of extras on the scene, but stylistically believed it was left better empty-looking with only one or two extras in the far back of the screen. Yates also chooses to keep the long stair corridor that Harry goes down to find Hermione empty as well. These scenes of emptiness allude to the emptiness that Hermione is feeling. The long columns and old architecture of the Hogwarts castle also add to the scene's eerie atmosphere. Even at the end of the scene, a dark misty sky is shown along with snow, showing a contrast of something beautiful and light with something gloomy, much like the beginning of the scene contrasted with the end.

Moving onto semiotics, there was one clear and powerful symbol that relayed an interesting message in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and that was the birds. While Hermione speaks to Harry about how she feels, she also explains she is practicing a charm spell to explain the birds. The birds are meant to contrast how Hermione is feeling, as they symbolize

elements of peace, happiness, and love. One could also argue that the birds suggest freedom, as they are able to fly wherever, but Hermione is trapped. Hermione conjures up these birds to distract herself from what she is truly feeling. However, the truth of how Hermione is feeling is exposed when she sickens the birds on Ron and Lavender later on in the scene. She calls out “repugno,” and the birds fly to attack Ron and Lavender and quickly disappear as they angrily fly into a wall. The death of these birds symbolizes Hermione’s bitterness and sadness towards Ron, as she is attacking someone whom she cares about very deeply.

The cinematography in this scene is done well too. The colors that are used are dark and give the scene a cold feel to it. The camera movement is steady and smooth, as this is not an action sequence, but rather a moment to show the audience the emotions of the characters. The scene starts with a close-up of Ron grinning to show his victory with extras in the background and then moves to a medium shot of Harry and Hermione talking. Then, there is a zoom-out frame of Ron kissing Lavender, which quickly cuts to another medium shot of Harry smiling at his best friend and Hermione looking onward in horror. This is an example of the Kuleshov effect, showing how Hermione is upset due to the kiss. Flashforward to Harry and Hermione sitting together, where there is a medium shot of them to the right, and then the scene cuts to Lavender and Ron barging in on them from a medium shot on the left. The camera then zooms in on Hermione in a medium close-up while she stands before sickening the birds on Ron and focuses on her face before she collapses into Harry’s lap after Ron leaves. The scene ends with a view of what everyone’s doing in the castle from afar, like a drone shot, and fades into a mysterious view of the castle in fog and snow to show mixed emotions.

Another part of textual analysis is sound. The sound at the beginning of the scene was very upbeat and rowdy, as people were cheering for Ron and having a celebratory party for his

win on the Gryffindor quidditch team. However, the upbeat and cheery sound quickly changed and dissolved into a new non-diegetic song while Ron and Lavender kissed. The music became very somber-like, and one can hear the sounds of the harp and, later on, the flute and some violin playing in the background. These instruments, with high-pitched sounds, indicate that there is something of high emotional intensity going on and establish the lonely and upset feel of the scene very well.

All in all, this textual analysis of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, proves that it is an upsetting yet powerful scene to its audience as there is much detail behind every aspect of the scene. In short, the sadness of the scene is shown through the stylistic elements in textual analysis, including mise en scène: what the director put into frame/character placement, wardrobe/lighting, and set design; semiotics, cinematography, and sound.

Works Cited

Glyn, Davis,, et al. *Film Studies*. Available from: Yuzu, Taylor & Francis, 2015.

Yates, David, director. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. *Harry and Hermione - Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince [HD]*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2009, youtu.be/ucS3xMZcrHQ.