

## *Traumatic Grief*

Mandana Vahebi



*In this video essay, trauma is portrayed through the cinematic technique of Free Indirect Discourse (FID). The constant interchange between the camera's narrative perspective and the character's traumatic grief creates a blurred line that makes it difficult to discern a single, unified point of view. Consequently, FID introduces an artistic ambiguity that significantly enhances the film's artistic value. Watch the video essay here: <https://flowcasts.uni-hannover.de/nodes/zVbEq>.*

### Creator's Statement

Upon viewing *Manchester by the Sea* (2016) for the first time, I was certain that this is a deeply moving movie that explores poignant themes of grief, guilt, and redemption, providing profound portrayal of the intricacies of human emotions. Set against the backdrop of a small Massachusetts fishing town, Lee Chandler is shocked to learn that he has been named the sole guardian of his teenage nephew, Patrick, following the sudden death of his brother, Joe. As Lee reluctantly returns to Manchester-by-the-Sea, where his past and present collide, the film delves into his tragic backstory, revealing a life scarred by a heartbreaking loss, which led to his withdrawal from the world.

As Lee carries the weight of his inner traumatic grief, the flashbacks, with the help of the narrative, vividly and skillfully portray an ambiguity, that resonates with the audience. The viewer watches a series of scenes that seemingly present a neutral recounting of events from Lee's past.

However, they are aware of Lee's withdrawn attitude toward life and his grief. The vague realization revolves around whether the memory of the horrible past events is a matter of accepting them, merely reviewing them, or the protagonist's inability or struggle to overcome them. In employing flashbacks as an FID cinematic technique, the voice of a third-person narrator (camera) seamlessly blends with the thoughts or speech of the protagonist, Lee.

Although in literature FID is identified through textual elements such as narrative style, word choice, and syntax, in cinema FID is conveyed through audio-visual means such as camera angles, editing, sound design, and acting. Navigating this transition between mediums requires an examination of the art of expertly converting literary techniques into visual storytelling, reshaping the intricacies of inner contemplation into captivating experiences on the screen. My intention was to highlight cinematic scenes in *Manchester by the Sea* to demonstrate how traumatic feelings are skillfully blended with neutral representations by the camera, making it challenging to distinguish between the two. This purposeful blending of elements gives rise to a nuanced and rich emotional landscape, blurring the distinction between the character's internal struggles and the objective portrayal of events. Through the lens of the camera, the audience is invited to experience a more authentic and emotionally intense cinematic narrative. As a result, the ambiguity created by FID both sustains the viewer's curiosity and enhances their artistic cinematic experience. It makes the audience gain a profound appreciation for the film's capacity to depict the multifaceted nature of humanity, surpassing the boundaries typically associated with the conventional storytelling.

## Author Biography

**Mandana Vahebi** is currently pursuing a master's degree in North American Studies at Leibniz University. She holds a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from Arak University, Iran. Her academic interests span a wide range of fields, including cultural studies, transnationalism, poetics, affect studies, and media, film, and communication. In her current role as Associate Editor at the *In Progress* journal at Leibniz University Hannover, Mandana has applied her specialized skills in video essay creation to the addition of compelling and informative video content in the journal's latest issue.

## Works Cited

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- Ghaffary, Mohammad, and Amir Ali Nojournian. "A Poetics of Free Indirect Discourse in Narrative Film." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2013, pp. 269-81.