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### Maturation Through *Mise-en-Scène*:

#### Examining Character Development of the Doctor's Wife

The character exhibiting the most growth in Fernando Meirelles' 2008 film *Blindness* is the Doctor's Wife (Julianne Moore). Her identity is quickly established as secondary to her husband (Mark Ruffalo). By the end of the film, she firmly holds the lead role. In this essay, I will explore how the Doctor's Wife achieves autonomy and how it is signaled through *mise-en-scène*.

Little is explicitly stated about the life of the Doctor's Wife pre-pandemic; what we know is disclosed through her home's naturalistic *mise-en-scène*. She is introduced while serving her husband tiramisu (00:11:28-00:12:55). Her costuming is put-together but somewhat plain; she fades easily into the background. The dinner table blocking has the Doctor in the center of the frame as she flits around him in the periphery. Before the pandemic, there is only one scene of the Wife alone. The shot is indirect; we see her reflection in a windowpane, washing dishes. She glances at herself discontentedly, then sips her wine (00:12:56-00:13:09). This emphasizes her subordinate role. She is not given enough consideration to merit a close shot of her face.

The home has a quiet, dim atmosphere. The evening shots are warm but minimally lit. It is a cozy space but seems isolating. The home is significant because it is an extension of the Wife's character. We infer that the Doctor spends less time there. The character is preoccupied with work, even working late in his home office (00:13:10-00:13:55). In contrast, the Doctor's Wife does not have a stated occupation. Her role is domestic, as we see with the aforementioned

tiramisu. While the tiramisu functions as an instrumental prop, it is also a metaphorical prop. It reinforces her undervalued status. This is showcased by the husband's distracted mislabeling of the labor-intensive dessert (00:13:46-00:13:50).

After the pandemic hits, a change occurs in the Doctor's Wife. When the virus invades the home, the lighting becomes harsh and white. It is no longer a comfortable space. The blocking also changes when the Doctor announces he is blind. He is in focus until he admits, "I...I can't see." Then, the Wife gets a close-up while the Doctor fades to an out-of-focus medium close-up. (00:17:42-00:18:00) The admission of blindness reduces his role while emphasizing the newfound importance of the seeing Wife. The *mise-en-scène* is even more dramatic once the characters enter the camp. This ordinary woman transforms into an extraordinary one; the shift occurs in two parts.

First, her make-up and costuming become more plain. Her beige, shapeless clothing fades into the scenery, removing her femininity and individuality (00:44:33). Her humanity is further worn away in the scene where her watch, the object tying her to society and normalcy, loses the time (00:49:15-00:50:16). Through this loss of greater identity, it functions as another metaphorical prop.

A third metaphorical prop finalizes the Doctor's Wife's evolution. The pair of scissors is a catalyst for freedom. It indicates total autonomy for her character. She recognizes the potential of the scissors, and she stashes them of her own volition (00:58:58-00:59:04). By using the scissors to kill the King of Ward 3, the Wife takes control of the narrative.

When the Doctor's Wife finally returns to her home, she is no longer marginalized. The original *mise-en-scène* has changed. Now she is a focal point in her own dwelling. In the communal bathing scene, she is warmly lit; her character glows. The camera pans between three

women, but the Wife always remains fully in-frame (01:44:58-01:45:40). She is no longer alone and staring at her reflection. She gathers her makeshift family for dinner, guiding them through the table setting (01:48:12-01:48:49). Though she retains some domestic characteristics, she has a commanding presence. Her original, unappreciated traits have developed into a newfound authority.

*Mise-en-scène* is vital to understanding the character development of the Doctor's Wife. Each step of her transformation builds through careful, deliberate manipulation of what the audience sees. She finds strength within herself through the journey we watch unfold.

### Works Cited

*Blindness*. Directed by Fernando Meirelles, performances by Julianne Moore and Mark Ruffalo, Miramax Films, 2008.