

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FILM BOXING HELENA

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*Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to analyse the film *Boxing Helena* (1993), directed by Jennifer Lynch. The present paper relies on a psychological and psychoanalytical interpretation of the film, showing how the film is not, as understood by certain viewers and online community members, a horror film. It is, first and foremost, a film about romantic relationships and their psychology, more than about external incidents. Nick and Helena interact on a deep level to the point in which Helena psychologically challenges Nick about his relationship issues. The dreams and daydreams also occupy center stage in this film and in the interaction between Helena and Nick. The methodological framework is made up of psychoanalysis and psychology, suggesting the significance of this film lies in its psychological level.*

Keywords: Unconscious, psychoanalysis, dreams, daydreams, relationships.

The film *Boxing Helena* (1993) was directed by Jennifer Lynch. She also wrote the screenplay. We may start in our analysis from the reactions of the viewers, which are all the more visible and readily available in the online medium, in various communities where the film has been discussed throughout the years. We can see that this film is associated with a sense of nostalgia for the films that were created and available for viewing in the 1990s. The films from the 1990s come out, based on the viewers' opinion, as deeper and more thoughtful than the ones that are currently around nowadays. We may consider this a subjective opinion regarding the reflections on society and the clash of values between generations, which have become a usual and widely-spread phenomenon. At the same time, such discussions also give us access to the frame of mind and life situation of the viewers when they have watched this film just as it came out, on its 1993 release. Mindsets change, just like values change, and individuals themselves change according to the influence of the society shaping them in their formative years. We may thus judge films from one perspective or another, and remain starting with a certain age anchored in the times of our youth and formative years, as we may further on no longer take over other, completely different, values. As a result, the youths of the 1990s generation may see present films as too commercial and lacking deep meaning, as they cannot identify with the values promoted by these films and as they cannot resonate with the characters.

It has been considered, or implied, by its viewers, in various online Internet communities, to belong to various genres, to horror, thriller, and psychological film. Some viewers have mentioned, in their online community reviews, that they had expected a horror story and the ending, showing that it was all a dream, was from this point of view a disappointing one. They believed that here was the point where Jennifer Lynch, the daughter of David Lynch, famous for his thriller and horror films, had failed. In the film theatre, some users sharing this opinion, mentioned that everyone was disappointed that none of what had happened between Nick and Helena had been real.

Here, in this paper, we can express the doubt that if it had not happened for real, in the fictional world, in the waking state of Nick, it means that it is not a powerful story. While the external incidents may have all been a dream, the story retains its strong grasp on the viewers, or

at least on some of them, with respect to the interior, psychological reality. Our inner world can be just as powerful as our exterior world, and our emotions and actions in our dreams can have the same powerful impact when we speak of dreams as well. We are all familiar, after all, with dreams that make us experience very powerful feeling on waking up, and we still feel that the dream was real, or we start doubting, just as Nick seems to be doing, what has been real and what has been a dream. Furthermore, we can move on to the realm of psychoanalysis, which shows us how the unconscious contains wishes, fears, anxieties, anger, and various violent feelings which can make us feel horror at what we hide inside ourselves, and which become visible once we interpret our dreams using the psychoanalytic method. By using the psychoanalytic method, we reach the level of the unconscious meanings, which are able to make us feel the same as if we were watching a horror film. We can also consider that nightmares can be really disturbing dreams at surface level without any further interpretation in themselves. We can even get the feeling that nightmares resemble horror films to a large extent and, from this perspective, horror films can be considered to be inspired by nightmares and be derived fantasies and daydreams using similar contents.

By analogy, other online Internet community users have expressed doubt regarding whether or not the entire horror story of Nick the surgeon actually imprisoning Helena and amputating all her four limbs had been a dream. One user pointed out that the story may either have all been a dream, and that Helena had been taken to hospital by Nick and has all her limbs, or that he had dreamt that he had taken her to hospital when in fact he had retained her in his home as a prisoner and had actually amputated all her limbs even if this was not necessary from a medical point of view. Nick may have dreamt the horror scenes, or he may have dreamt that nothing of the horror scenes had actually happened and that everything was normal, when in fact it was not. The border between fiction, or fantasy (Freud, 1983), and reality is, therefore, ambiguous. Other users explained how they had felt that making it all seem a dream Nick had had was a means of playing it all safe, as a fantasy, and not as a reality, actually displaying violence towards a woman. At the same time, other users drew attention to the fact that in many films there is violence against women presented as entertainment, when in fact we should raise awareness to the domestic violence women are subjected to in relationships and not present in all light-heartedly.

From this perspective, the present paper will argue that the violence against women as entertainment is clearly not the purpose of this film. There is a deeper, psychological, in fact even psychoanalytic layer to the film which is related to the period of the Oedipus complex and the various derived unconscious wishes and drives. As viewers that are knowledgeable about Freud's psychoanalytic theories may be aware of, a young child witnessing his or her parents during a love scene or sexual act, or two adults other than his or her parents can lead to the respective child perceiving the sexual act as a sadistic act, related to violence and cruelty. At a young age, therefore, witnessing such an act can be a traumatic experience. Later on, as an adult, the former child may have certain psychological issues related to the fixations formed during the period of infantile sexuality and especially during the period of the Oedipus complex.

For this matter, still other users than the categories already mentioned, pointed out that the film was recommended to them as an example of film featuring the case of a character, Nick, having an Oedipus complex. Indeed, the film clearly shows how, for Nick, the image of Helena overlaps with the one of his mother, in his dreams, fantasies, and flashbacks from the scenes witnessed in his childhood. Both women behave towards him with indifference and hostility, and also both of them are very attractive and seductive, and enjoy getting all the male attention at parties.

The plot of *Boxing Helena* is usually summed up as involving a surgeon, Nick Cavanaugh, who kidnaps the woman he loves but who is not interested in him, and amputates first her legs having as a pretext an accident she was involved in, as she was hit by a car, and afterwards amputating her hands as well after they have a fight. Helena is presented by film descriptions as not having been that badly wounded to need the operation for amputating her legs. Nick took that decision in order to have as a pretext to keep her in his home. Helena fights against Nick verbally when she cannot do so physically, and gradually she softens towards him telling him she loves him, as viewers notice how Nick cares for her during all this time. Some viewers have suggested that in the end Helena gets Stockholm syndrome as Helena tells him she loves him and as she tells her former boyfriend Ray to leave Nick alone, and that she does not need his help.

However, this is a simplified and incomplete view of the film, to which we can find deeply underlying layers of psychoanalytical and psychological meanings. The actions of Nick are not surface-level ones, and he is not a stereotypical, one-dimensional kidnapper. There is a larger picture to the entire relationship dynamics between Nick and Helena, which does not stop at him chopping off her limbs and keeping her a prisoner in his house. This level, which could be the expected horror story level, left alone without other in-depth issues and layers, and consideration for underlying motifs, makes the story feel completely not worth watching. This was the mistake some viewers made when they took this level of the story to be the only one and considered the story not worth watching and especially disappointing once it was revealed that this entire story of Nick chopping off Helena's limbs was an illusion.

We may start, however, wondering why, even if it had all been such a dream, are the characters involved in it so deeply affected during the present moment at the hospital? Nick looks completely emotionally disturbed and Helena wakes up with tears in her eyes. The assumption of the author of this paper is that the accident Helena had been involved at Nick's estate had changed the relationship dynamics between them, in parallel with the interaction between them in the dream Nick had. An accident is, after all, a traumatic event, and it looks like it has been so for both Nick and Helena. As Nick had playfully taken Helena to give her back her purse after being late at the airport where she had asked him to give it back to her, and notices her address book is missing, Helena gets upset and wants to leave. She accidentally gets out in the road, where a speeding car hits her and the driver does not stop, running away. Likely, Nick feels guilty for the accident, as he had brought her there against her will, as he was hoping to make up with her, although she directly told him she was not interested in a relationship with him. He had, however, asked her to have lunch with him, hoping that he could be together in a romantic relationship with her. In doing so, Nick may have felt he had brought her by force there and had imposed his will on her. As she opposed him, she had an accident which he may believe would not have occurred if he had not brought her there. Some dream flashbacks are reexperienced by Nick as he watched Helena still sleeping in her hospital bed after a surgery that had taken six hours.

In the meantime, Nick had fallen asleep, likely from the drugs he had been taking with alcohol as he was running after Helena. Viewers are not told directly what those drugs are for, but they witness Nick taking them in moments when he is anxious or stressed. Next to the moment when Helena walked off saying she would be leaving from his house, Nick was also spotted by viewers taking those drugs with alcohol at the party as he was looking for Helena to see if she would come, meaning that she had accepted his invitation. As he watched Helena after surgery, Nick hears flashbacks from the scenes in his dream, such as the one where Helena reproaches him about what he had done to her, as she was sitting in a chair he had placed her on over a table surrounded by flowers, without arms and legs. Another flashback is composed of the words of

Helena's former boyfriend Ray who attacks Nick and reproaches him that Helena had been beautiful and he had turned her into a freak, to which Nick replied that Helena was still beautiful at the moment, and that her beauty did not belong to the past. Viewers may consider, as the author of the present paper does, that the dream showed and expressed Nick's feelings of guilt over the accident Helena had been involved in. He may have considered the worst case scenarios, as he had fallen asleep at the hospital waiting for Helena to be operated on, and wondered whether she would come out without limbs from surgery. At the same time, Nick may have considered a wish that Helena would come out of the operation after the accident with amputated legs so that she would be helpless and depend on him for care. In this way, he may have wishes and hoped that he could show her his love for her and that, in her turn, she would love him back.

Definitely the function of the superego, the moral instance in psychoanalytic theory, would make Nick guilty of such a wish, which is related to the id, of the instance which is related to our giving in to our wishes, pleasures, and various instinctual drives, including aggressive ones. Nick's ego, the instance which represented the self we are aware of, has to mediate in the case of Nick between id and superego, between his wish to have Helena as a lover, and his moral sense telling him that such a wish, including all its consequences with cutting off her limbs and taking her as a prisoner, is unacceptable from a moral point of view. Nick has a disturbed look and mood, suggested by the musical score in the film, as he goes to see Helena after her surgery. Viewers see her, together with Nick, with all her limbs. Nick only holds her hand as she still lies asleep and kisses it. He does not wait for her to wake up, likely from his feelings of guilt after having had that very vivid dream, which was clearly not only caused by the drugs he had taken, but by the workings of his unconscious mind. He does not wait for her to wake up and is not shown talking to her after the accident, a sign which can be taken as him feeling both anxious, afraid, and guilty about his unconscious contents that had been revealed to him in his powerful dream.

Previously, Nick had been presented as a hopeful young man, not having gotten over his love for Helena, and asking his friend Lawrence for advice over the phone over what to do to get Helena back. Lawrence had given him common-sensical advice, to stop seeing Helena even accidentally and to think about his current girlfriend, Anne. Nick had previously been watching Helena from outside and even climbing in a tree outside her window. When he realizes she is about to make love with another man, he runs away and phone Lawrence from a public booth. Another previous image of Nick is the playful Nick smiling as he goes by car to do Helena the favour she had asked from him to bring her her purse at the airport, watching her in the side mirror walking angrily and telling him he was late. Viewers see from his facial expressions and language of gestures he had done everything on purpose.

Here, in the last scene we viewers see Nick together with Helena, he is very serious and disturbed about not only the consequences of his actions, but also about the way he feels about these consequences. He seems to realize how serious the entire issue was, and how maybe he should have stopped chasing after Helena, who had clearly been rejecting him all along. In the meantime, Helena is portrayed in the last scene viewers see her, lying in bed, as dreaming or recalling the moment of the accident. She has no words, yet she sees Nick telling her everything is going to be fine, that he is with her, and also she sees him genuinely concerned about her and willing to do everything to help her. He goes with her in the ambulance to the hospital and asks the doctors to give her a perfusion since she had lost a lot of blood, and he also asks the driver to hurry up to the hospital. Helena wakes up in a meditative mood, likely having understood, as viewers like the author of the present paper can imply, that Nick had been very serious about caring for her. She was, likely, impressed by the way he had shown affection, care, and honest concern

about her after the accident, doing everything possible to help her by taking her to the hospital right away. We can notice the way in which both characters become more thoughtful after the accident, and this is implied simply by their body language and facial expressions. The tears in Helena's eyes on her hospital bed suggest she had been impressed by Nick's care for her, which had been much more than the concern of a professional doctor. Helena turns her head to the other side as she wakes up, likely searching for the presence of Nick, who is not there next to her. She may regret that she does not see him next to her in her hospital room. At the same time, we notice the presence of the rich and large floral arrangement at the head of Helena's hospital bed, seen from upwards, yet we understand it can be part of Nick's intrusion of fantasy and unconscious material, as it is related to his flashbacks from his disturbing dream.

We also witness, as viewers, the entire scene of Nick taking Helena by ambulance to hospital from her perspective. Previously, in the beginning of the film we had witnessed some scenes from the perspective of Nick as a child, to whom various adults at one of the parties held in his parents' home addressed. These filming techniques and perspectives show the way in which these moments are powerful and meaningful in the evolution of the characters. Helena may be dreaming a traumatic dream. Traumatic dreams are dreams that repeat themselves and which are related to scenes that have been part of the original traumatic experience. The scenes are likely presented as such, as they have occurred, since viewers find everything plausible. This is due to the visual exchange between the two at the time when Helena is soon hit by the car, and also due to the knowledge of the viewers about Nick's feelings for Helena. We can notice the look Helena gives, after seeing the car coming towards her, towards Nick, as if asking for help, even if it all happens so fast. No detail is left to chance in this film. The quick look Helena gives Nick as the car is about to hit her can already be considered a change in the relationship dynamics between them. Until then, Helena had argued with Nick and behaved haughtily with him, in a way similar to his mother as a young child. The look Helena gives as she is about to be hit by the car clearly resonates with Nick psychologically, as he later on has the powerful dream where he is taking care of her and where, at some point, tells her that he is all she has. Helena's look for help had clearly sparked a psychological reaction in Nick, a reaction powerful enough to be transposed into his dream.

Nick's dream is the one making up the surface-level plot of the film, of the strange interaction between Nick and Helena as Nick takes Helena into his home to care for her after the accident. After her accident, viewers witness the two of them relating in a confined universe, that of Nick's mansion, with brief interruptions from accidental interruptions coming from the presence of other characters, such as one of Nick's colleagues wishing to become chief surgeon in his place, Nick's girlfriend Anne, his friend Lawrence to whom he does not even open the door and from whom he hides, as well as a girl he makes love to in front of Helena, after she teaches him about romantic relationships and the way a woman feels while making love. The final interruption comes from the abrupt intervention from Helena's former boyfriend Ray who attacks Nick. Even this dream is not a one-dimensional, simple one, just like the plot of the film is as well.

The plot of the film cannot be briefly presented, since it relies on a series of highly meaningful scenes which include implied assumptions about the characters and non-verbal languages, as well as meaningful details for the action that is to follow. Nick Cavanaugh, a successful surgeon, after the death of his mother, inherits her rich home. It is the home where he had grown up, and from the image of this home his entire memories and psychological issues are presented before the viewers. The rich home, the mansion, becomes the central setting in the film,

where the main scenes of both Nick's childhood, which define him later as an adult, and of his adulthood take place, with a main focus on his romantic relationships.

In the beginning of the film, the image of the coffin let down in the hole is presented, as if we are looking at it while we are already below and watching it being descended from above. Such a scene looks as if belonging to a dream or to a fantasy. Nick has some flashbacks regarding scene with him as a young child looking at his mother behaving in a seductive way at parties at the mansion and being in the company of seductive men. She does not show much interest in her son and also not much affection for him. At some point, young Nick called her, using the word *mother*, yet she looks at him reproachfully, since apparently a child does not fit in the scene. At the same time, she looks at him reproachfully since the moment for him to interact with her is not appropriate, since she is talking to another adult at the party and, in fact, seducing a man other than her husband and his father. The non-verbal language in these scenes is highly meaningful. The child feels rejected, and we can also hear as viewers from a discussion between two ladies at one of the parties in Nick's childhood asking whose child he is and on the ladies claiming it was Mary's, his mother's, while another lady says Mary did not mention having any children, which suggests that she is distant towards Nick and maybe even hostile, judging from the scenes at the party. While his mother is socializing with another man, we also get a flashback of Nick's father, who also has no time for interacting with his son, as he is working in his office. His father is a surgeon, and Nick becomes a surgeon just like his father, and a dedicated surgeon for that matter. One of the guests at the party had told Nick as a child that he should work hard like his father in order to get anything he wanted later in life. Viewers may find this ironic, as in the meantime the wife is at the party seducing other men and seeking their attention. In turn, Nick as a young child does not receive affectionate attention from his parents or other adults, at least as we can witness from the flashback scenes. In another flashback, Nick recalls while he is sitting in the same place on the staircase his mother after an erotic meeting with a man who gets out of her room and she looks at him haughtily and asks him if he had been watching her, showing she had noticed.

As an adult, Nick is depicted out at a club during an evening celebrating with his friends a difficult surgery and there he sees Helena, about whom viewers gradually discover that they had been together once and Nick is still in love with her. He organizes a party and invites Helena, and shows interest in her, in spite of having a girlfriend, Anne, who works at the same hospital with him and who is also a surgeon. He had previously confided in his friend Lawrence about seeing Helena accidentally again and still having feelings for her. However, the matter-of-fact advice given by Lawrence cannot truly help Nick. There are significant scenes regarding Nick's not having gotten over the romantic episode with Helena. First, we witness him following her as a voyeur as she is about to start a love-making scene with her current boyfriend, Ray. Nick watches her in a similar way in which he had watched his mother making love with men other than his father at parties hosted at their mansion. Helena shows a similar behaviour, as she treats Nick with indifference at the party he hosts after becoming the owner of the mansion of his childhood. Like his mother, Helena engages in dialogue and further affairs with men other than him, such as his friend Russell. He watches her in the fountain scene, where she hands over to Russell, whom she had just met, her hair clip, her shoes, and her dress, as she walks in the fountain in her negligé to cool off, as the party is clearly held during summer. The scene is a highly seductive one, gaining the attention of Nick, as he is framed in-between his good friend Lawrence and his girlfriend Anne. Nick is then told by his friend Russell that he is going with Helena to spend time together, leaving his party. Anne witnesses the scene understanding from non-verbal language what is going on when it comes to the fountain scene, as Nick watches Helena and is clearly troubled by her, and

further on she asks Nick if he is sleeping with the woman he had invited to his party, the one called Helena. She also clearly notices how disappointed Nick feels when Russell tells him Helena is leaving. Anne also tells him she is leaving, and Nick has a moment when he performs a slip of the tongue, calling her Helena. Anne corrects him on the spot and is visibly hurt and angry at the entire situation. She also tells Nick that she is leaving his party. Nick whispers only for viewers to hear him that he tells her to leave if she is Anne.

Nick's friend Russell still seeks Nick's approval to leave his party with Helena, asking him if she is his girlfriend. Nick tells him that she is not and that he can go with her and have fun. It is during this time that Lawrence asks Nick what had he been thinking when inviting Helena, right before Russell appears, and when Russell brings Helena's purse which Nick had previously given him. Helena later on when at Nick's home asks Nick if what had happened last night had not been clear enough for him that she is not interested in a relationship with him. Nick still continues to hope that she would change her mind, yet the scene of the accident seems to change everything, in the attitude of both characters.

Viewers of the film notice how Nick's childhood had influenced him to be who he is at the present moment. We notice visible influences of his mother's behaviour on him and his current relationship issues. Helena can be considered a perfect copy of his mother, due to her attitude towards him and also due to her seductive attitude at parties. Various parallels between his mother and Helena, due to her attitude towards him make viewers realize the strong extent to which Nick's Oedipus complex has shaped him psychologically. In addition to Helena as an image of his mother, viewers can also consider Anne as an image of Nick's mother as well. Anne, through her looks, also reminds viewers and, likely, Nick as well, of his mother. She is also blonde just like his mother, and Nick's choice of her based on this criteria is definitely not random. What is more, Anne behaves in a motherly, kind way towards Nick on certain occasions, showing that she is, due to this image, the attitude Nick would have hoped for in his mother. Anne is worried about Nick when he does not show up at work at hospital for quite a number of days as he spends this time with Helena, taking care of her at his mansion. Nick isolates himself from the rest of the world at his mansion, not going out any more even to get the newspaper. We see his friend Lawrence gathering the uncollected papers by Nick at his door, as Nick hides from him and does not answer his calls.

Viewers notice that Nick becomes all the more lonely when he takes care of Helena as a patient after the accidents when she is hit by the car in his dream. The moment Helena is hit by the car marks the passage from reality into fantasy. Viewers become aware that something is wrong when the surgeon wishing to take Nick's place as chief surgeon at the hospital visits him and tells him, after he sees Helena, that he should have taken her to hospital given the state she is in and that she needs constant care. Nick tells him he loves her and that he is willing to care for her at all times, which is why he had given up his job at the hospital. Nick leaves viewers to understand, gradually, that he is not allowing Helena to leave his mansion and that she is a prisoner there, after he had amputated her legs. Viewers see, as an analogy, the image of a bird prisoner in a cage in Nick's home, struggling to get free. During the time, Helena accuses him telling that it is his fault that she is in the state she currently is, and rejects his help as he brings her a wheelchair and offers to help her to get into it. She throws things at him and is very angry. In the meantime, Nick continues to behave nicely to Helena, and even bring her flowers from his garden or from the florist's with messages as she is recovering. At some point, Anne comes to Nick's home, since she has the key, and gets inside, as she is worried about him and also about their relationship. Nick, who was having a romantic dinner with Helena, even if against her will, fights with her to keep

her quiet and to keep her from shouting after help from anyone visiting Nick. He tied her up as she is fighting with her hands and wheeling her wheelchair away from Nick. This is one of the moments when Nick makes Helena watch, while hidden in a room, how he makes love to another woman, in this case Anne. Nick fails and is angry, making Anne go away. Helena makes fun of him, argues with Nick, and uses her arms and hands to choke him, telling him she does not care about his feelings. Nick has a similar flashback with his mother doing something similar to him as a child. Later on, we see Nick exercising in his home and soon giving Helena her medicine in order to feel better. We viewers see her placed on a chair as if on a pedestal, with fresh flowers next to her, yet without arms just as well as without legs. Nick had done further surgery on her, it is implied, and amputated her arms as well.

The meaning of Helena's being left without legs and afterwards without arms can be seen through the significance of this as a way of making her helpless, as well as unable to both literally leave Nick and fighting him back. We can remember, as viewers, how Helena had walked away from Nick on various occasions, at the party and also while being brought by him to his mansion to visit him. Furthermore, she had used her hands and arms to move her wheelchair away from Nick in his house while arguing with him, and telling him nobody had even taken care of her and that nobody will in the future either, and before she had used her hands to throw things at Nick when she was angry over her amputated legs in her bed as a consequence of the accident, and afterwards to try to run away from him and to choke him. Nick amputates all of Helena's limbs in an attempt to quieten her and to make her stop opposing him. Even so, she still verbally attacks him, while in fact she depends on him for help. What strikes viewers is that Nick all the while is nice to Helena and keeps on taking care of her, in spite of all the not so nice words she addresses him. Even while viewers may believe what he had done, related to his surgery on her, is wrong, they can still see how he cares for her. All this places his attitude in a strange position. Nick cannot be completely condemned, yet also not be considered completely without guilt and condemnation.

Even so, the entire situation with keeping Helena inside the home and mutilating her cannot find a real-world correspondent. Everything looks unrealistic, since, in spite of the severity of the situation, the characters still behave as if nothing is fundamentally wrong. The relationships dynamics continues, with the characters fighting with each other. Helena continues to fight against Nick, reminding him how, when they had been together, she had had to tell him what to do while they were making love and that he had not been able to satisfy her. This clearly brings her in a patronizing position, while, at the same time, later on she starts giving him advice on how to make love to a woman, in a rather motherly and understanding way, showing viewers how she fits in his Oedipal pattern (Axelrod & Silverman, 2020; Cham & Vriesema, 2022; Simon & Gagonon, 1998) and image of a woman selected unconsciously for a romantic relationship. Previously, Nick had told Helena that he was all she had and if he shot himself, offering to kill himself with a pistol right in front of her, she would remain alone, as he was all she had. Helena, at this point, begins to soften, showing she does not want Nick to kill himself. Nick lies down on her lap for comfort, and daydreams or actually falls asleep and dreams that she still has all her limbs and is able to caress him on his head and hair in her lap, and then tell him and teach him how to behave with a woman when making love to her. Nick places Helena, now without any limbs, and no longer showing any opposition in a place from where she can see him making love to another woman. Online communities users have assumed the girl Nick makes love to in front of Helena is a prostitute, yet further on at the hospital as he goes to see Helena after the six hours operation he meets this girl in the elevator as a nurse, who smiles at him and greets him, yet viewers can tell she has some allusive remarks based on body language, making them wonder if the love-making scene to her in

his home had actually been real or not. She smiles knowingly and greets him with a touch of reproach, which could be due to her remembering the doctor not paying all his attention to Anne, her colleague at the hospital and, instead, to Helena, the patient. Likely, the nurse in the elevator would have been aware of how Anne had been pushed aside by Nick and would have sided with her. After all, viewers witness Nick being greeted by Anne who tells him he can find her later, as she had just come to see how he was, and as viewers understand he is worried about Helena.

While Nick does not interact with Helena after the accident, or so is implied due to what scenes viewers have access to, he does further on have dreams about her which seem to be traumatic and very intense dreams from which he is waking up at night. The replica of the Venus of Milo statue, the statue of a beautiful woman without arms, falls over Nick in his dreams, crushing him, and also the statue is destroyed in the process. Viewers had seen the statue before, when Helena had contemplated it as an omen when visiting Nick to get her purse and address book back. In the process of taking care of Helena after her accident, the statue loses not only its arms but also its legs, showing how it reflects the relationship Nick has with Helena. However, it is all a fantasy, as Nick only imagines it all and does not resort to the actual act of making her dependent on him, although he would have liked to.

Viewers see reflections of significant scenes in the previous moments before bringing Helena to Nick's home as a patient. The scene where Helena bathes in the fountain at his party is reflected in her and Nick getting wet as he pushes her wheelchair outside in the rain of the porch, provoking her to scream for help.

Viewers may also start thinking about other literary works such as *The Collector* by John Fowles, drawing parallels with how Nick imprisons Helena at his house, and also as she, at some point, asks him how he loves her, as a woman or as a possession.

Helena changes her attitude as she becomes a voyeur of her own will, after teaching Nick how to make love to a woman, in a half-real and half-fantasy scene. Nick makes love to a girl whom he and viewers recognize as the nurse in the elevator Nick meets as he goes to see Helena at the hospital after the six-hour surgery following her accident at his estate, when she had been hit by a car. Helena seems moved by the scene, where she mirrors the child Nick as a voyeur and falls completely for him. Since then, her attitude changes, and asks Nick to kiss her and he starts organizing a romantic evening. However, the boy from whom he orders the ingredients for Helena's favourite drink alerts Ray as they had agreed, and Ray is shocked at the state he finds Helena in. Still, she tells him she does not want his help. Viewers notice that Nick still finds Helena beautiful no matter what, and the attitude Ray has when he sees her without limbs reinforces the idea Nick had resented that all those men who had been involved with Helena did not have deep feelings for her, like him, who would love her no matter what. However, a statue falls over him, crushing him, and it is the statue that is the replica of the Venus of Milo. The statue can symbolize Nick's Oedipal complex which ends up by destroying him. He leaves, in this dream, Helena helpless, as she asks Nick to wake up since she loves him.

Viewers notice that both Nick and Helena have romantic relationship issues. Nick is afraid of women and of himself, as Helena notices and confronts him through their interaction as he keeps her at his place, while Helena grows indifferent to the men interested in her. Viewers can see the same indifference and disinterest she has in Ray as she had previously done with Nick. She argues with Ray and even shows him the way out of her apartment. Yet, Ray seems to echo her way of behaving as he himself tells her he is leaving yet he is going to the club to find another woman, as he implied by telling her he is going to the club to get laid. Helena, however, does not seem to care and order the ingredients for her favourite drink from a phone call with the groceries boy.

In the end, viewers notice how Nick confesses he still has those dreams, after the Venus of Milo crashes over him once more. He wakes up at night from his bed. Some viewers of the film had believed he was alone in his bed, while still others have claimed there was a woman sleeping next to him, who could have been either Anne or Helena. Still, nothing is certain. Nick goes to the statue and kisses it, seeing it, likely, as a symbol of Helena. The scenes Nick dreams about may have happened in reality or fantasy, yet viewers understand they are part of traumatic dreams, echoing Helena's own traumatic dream scenes about the accident. In support of a traumatic dream interpretation, Nick mentions in the end of the film that he is still haunted by his love for Helena. Yet, the pronoun *her* we can take to refer to Helena could also refer to the original, to his mother, of which Helena is a reflection, just as much as Anne herself is. The interplay between fantasy and reality is clearly visible in this film, just as the traumatic dimension is.

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