

The following four-page essay is an example of an *A* paper turned in by a student. It provides thoughtful, detailed analysis of the film's visual and narrative elements, while using specific examples to support the writer's ideas. Some further formatting guidelines you should be following include:

- ~ Use specific, detailed examples from the film to support your analysis. This is crucial for writing successfully in this class.
- ~ Avoid using too much summary/exposition. Assume the reader (me) has seen the films, and understands them intimately (because I have, and do).
- ~ Dispatch of any review-type language (ex: The film is a blockbuster extravaganza!).
- ~ Do not ask rhetorical questions, and do not raise questions you do not attempt to answer. Also, do not talk about what the film doesn't do, but rather, what the film *does* do. Be critical and express your ideas.
- ~ Use *italics* for all film titles, i.e. *Citizen Kane* not **Citizen Kane** or Citizen Kane.
- ~ Do not qualify your analysis (ex: I think, perhaps, probably, sort of, etc.). Do not be afraid to make statements and support them with examples/analysis.
- ~ If you refer to a character in the film, research their name (as well as directors, writers, etc.). www.IMDB.com is a great site for information about the films (though not an outside source; see below).
- ~ Don't use quotes as stand-alone analysis, but rather, as support for your own thoughts about the films. I'm interested in *your* perspective, not someone else's.
- ~ Do not simply copy down the readings/interpretations of your fellow students during the discussion and pass them off as your own. If we talk about something in class, I expect you to elaborate with your own perspective to support.
- ~ Use present tense for film criticism (ex: *Citizen Kane* is a good example of... not, *Citizen Kane* was a good example of...).

You are also required to use **at least two** written sources to support your ideas in your papers. For each paper you are to use **a)** one of the chapters/essays read in class as a source, along with **b)** a source outside of the class materials that you have researched either in the library, or online. Wikipedia is not a source. In addition to your two written sources, you may also use other films as references. Be sure to cite your references appropriately using any citation method of your choosing (MLA Style, Chicago Style, etc.).

I do not accept physical papers, so please email all of your assignments to adam@apwadenius.com. Please send your paper in an editable format such as Microsoft word, Open Office, Text Edit, Notepad, or Pages. **No .PDF or .WPS files!** Adhere to standard formatting conventions (one-inch margins, 12 pt. font, double spaced, etc.). Your works cited page does not count as one of the 4-5 pages, and if you format your paper incorrectly (16pt. font, 2.5 spacing, etc.) I will simply reformat it as I'm grading and you'll be docked points for improper submission. Do not try to skimp on providing analysis. When saving your papers, format the file name thusly or I will not accept your paper:

Your Name_Class Title_Film Title_Paper#
Ex:
AdamWadenius_Film110_Citizen Kane_Paper#3

When sending your paper to me, format your email thusly, or I will not accept your paper:

Email Subject: Your Name_Class Title_Film Title_Paper#
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Email Subject: AdamWadenius_Film110_Citizen Kane_Paper#3

You are responsible for emailing me your papers by the start of class time on the assigned due dates. Upon receipt of your paper I will email back a response that I received it, and will email back your graded paper with comments, usually a week after I receive them. If I don't email you back, assume I have not received your paper, and re-send it to me. You are not bothering me if I receive your paper multiple times; it's better to be safe than sorry!

SAMPLE ESSAY

Choose one of the filmmakers we've discussed in class this semester, and provide an argument for him/her as an "auteur," in the terms that François Truffaut and Andrew Sarris describe the concept.

Visions of an Auteur: The Cinema of Paul Thomas Anderson

Directors and screenwriters have always quarreled over who is to be considered the auteur, or author of a film. In 1951, a monthly magazine entitled "Cahiers du Cinema" was established by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and soon its central critic Andre Bazin was declaring the director as the true auteur of a film (Bordwell & Thompson, 419). In the mid-1950's, Francois Truffaut's essay "A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema" argued the notion that only a filmmaker who wrote and directed his own script, could tout himself a "man of the cinema" (Truffaut, 12). In the late 1960's, American critic Andrew Sarris formulated what he called the "auteur theory", stating that a genuine auteur was one who used recurring subjects, themes, images, stylistic choices and plot situations, to promote a body of work with a distinct unity (Sarris ,32). By stamping his body of work with these specific elements, a filmmaker would then be expressing his own personal vision of the world, transcending the constraints of the classical Hollywood system. With only four films under his belt (*Hard Eight*, *Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia* and *Punch-Drunk Love*), filmmaker Paul Thomas Anderson has already established himself as an auteur in every respect of the word. Working as a writer-director of his own scripts, Anderson's films offer recurring themes and plot situations, expressed with a specific a style that is all his own. With these elements, Anderson's films express a unique personal vision, distinguishing him as one of the few auteurs working in the film industry today.

Though the plot lines of Anderson's films are distinctly different, common themes begin to emerge from within the text. Women are often objectified and occupy degrading positions in life. In *Eight* the single woman character named Clementine is a Las Vegas waitress who doubles as a

prostitute. She is repeatedly put in humiliating situations, where she is abused both verbally and physically. The women of *Nights* are porn stars and strippers working in an industry governed by men, whose only interest is to exploit their female bodies. Amber Waves is portrayed as an unfit mother to her child, and Rollergirl is a high-school dropout with no future; both women also abuse drugs. The most cutting example is Frank T.J. Mackey in *Magnolia*, who offers advice to men on how to pick-up, sleep with, and then dump unsuspecting women. Throughout his seminar he refers to women as “bitches” and “chicks”, and makes the repeated generalization that “all women are the same”. Barry Egan’s sisters in *Love* are never targeted for embarrassment themselves, however the continued abuse of their brother certainly demonstrates an unending level of cruelty, characterizing the women as coldhearted.

No marriage is stable in an Anderson picture, and fidelity is a virtue that often goes unobserved. Shortly after she’s married in *Eight*, Clementine is unable to resist temptation, and sneaks off to sleep with an overweight tourist in exchange for three hundred dollars. In *Nights*, Amber and her husband are separated and in a custody dispute over their son, while Dirk Diggler’s parents are constantly fighting with each other. Little Bill catches his wife cheating on him several times, driving him to shoot her and commit suicide. Both Jimmy Gator and Earl Partridge in *Magnolia* admit they were unfaithful to their wives, and Linda confesses that she was never in love with Earl, marrying him for the sole purpose of getting a big inheritance upon his death.

While a solid marriage may be unattainable, the quest for love is a common thread weaving its way through all of Anderson’s films. It is established early on in *Eight* that John has a romantic interest in Clementine, and despite her cheating on him, John continues to chase after her love. Scotty summons up enough courage to kiss Dirk in *Nights*, and Buck Swope repeatedly changes his style of clothes, hoping with each new look that he will attract a member of the opposite sex. Drug addiction does not keep police officer Jim Curring away from Claudia in *Magnolia*, as the

two find solace in each other through a blossoming romance, while Donnie Smith is willing to get unnecessary oral surgery to fulfill his distorted fantasy of being with Brad the bartender. Barry's peculiar nature and fits of rage in *Love* are not troubling in the least to Lena Leonard, as she is able to see through his troubled façade, and find the tenderness in his heart.

The most common theme resonating from Anderson's films is the mending of, and the establishing of new familial bonds. In *Eight*, Sidney has not spoken to his children in years, and John has lost his father at an early age to a gunshot wound while gambling in Atlantic City. The relationship that soon emerges between the two slowly evolves to that of a father/son bond, and is then threatened upon the realization that Sidney is responsible for the murder of John's father. Family ties are again threatened when John discovers his new wife Clementine is a prostitute, and has gotten herself into trouble with one of her johns. The emergence of a father/son bond is also present *Nights*, as the naïve Dirk is taken in by filmmaker Jack Horner, where the world of pornography soon becomes a surrogate home for him, away from the fighting of his parents. *Magnolia*'s Frank is on poor terms with his philandering father Earl, who abandoned the family while his wife was on her deathbed. Whiz kid Stanley Spector is pushed into a life of contests and game show appearances by his father, while TV Host Jimmy Gator struggles to mend ties with his drug-addict daughter whom he sexually molested, and loving wife whom he has been cheating on. In *Love*, Barry is continually berated by his older sisters, which has given him a distorted sense of self-worth, causing him to explode into violent outbursts during moments of stress.

While it is never clear which direction an Anderson picture will take, certain situations spring up in each of his films. Violent acts often arise in key situations, forcing characters to make critical life decisions. When Jimmy threatens to tell John that Sidney murdered his father *Eight*, he does so by breaking the car window and shoving a loaded gun in his face. Shortly after paying Jimmy six thousand dollars for his silence, Sidney breaks into his house and waits for him to

return, later shooting him and retrieving the money. This act of violence forever conceals the secret Sidney keeps from John, while maintaining the relationship that has matured between them. When Dirk, Reed Rothchild and Todd Parker try to sell a half of a kilogram of baking soda to a coked-up drug runner in *Nights*, gunfire soon erupts and Todd is killed in the process. This violent act leads to Dirk asking for help from Jack, reuniting the two as friends. A birthday party turns sour Barry and his family in *Love*, as he shatters a sliding glass window upon his sister's incessant teasing. Afterwards, he tells his brother-in-law that he's been having some troubles, and would like to talk to a psychiatrist. It is after this violent outburst that Barry begins to admit to his problems, taking steps to get help.

There is a moment at the end of every Anderson film, where certain characters realize that there is hope for the future. As John and Clementine are on their way to Niagara Falls in *Eight*, she leans over and puts her head on his shoulder, promising never to stray again. As they look into each other's eyes, this simple gesture conveys a sense of hope for their relationship. After stealing a bag full of cash during a botched robbery in *Nights*, Buck uses the money to fulfill his dream of opening a discount stereo outlet. At the same time, Rollergirl decides to go back to high school, Reed takes his shot at becoming a magician, and the Rodriguez brothers finally get a neon sign for their nightclub. Each of these characters has distanced themselves from the pornography industry, taking steps towards what is now a more optimistic future. Frank confronts his father Earl in *Magnolia*, finally venting all of his anger and love, while Stanley tells his father that he needs to be nicer to him. Officer Jim Curring retrieves his lost revolver, and goes to visit Claudia, expressing his desire be with her. As she turns to the camera and smiles, it is evident for the first time, that she and the rest of the characters in the film may finally have some comfort in their lives. The same sense of comfort is evident at the end of *Love*, as Barry and Lena hold each other next to the baby piano, their love just beginning.

When choosing a method in which to present his images to the viewer, Anderson utilizes a vivid, unconventional camera style. He is fascinated with complex tracking shots, using long, unbroken takes to follow characters through alleys, down corridors and into hallways. The camera follows behind Sidney as he passes through the casino in *Eight*, sweeping around him in a circle as he gets to the craps table, and again as he walks up the stairwell to the apartment where Clementine and John have taken the overweight man hostage. The camera makes a pass around the swimming pool in *Nights* just before it dives in, moving in and out of the water as a group of bikini-clad women frolic about. Little Bill walks into Jack's house and through several rooms, then back outside to his car to get his gun, and back into the house again where he shoots his wife and himself; all in one continuous take. *Magnolia* employs long takes during Frank's seminar and the game show sequences, and one scene follows five different characters down several hallways, into and out of an elevator, and through a large office space, jumping from character to character along the way. Barry makes several attempts to enter his parent's house in *Love*, the camera watching as he opens and closes the door a number of times, finally gathering up enough courage to walk through the dining room into the kitchen, and on into the living room.

Anderson is also adept with long static shots, used during moments of realization for the characters. Shortly after killing Jimmy in *Eight*, Sidney sits alone in the café smoking a cigarette. The camera holds on him, his face wrought with torment at having to kill again, yet alive with a slight smirk, knowing that the murder will seal his and John's friendship for life. Finding himself in the middle of a dope-deal gone wrong in *Nights*, Dirk sits in a quiet daze, his eyes dancing around the room surveying the increasingly dangerous situation. The events of his life pass rapidly through his head, and for the first time he recognizes the importance of where they have led him. The same is true for Frank in *Magnolia*, when Gwenovier asks him about his father. He sits motionless as she inquires about his childhood, confronting him with questions he hasn't the

courage yet to face. Claudia also faces these same fears when Jim comes to her at the end of the film, the camera lingering on her sulking face as he expresses his affection for her.

The Hollywood system in place today is a cold, highly impersonal machine, solely concerned with profit margins and gross earnings. Paul Thomas Anderson is a writer-director who is able to incorporate specific thematic, structural and stylistic elements into his films, creating a body of work that transcends these traditional Hollywood limits. In creating these highly emotional, personal visions, Anderson is able to thrive in the industry by challenging its conventional boundaries, establishing him as one of the few auteurs making films today.

Works Cited

1. Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. Film Art: An Introduction. New York; McGraw-Hill, 2001.
2. Sarris, Andrew. "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies. Eds. Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, and K.J. Shepherdson. 19-27. New York: Routledge, 2004.
3. Truffaut, François. "A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema," Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies. Eds. Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, and K.J. Shepherdson. 19-27. New York: Routledge, 2004.