

Texas Christian University

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The Crowd: Teaching film as film
to help students visualize
literary techniques



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Common Visual Cinematic Techniques with Possible Meanings and Literary Connections

	Cinematic Element	Definition/Description	Often Used for/Connotation	Comparable Literary Elements, If Any
Framing	Long Shot	Main object(s) are seen in the distance and appear small on the movie screen.	Establish setting, show characters in relation to objects	third-person omniscient point of view
	Medium Shot	Shows a character from the waist up	Natural, "common in our real lives" (Golden 5). A neutral shot.	objective or third-person omniscient narration
	Close-up Shot	A shot in which the object or subject takes up most of the movie screen	Show emotion, identify viewer with character; subjective point of view (Golden 73)	subjective, first—or third-person limited point of view
Angle	Low Angle	The camera is located at a lower position than the subject.	Intimacy; establishes power; shows feeling of specific characters (Golden 61–62)	descriptive/ subjective narration
	Eye-Level Angle	The camera is positioned at the eye level of the actor.	"Neutral shot," emulates the way we usually perceive the world (Golden 9)	objective narration
	High Angle	The camera is positioned above the subject.	Intimacy, power dynamic (Golden 61–62)	descriptive/ subjective narration
Movement	Pan	The camera "pivots along a horizontal axis" (Golden 12) without moving from its original location.	Camera movement cues us that we are watching through a certain point of view (Bordwell and Thompson 245) and emulates the movement we make in daily lives, bringing us closer into the narrative of the film.	subjective point of view, builds suspense or increases emotion
	Tilt	The camera moves along a vertical axis, as if it were following someone moving up and down a ladder.		
	Zoom	The camera lens changes so that an object appears to grow either larger or smaller (take up more or less space) on screen.		

Lighting	Low-key/Side Lighting	A small source of lighting is used, characterized by the presence of prominent shadows	Suspicion, mystery, danger. Suggests characters that are evil, hiding something, morally ambiguous, conflicted	mood, atmosphere
	High-Key/Front Lighting	An even light source and few shadows, as in a office building	Honesty, nothing to hide, lack of threat.	
Editing	Fade	"The image on-screen slowly fades away", the screen blackens until the next shot fades in.	Makes a connection between two objects or characters	Analogy, simile, metaphor, juxtaposition, irony
	Dissolve	One image fades out as another image fades in so two images are on the screen briefly at the same time.		Mood, can create irony.
	Crosscut	Also known as parallel editing; the director cuts between two different episodes.	Builds suspense	Tempo, pace
	Eyeline Match	Begins with the shot of one character looking in one direction, presumably looking at something, cuts to whatever the person was looking at, cuts back to show the character's reaction.	Can reveal thoughts	Internal monologue

Muller, Valerie. "Film as Film: Using Movies to Help Students Visualize Literary Theory." *English Journal* Vol. 95.No. 3 (2006): 32-38. Print.

The Crowd Background

The Crowd (1928) is a genuine, immortal, timeless American silent film masterpiece from director King Vidor, whose earlier big WWI epic *The Big Parade* (1925) had been a major box-office hit for MGM studios. It was shepherded by MGM's "Boy Wonder" producer Irving Thalberg, although studio head Louis B. Mayer hated the film. This experimental, social commentary movie, with a screenplay by King Vidor and John V.A. Weaver, was remarkably different from other feature films of its time because of its non-Hollywoodish reflection of daily life. [A record of sorts, it was the first US feature film to show a bathroom with a toilet bowl.]

With a novice actor (James Murray) in the lead role, the film was simply a realistic, bittersweet drama of the existence of an ordinary common and average American (an Everyman prototype embodied in a white-collar worker) trying to make it with his wife in the monolithic big city - but without any maudlin sentimentality, extreme passion, exploitation of romance, or escapist melodrama. Harsh reality intrudes as he experiences cramped living conditions, a boring job, and a limited life with regret and bitterness, rather than what he had expected.

Vidor's natural and uncompromising film tells the episodic, poignant story of the working and domestic life of an average, commonplace man in 'the crowd' - John - with his wife Mary (played exquisitely by the director's real-life wife Eleanor

Boardman), chronicling their ups and downs, including their meeting, courtship, marriage, and family life. The director also cast a virtual unknown newcomer to the role of the husband in his candid view of the average man - a character lost in the midst of the faceless masses. The film's director refused to pass judgment on the harsh realities of life for the workaday couple, either by condemning or celebrating the gloom of the bleak tragedy befalling them. Instead, in this social problem drama, he visually and eloquently captured their believable human struggle as they lived their unidealized lives and confronted disappointing setbacks, the tragic death of their daughter, dashed hopes and brief triumphs, and eventually found comfort in the anonymity of the masses, watching an unfunny theatrical clown act in the film's conclusion.

To capture the authenticity of the city, the director sometimes used a 'hidden camera' in his on-location shoots in New York. Stylistically, the film, in various places, resembles the German expressionist films of F. W. Murnau and Fritz Lang, although it also uses fluid and natural camera movements. King Vidor received an Academy Award nomination as Best Director, and the film itself was nominated as Best Unique and Artistic Picture in a short-lived award category, where it was defeated by Fox's and F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927). *The Crowd* was very influential for a number of directors, including neo-realist Italian director Vittorio De Sica (and his landmark *Bicycle Thieves* (1948, It.)), and director Billy Wilder's Oscar-winning drama *The Apartment* (1960).

Six years later, Vidor independently produced and directed a 'talkie' sequel to *The Crowd* (intended as part of a film trilogy) titled *Our Daily Bread* (1934) — it was a Depression-Era, hard-times social drama about an idealistic man who was running a farm cooperative organized as a socialistic society—in the country away from the crowd.

The Story

Opening of *The Crowd*

The film's opening title heralds the celebration of July 4th in an anonymous town in the year 1900:

The nation on holiday! Fireworks! Parades! Picnics! Celebrating America's 124th birthday! - but what was a little thing like the Declaration of Independence compared to the great event happening in the Sims household?

In an upstairs bedroom where a midwife and family doctor attend the hero's birth - a startlingly-realistic scene - the doctor lifts (feet-first) a naked baby boy from its mother's bed and slaps it twice on its bottom. The infant is wrapped in a blanket and brought to the arms of its proud, elated father:

There's a little man the world is going to hear from all right, Doctor. I'm going to give him every opportunity.

To illustrate time passing, a row of dominoes—each marked with a year—are toppled over, from 1900 to 1912.

Johnny Sims reached the age of twelve. He recited poetry, played piano and sang in a choir...so did Lincoln and Washington!

Eight male school friends sit perched on a fencepost and talk about their futures, many of which are already mapped out for them—even so, young twelve year old Johnny is confident of his prospects:

White boy: *What are you gonna be when you grow up, Whitey?*

Black boy: *I detend to be a preacher man! Hallelujah!*

Nerdy-looking boy: *I purpose to seek occupation as a cowboy.*

My Notes, Answers, Questions

What is the significance of opening the film on July 4, 1900? Why so many people going by the house?

Why open with the birth of the main character?

Why make the scene so realistic? What do the surroundings tell us about the family?

Is this the same hope for all families?

Why use a row of dominoes instead of a calendar?

What is the significance of the comparison to Lincoln and Washington?

Why use stereotypes here? What makes us sense that they all get along with each other?

White boy: *How 'bout you, Johnny Sims?*

Johnny: *(Me?) My Dad says I'm goin' to be somebody big!*

A horse-drawn white ambulance wagon pulls up in front of the Sims house, bringing an abrupt catastrophe to the boy's youth:

Jimminy crickets! It's stoppin' at your house, Johnny!

An inquisitive crowd gathers outside as men carry a stretcher up to the second floor. To accentuate the claustrophobic, narrow corridor of the home's staircase, the camera is placed in a fixed position at the top of the stairs for the sustained shot. No longer confident, Johnny is a tiny figure in the long, tapering confines of the boxy entryway with walls that stretch away—he is painfully overwhelmed by the funneling void of his familiar flight of stairs. He leaves the people crowded and huddled at the doorway and tentatively starts the long climb up the steep steps to the top - to his questionable future. At three-quarters of the way up, he pauses - a female relative from above comes down to him, cradles him, and tells the newly-orphaned boy of his father's premature death:

You must be brave now, little man...like your father would want you to be.

When John was twenty-one he became one of the seven million that believe New York depends on them.

To bravely face his future, claim his birthright and seek the dream his father always wanted for him, 21 year old John rides the ferry to New York (Manhattan) with his name-labeled suitcase under his arm—at the ferry railing while looking at the skyline, a gaunt passenger cynically and ominously warns the naive yet ambitious young man of the depersonalized metropolis and the myth of advancement there:

Passenger: *You've gotta be good in that town if you want to beat the crowd.*

Johnny: *Maybe...but all I want is an opportunity.*

In his sobering search for fame and fortune, John is immediately submerged in the new capitalistic, uncaring environment - with its massive confusion and overpowering size. The montage of the hustle and bustle of the city symbolizes how engulfed, surrounded, isolated and insignificant he is - everything is shot from his point of view. [High skyscrapers and traffic in a bustling, crowded city was a novelty in 1928.] From a high angle, crowds of scurrying pedestrians cross the city block at W 45th. Cars and bus traffic overwhelm the thoroughfare. An endless movement of people, cars, vehicles, and elevated trains speed by. Smokestacks spew plumes of white smoke from skyscraper tops and from tugboats in the harbor. The camera moves further and further back to encompass the exhilarating scope and vastness of the city, filled with beehives of workers. Then, aimed at the top of a tall office building, it rotates in a dizzying clockwise turn.

One of the greatest impressionistic tracking shots in all of cinematic history begins at the street level. The majestic shot tilts upward and smoothly travels up the flat outside surface of a stone wall of a multi-windowed

What is the effect of the cut to the speeding ambulance right after Johnny speaks?

What is the significance of a "crowd" here again. Why such chaos?

Note the position of the camera in this sequence. What effect does this have? What is the effect of the crowd at the bottom of the stairs? Why have the boy climb the stairs alone? Why does the progress up the stairs make us question the boy's future? Note the angle that the camera sees.

What is the effect of the close-up on the boy?

What is the irony of this statement? What hint does it give us about his future?

What is the significance of the differences in the two men—**note** attitude, stance, clothing, and facial expression.

Note the passenger's reaction.

How does this montage of people make us feel? What hint does it give us about Johnny's future? As you watch this scene be aware of the movement of the camera and the effects that the movement creates.

skyscraper - one of many in the city. Suddenly, the office building rises and straightens up outside one floor, and transports the viewer directly into one of its windows. In a dissolve, the camera slides through the window into a large room filled with a monotonous criss-crossing of hundreds of rows of identical office desks and workers. The camera sweeps across the infinite sea of toiling, anonymous and faceless, business-attired insurance company paper-pushers until it zooms in on our hero - one of many wage-slaves seated amidst hundreds of other obedient and cowed clerks. Another faceless victim of the city, John Sims' (James Murray) desk is labeled (in close-up): "John Sims 137." [In *The Apartment* (1960), director Billy Wilder paid homage to this image of a sea of desks in parallel rows for anonymous workers.]

He has in his hand a torn newspaper ad with an offer for "One Hundred Dollars Cash Prize" if he can win the product-naming contest for the Sylvania Oil Company in New York: "GIVE US A NAME FOR OUR NEW MOTOR FUEL." A few of his clever, inventive ideas are 'Petrol-Pep' and 'Jazz-o-lene.' Impatiently, he watches the wall clock - it is a few minutes before 5 pm. His life's comings and goings are dictated by the giant time-piece. When the minute hand moves to 5, the automaton workers leap up and scurry away from their desks for the exit and swarm through office doors. In the washroom, the likeable young office worker freshens up and combs his hair, and is aggravated when told identical things by four different colleagues:

"Washin' 'em up, Sims?", "Takin' a wash, Sims?", "Scrubbin' 'em up, Sims?", and "Chasin' the dirt, Sims?"

You birds have been working here so long that you all talk alike!

His buddy Bert (Bert Roach) proposes a double date to Coney Island:
Bert: *I've got a pair of wrens dated up for Coney Island. Want to make it a four-some?*

John: *Nothin' doin', Bert! I'm studying nights!*

Bert: *Aw, come on! These babies have got what ain't in books!*

John: *Well, I'll try anything once...but I ought to study.*

They join the steady stream of regimented office workers in the hallway who descend in a packed elevator to the lobby and eventually to the stream of humanity swarming from the building into the street.

John: *You know, Bert...forgetting studies once in a while is good for us business men.*

Elevator operator: *Say, You! Face the front!*

John: *This night-life is my speed, Bert Old Bean! We gotta do it often!*

Revolving doors from another office building spit out 20's flappers to awaiting gentlemen. John's blind date, who is a friend of Bert's girl friend Jane (Estelle Clark), is named Mary (Eleanor Boardman) - she is a plain-dressed, no-makeup, dowdy, gum-chewing stenographer:

Jane...John! John...Jane! Mary...John! John...Mary!...

How does this sequence of shots influence our impression of the city and Johnny's relationship with "the crowd"?

Compare the windows on the building with the rows of desks.

What is the effect of this close-up after all of the longer shots?

What is the significance of him working on this instead of his job? Notice the others are working. Does the "clock" still "rule" us?

Note the crowd in the mirror.

Does this still occur in society today in groups of people that work/study/play together? Why?

The language has changed over the years, but has the attitude toward "dating" changed? Can you think of examples in your own life?

Notice the attitude/dress/etc. of the workers. Look familiar? The dress may be different today, but what about attitude?

What is the significance of the operator's command? Why does John obey?

Look familiar? After class? After school? After work?

Notice John's reaction to meeting Mary. He starts making jokes. Why? Do we still react this way sometimes?

<p><i>Come on, Romeo! Save something for the moonlight!</i></p> <p>To escape the confines of the city, they ride on the top of a double-decker bus, taking the spiraling access way up the back of the bus to get there (with a few tasteless gags about peering up their dates' dresses). There, John has a new perspective of himself from the bus' lofty heights:</p> <p>John: <i>Look at that crowd! The poor boobs...all in the same rut!</i> Bert: <i>Cut out the high-hat, John! Do your stuff!</i> John: (to Mary, after putting his arm around her) <i>I get a pain in the neck from most people...but you're different.</i></p> <p>They pass a down-and-out juggling clown on the busy street, with a sandwich board sign plastered on his front: "MAKE YOUR FEET HAPPY - Buy Your Shoes at Brockton's" - John, a cocky showoff, mocks the job of the man - a foreshadowing of his own decline:</p> <p><i>The poor sap! And I bet his father thought he would be President!</i></p> <p>John is well-suited for his date, and their relationship begins on a positive note. The foursome reach the Coney Island amusement park where they joyously ride the roller coaster, the barrel roll, the spinning wheel, the slide, the merry-go-round, and the dark tunnel of love—where the men are expected to make romantic moves on their dates:</p> <p>John: <i>Sit down! You don't look historical....you look hysterical!</i> Jane: (to Bert) <i>Say, am I ridin' with you...or wrestlin'?</i> Mary: (after John overwhelms her with many kisses) <i>Gee...I oughtn't to let you kiss me.</i></p> <p>On the crowded subway ride home, Bert hasn't fared well with Jane, <i>You big egg....can't you read?</i> Jane points to No Smoking sign. Bert: <i>It doesn't say positively!</i> but Mary is sleepily curled up in John's arms. A subway advertisement for a furniture company in Newark, N.J. sparks an idea in John's head: "YOU FURNISH THE GIRL - We'll Furnish the Home!"</p> <p><i>Mary, let's you and me get married.</i> (She wakes up and stares back at him.)</p> <p>The next scene opens with a fade-in on a pan down a railroad sign for "The Niagara," a special train which departs at 8:30 pm for the destinations of: "POUGHKEEPSIE, HUDSON, ALBANY, SCHNECTADY, UTICA, SYRACUSE, ROCHESTER, BUFFALO, NIAGARA FALLS." Well-wishers throw rice and carry a "Just Married" sign. John and Mary are leaving Grand Central Station on a sleeper train bound for Niagara Falls for their honeymoon.</p> <p>Bert: (to John) <i>Don't forget to pull down the shades!</i> Mary: (to her mother - played by Lucy Beaumont) <i>Don't cry, Mother! This isn't my funeral!</i> (to her brothers Jim (Daniel G. Tomlinson) and Dick (Dell Henderson) <i>Jimmy, you and Dick stay home nights with Mom...like good brothers, won't you?</i> Bert: (cynically and nonchalantly, after they have left) <i>Well, I'll give them a</i></p>	<p>Comparison today? Use of cell phone cameras? We still see "the crowd" on and off the bus. Significance?</p> <p>Irony? John just came from that crowd. How can he know this? He just met her.</p> <p>Make a note about the clown. We will see this again. What does it represent?</p> <p>Why is this ironic?</p> <p>Why a date at an amusement park? What is suggested about life by the rides they go on—roller coaster, barrel roll, spinning wheel, slide, merry-go-round, moving walk, tunnel of love?.</p> <p>The four of them are "caught" by the crowd. Significance?</p> <p>Contrast the two couples.</p> <p>Events move faster in movies, but does this actually happen in real life sometimes?</p> <p>Another crowd.</p> <p>Why does Bert say this? Notice Jane's</p>
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<p><i>year...maybe two.</i></p> <p>In their sleeper compartment, the two newlyweds discuss their dream Model Home as they view a magazine ad. Idealistic and confident, John boasts enthusiastically that he will work his way to the top:</p> <p><i>That's the home we're going to have, Honey...when my ship comes in.</i></p> <p>The sequence in the sleeper accentuates, in a tawdry, predictable way, their embarrassment and reluctance about retiring together on their wedding night.</p> <p>Passenger: <i>From the way he's dolling up....he must expect to walk in his sleep.</i></p> <p>Notices rice: <i>Ah! The secret is out!</i> Picks up book <i>What A Young Husband Ought to Know</i></p> <p>John: <i>Mary! It's me!</i></p> <p>Eventually, they find their way into the same berth for the night.</p> <p>The next scene is a full panoramic shot of Niagara Falls where the roaring water cascades over. The happy couple breathlessly climb up the edge of the precipitous cliff in front of the plunging, relentless flow of water - there on a tiny plot of grass, he spreads out a blanket for a picnic lunch and takes a few snapshots of her posing in front of the raging falls. Rapturous, Mary lies back in the grass - John joins her and they lie together in a tender moment of embrace and promise:</p> <p>John: <i>You're the most beautiful girl in all the world! My love will never stop, Mary. It's like these falls.</i></p> <p><i>"CHRISTMAS EVE - Home, Sweet Home."</i></p> <p>Their dream house turns out to be a cheap apartment next to the noisy, elevated train (but with indoor plumbing and a toilet) - [the first American film to show such an appliance], John mindlessly strums on his ukulele without a care in the world:</p> <p><i>Wife and I are happy And everything is swell; It's heavenly inside our flat But outside it is EI!</i></p> <p>Mary: <i>Will you put the folding bed in its garage?</i> To conserve space in their cramped flat, their bed is hidden in a compartment in the wall during the day.</p> <p>On the occasion of the newlyweds' first Christmas Eve with Mary's relatives, she is cooking a Christmas turkey dinner:</p> <p>Mary: <i>Mom and the boys will be here soon. Better get ready...it's after six.</i> John (the doorbell rings): <i>You'd better answer. They're your family.</i></p> <p>Mary exchanges gifts with her dour-faced, hard-of-hearing mother and brothers Jim and Dick, while John delays in the bathroom - reluctant to</p>	<p>reaction.</p> <p>Why the use of comedy here? What does it achieve?</p> <p>The cramped space in the sleeper foreshadows their cramped apartment.</p> <p>Symbolism of the waterfall? What could the act of climbing up to the edge represent?</p> <p>We still "document" events today. Note the "eye" of the camera.</p> <p>Back to the waterfall and rushing water.</p> <p>Note the door keeps opening. Lack of privacy in small space.</p> <p>We don't see the family right way—just the bell ringing. Why? John's comment reveals possible tension.</p> <p>Note picture Mary is given.</p>
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<p>meet her folks who think he's a wastrel.</p> <p>Mary: <i>Aren't you going to kiss Mom?</i> <i>Johnny's invented another new trick. Coax him to do it for you.</i></p> <p>John: <i>It isn't much....just breaking my arm.</i> Dick: <i>He says he's goin' to bust his arm, Mom.</i> John: <i>That's it.</i> Dick: <i>That's what?</i> John: <i>The trick!</i> Mother: <i>Before you attempt any more tricks, young man, I'd like to know if you got your raise yet.</i> John: <i>No...but everybody tells me my prospects are good.</i> Jim: (spoken into his mother's right ear) <i>He says, 'No' ...as usual.</i> Dick: (spoken into his mother's left ear) <i>He says he has prospects...as usual.</i> Jim: <i>Wipe the soap off your ear!</i> Jim: (spoken into his mother's right ear) <i>Soap on his ear...from shaving.</i> Dick: (spoken into his mother's left ear) <i>Probably from yesterday.</i></p> <p>John's stash of alcohol is depleted (he recovers an empty bottle of bootleg hidden under the bathtub in their bathroom) John: <i>It looks like the plumber has been here again.</i> Mary: <i>Maybe Bert has some.</i> Mary: <i>Forget something</i> Mary: <i>Careful, dear! Don't slip on the ice!</i> John: (boastfully) <i>Don't be foolish! Why should I slip on the ice?</i> He slips down the front steps as his wife expected him to. Mary: <i>Don't slip, dear!</i></p> <p>He runs to Bert's place. There, a flirtatious young lady in a party mood bolsters his self- esteem as she flings herself at him for a dance: <i>Oh, Gee, Baby! How did the angels ever let you leave Heaven? Gee, but you're a great, big, good lookin' some-account man!</i></p> <p><i>Show me the way to go home I'm tired and want to go to bed.</i> Bert escorts his singing, drunken friend back home late that evening after everyone has left: Bert: <i>Somethin' you ate no doubt.</i> John: <i>S'no doubt.</i> (He gestures toward his place) <i>S'my castle.</i></p> <p>John tiptoes into their living room/bedroom where Mary is already in bed—without turning her head from her pillow, she shoots him a look with her eyes. He excuses his tardiness with a lame explanation:</p> <p>John: <i>Looked all 'round town. Couldn't find a drop.</i> (With a contrite look, he glances around.) <i>S'Mom and the boys went?</i> Mary: (with love and understanding) <i>They don't understand you...but that doesn't matter.</i> John: <i>Do you understand me?</i> Mary: (She sympathetically smiles at him) (I think I do.)</p> <p>He walks over to the table where he gathers up three gift-wrapped presents for her. With his back to her, he glances at the small tokens of his love, and clutches them to himself, realizing how inadequate they are to</p>	<p>Why the use of comedy again?</p> <p>Why do we have this "unfunny trick" here in the story?</p> <p>How does this sequence reveal how inept the family thinks John is?</p> <p>Why does John suddenly think of serving drinks?</p> <p>Why does John quickly decide to visit Bert?</p> <p>Slip has more than one meaning here. What are the possible meanings?</p> <p>What could the revolving record represent?</p> <p>Why the comedy again?</p> <p>Does Mary understand John? Why or why not?</p> <p>Why does John appear sad about the presents he has for Mary?</p>
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express his affection for his unconditionally-loving wife. In the scene of poignant, romantic realism, John takes the gifts back to the bed - she opens the long skinny one first - it's an umbrella:

John: *You're a wonderful little woman.* (She raises the umbrella in the room - he criticizes her for the impropriety of her action and snatches it from her.) *Whuzza idea...always doin' somethin' wrong?*

Mary: (They quarrel lightly) (...It's mine, give it to me. It's my umbrella. It's mine.)

"APRIL."

In their cramped, inadequate, dingy apartment next to the elevated train, many minor imperfections and annoyances (a faulty toilet, an unhinging door, an uncooperative hideaway bed) begin to produce mounting frustration in John's attitude toward their average, bleak, middle-class life. His unfulfilled ambitions cause him to childishly blame and chastise Mary for every break-down. He holds onto an unrealistic dream that one day, he will be a perfect success:

John: (regarding the toilet) *Why didn't you tell me this was busted?* (regarding the door) *You've got this on the blink, too! For the love of Mike, will...will - will you please have that darned thing fixed today? Nothing works right around this place!*

They flip a kitchen cupboard door back and forth at each other, and miss passing a plate of bread between them - it crashes to the floor: "*Why didn't you take it?*" asks Mary. The pressure and antagonism of their marriage impacts their ability to communicate. At the early morning breakfast table, John winces when Mary accidentally squirts him with grapefruit juice. He complains about her dowdy, unkempt, drab appearance, and she is unjustly criticized for the problems they experience during their expanding domestic quarrel:

John: *Your hair looks like Kelcy's cat!* (He cruelly thrusts the sugar spoon at her when she can't locate it.) *Can't you do anything for yourself?* Mary: (She rises from the table, upset.) *I'm getting sick and tired of you always criticizing me!* John: *Forget it, Mary! I'll overlook your faults!* (He sprays himself with milk when he pops open the glass bottle - he explodes with exasperation) *Why can't you tell me when things are full?* Mary: *You'd try the patience of a Saint!* John: *You're no soothing syrup yourself!* Mary: (It's not my fault.) John: (As he bolts to the door to leave for work.) *Take it from me, marriage isn't a word...it's a sentence!*

Fed up and exasperated with his incessant, harsh, unsparing negativity, she hurriedly packs a bag with her clothing: "*I'm leaving!*" she threatens. He gestures that it's fine with him. For a long moment (in one of the film's long takes), she is stunned - she stands staring at the door he has just slammed behind him. Grief-stricken, she begins to tremble and weep over their constant, tedious arguments, bickering and unhappy marriage. As she moves her hands over her face and down her body, she remembers that she is carrying the beginnings of life within her—in a simple yet subtle pantomime (without titles), she delicately communicates that she is pregnant with his child and has forgotten to tell him. She halts him from

Why does John criticize Mary for opening the umbrella?

Why do these things (which have been a problem for awhile) bother John suddenly?

Their situation appears to be serious so why is the flipping of the cupboard door funny to us?
Why does John appear to be so focused on himself?

This scene is very realistic to us. Why?

Why do we have such a long take here after John leaves? What is the director taking the time to communicate?

leaving for work through a second-floor window, and tenderly gestures for him to come back for a few minutes.

Hesitantly, she finds the words to explain to him that she was so preoccupied that she forgot to tell him that she was pregnant in a beautifully-affecting scene:

Mary: *I...I didn't get a chance to tell you—(I'm pregnant) (She looks away, and then nods affirmatively as the truth dawns on him. They embrace and kiss.)* John: (vowing) *From now on I'm going to treat you different, dearest.*

They re-enact the breakfast scene - he waits on her and serves her coffee. He selflessly attends to her every need. John: *Mary, you're the most beautiful girl in all the world.*

Their marriage is renewed and revitalized. He parts for work after smothering her with loving affection - they blow each other kisses from opposite ends of their apartment. He pops back in the door, cradling and rocking his hat in his arms like a baby, while flirting and making funny faces at her. It is a marvelous good-bye scene and extreme about-face for the couple.

"OCTOBER."

At his office desk, John is anxiously awaiting news of the birth of his child: *"There should have been word from the hospital before this."* Suddenly, he is summoned from his place in the center of the vast room of workers and taken to the phone. He hurries back to his desk, tells Bert: *"Well...I'm a father!"* and then optimistically promises his pal as he hands over his work: *"When I get my big job, Bert, I'll take care of you for this."*

Inside a hospital corridor, John frantically asks various medical personnel: *"Do you know where my wife is?...Where'll I find Mrs. Sims?...Where's my wife?...I'm Sims, Doctor! John Sims! Her husband!"* A doctor grips his upper arms and reassures him: *"Don't worry! We've never lost a husband yet!"* Partially calmed, he rotates his hat brim between his hands. He considers opening the door to "Nursery No. 3" with a "NO ADMITTANCE" sign on it. Other expectant husbands (one of whom is a black man) are lined up on a bench, all expecting to be imminently notified. A nurse calls out: *"John Sims!"* and he is brought into Ward No. 3.

The camera tracks after him as he walks into a sanitized-looking room with white-garbed nurses and beds which are aligned around the perimeter. He finds his wife on the far side of the expansive room. He kneels at her bedside—nerve-wracked and agonized over being a new father. Roles are reversed—Mary comforts him: *"Poor boy...I'm sorry you suffered so."* The baby boy, wrapped in swaddling clothes, is brought to Mary's side. Mary: *He's just like you, Johnny.* John: *This is all I've needed to make me try harder, dear. I'll be somebody now...I promise.*

"During the next five years, two eventful things happened to the Simses. A baby sister was born...and John received an \$8 raise." During an outing to the beach with their two young children for a picnic, a carefree John plays

Notice the subtle communication from Mary. Why does she take the time to close the door?

Why does John's attitude suddenly change?

When did we hear these words before? Why repeat them now.?

Why does the news of a child change their attitudes? Why does John verge on the edge of silliness?

Why does the camera linger with Mary after John's exit?

John is back in "the crowd" again. Notice the heads of the other workers as John walks past.

For many years what we see here was the way fathers were treated at the birth of their children. How has this changed? How does the director use the dialogue and camera to show us John's anxiety?.

Watch the camera here. Where have we seen a similar shot? Why repeat it here? How does it add to the tension of the scene?

a tune on his ukulele:

*All alone,
I'm so all alone -*

An annoyed gentleman on the crowded sand complains at the noise: "*In one ear I got it sand...in the other I got it you and your zither!*" Their boy jumps up and down on one leg—and then the other—gesturing that he has to pee. Mary: *John* Mary: *The baby, too.* John takes both children, one at a time, behind upright logs in the middle of the open sand so they have a little privacy.

Boy: *Mom! I wanta napple, Mom!* To entertain himself, the Sims' rambunctious son runs circles around their blanket, spreading sand over Mary's freshly-baked cake. A coffee pot spills into the open fire cooking their meal. All the while, John haplessly plays on his musical instrument without assisting his frazzled wife.

John: *Hey! Your fire's out!*

Mary: *Picnic my eye! I'm doing the same things I do every day!*

John: *Don't crab, dear. Everything's goin' to be roses...when my ship comes in.*

Mary: *Your ship? A worm must be towing it down from the North Pole!*

John: *Well, don't blame me! It takes time to get any place in my firm!*

Mary: *Time? Look where Bert's gotten to...while you're dreaming about it!*

John: *Who couldn't get some place if they wanted to hang around the bosses? I've got big ideas! That slogan, A Carload Full of Coughs was mine! Only somebody sent it in first.*

Mary: *For Pete's sake...stop tooting your horn and get me some dry wood!*

John: (Over his knee, he breaks up a wooden sign for firewood.) *This is the way I work! I'm the old go-getting kid! No matter what happens...you never hear me squawk!* (He 'squawks' after burning his fingers while lighting the fire.)

Mary: (She soothes the burn by slathering butter over the wound.) *There!*

John: *Thank you!*

Mary: *You don't need to!*

Mary: *Here!* (hands him a sandwich)

His children ask: "*We wanta ride horsey-back, Pop!*" He obliges his daughter and the entire family shares a good-hearted laugh. He senses a turn in his luck: John: *This must be my day! I feel another advertising slogan coming on!*

Mary: *John, for once why don't you mail one of those slogans in?*

John (as he juggles fruit): *Sleight O' Hand! The Magic Cleaner! How's that for a darb?* Mary: (Oh John, that's good. That's marvelous.)

"Everybody wins a prize once in their lifetime...somehow. And \$500 came to the Simses...all at one time." John has one brief unexpected triumph in his life when he wins one of the slogan-writing contests. Rocking wildly back and forth in a rocking chair, Mary creates a want-list:

"Back bills \$220/New things for baby \$45/New things for junior \$25/Finish paying furniture \$85/Vacuum cleaner \$75.00/Total \$450/New dress \$50.00/Total \$500"

John returns home with his arms filled with packages, exclaiming: "*I've brought home the bacon, Mary! Five hundred bucks!*" He shows off his congratulatory letter:

Why is his song ironic?

Note we have "the crowd" once again.

What is the appeal of this domestic scene on the beach. What changes during the scene?

Why does the constant motion of the children ring true with us?

Why does John appear to remain deluded about his own abilities and fate, and believe in his grandiose schemes to make a windfall by winning slogan-writing contests?

How is this scene similar to the "breakfast scene" earlier? Why might some of their old problems be plaguing them again? Does the scene end in a similar manner as the "breakfast scene"? How? Why?

What is the difference between Mary's list and what John brings home? What do you notice about both of them as they consider using the money?

Who is absent from their celebration? Why should that concern us?

Dear Mr. Sims:

It gives us great pleasure to forward you our check for \$500 for the GRAND PRIZE AWARD for your slogan "Sleight-O-Hand, The Magic Cleaner." We are certain the slogan will prove a great one.

The Holland Cleaner Company Board of Awards

For one exhilarating moment, they rip open the presents together - a doll for their daughter, a dress for Mary, and a two-wheel scooter for their son. They call to their children from across the street to return home, waving the gifts at them through the upstairs window. Their short-lived boost toward happiness in life is quickly dashed as fate hits them with a hard blow. Without looking before crossing the street, the two children race back home. Mary calls for them to go back, but it's too late. Their little girl is unavoidably run over by a motor truck in a tragic, random accident. Powerless to do anything, Mary and John witness the excruciating collision from their window. John battles his way through passers-by to get to the lifeless body of his mortally-injured young child, and screams: "*For God sake get a doctor!*" [In the midst of his grief during the street accident, he is literally surrounded by crowds of caring people.] He brings her limp shape upstairs and lays her on their bed. A bedside vigil is held by the extended family that evening.

To soothe his dying child, John puts his finger to his lips to quiet one of his brothers-in-law for disrespectfully chewing gum in the room, and toward his mother-in-law for crying noisily. In one of the film's most famous sequences, the crowd seems indifferent to the death of the child. The added turmoil of the crowded city streets outside the window now threatens the grief-stricken, despairing, hysterically-mad father and prevents his daughter's recovery. He vainly beseeches and cautions loud newspaper hawkers, hook-and-ladder fire engines, motorists, and mobs of pedestrians to keep still—he is like a salmon swimming upstream against the strong current of the hurrying, blinded crowds. With cruel insensitivity, a policeman shouts at him to return home:

Get inside! The world can't stop because your baby's sick!

The attending physician removes his stethoscope from the girl's chest. Mary slowly bends forward and collapses in tears. John learns of his child's death from the look on Mary's grieving, wailing face:

John: *Mary! Mary!*

Mary: *Johnny! Our baby! Johnny! Johnny!*

The Sims family is physically torn apart - Mary is revived with smelling salts by the women in a separate room; John fights the restraining arms of his brothers-in-law who thrust a stiff drink at him; his son calls out for his parents, while Mary begs for her husband: "*John! John! Where are you?*"

The next day, the small funeral cortege (in a long shot) consists of a plain white hearse followed by two slow-moving, forlorn automobiles through the busy city streets. A traffic policeman brusquely waves them through an intersection.

What do we anticipate as soon as we see the camera focus on the truck? Why?

Notice "the crowd" once again. How does "the crowd" become a positive for a few moments in the film? As he carries his daughter up the stairs, what earlier scene does it remind you of? Why? Why has the director done this?

Note Mary in the rocking chair again. How does the scene reflect a mood change? How does John reflect the concerns of a parent in this sequence? Why is what he attempts all in vain? At the beginning of the scene, the crowd could be viewed in a positive light. What has changed?

How is lighting used to show us the depth of emotion in this scene?

Are the other people truly helpful to the hysterical parents? What about the son? How might he feel at this point? What is Mary doing with her arms? Why is this effective?

Why are Mary and John so far apart in the automobile?

"MONTHS...ENDLESS MONTHS. The crowd laughs with you always...but it will cry with you for only a day."

Overtaken by the tragedy, John sinks into a deep, guilt-ridden depression and loses ambition at work, falling out of step with his daily life. His hair is disheveled and his clothing is torn and wrinkled. In the film's fresh treatment of his worsening condition and lack of concentration on his job's accounting figures/numbers, images of his daughter at play are super-imposed on his forehead. In his dead-end job among other faceless workers, his supervisor warns him:
Looks to me like you haven't got your mind on your work any more.

He reaches the breaking point, tosses away his pen and books, and throws over his desk - and gives up on his job: *To hell with this job! I'm through! "Easy to quit a job...hard to explain to a wife who already is bearing so much...with such courage."* Returning home after he has quit his job, he can't muster the courage to tell her. Mary—the perfect homemaker and supporter—cheerfully brings out a cake and shows him a table laden with food: *"I've got everything ready for the company's picnic tomorrow...We'll have the best lunch on the boat...see if we don't!"*

As the ferry leaves the harbor for the Atlas Insurance Company's Fifteenth Annual Picnic, Mary supportively speaks on her husband's behalf to Bert—now a higher-up supervisor in the firm.

Mary: *John is very happy in his present job...but his loyalty and ability should be recognized, Bert.*

Bert (privately to John): *You'd better tell Mary about your job.*

Mary: *What was the high-sign for?*

John: *It's not very good news to break to you, Mary. I quit my job yesterday. I didn't tell you before... 'cause I don't know whether I've made a mistake or not.*

Mary: *Well, never mind their old job. There are plenty of better ones.*

"Mary was right. There are plenty of other jobs...and John found no trouble in landing his fourth in one week." Unable to succeed in holding a job, he resorts to selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door:

You wouldn't like to buy one of these, would you?

The compromising experience is humiliating: *"But it was always the same old story."* Sinking lower, without hope, energy, or dreams, John fails at this job too: John: *I'm sick of selling vacuum cleaners.*

Mary: *Oh, did you sell some?*

John: *Mary, I didn't want to waste any more time on that job...so I quit. You see, Mary...there's no use trying to sell vacuums. Everybody has one.*

Mary: *Are you sure it's always everybody else...and not you?*

"We do not know how big the crowd is, and what opposition it is...until we get out of step with it."

Now disenchanted and out of step, he is swept aside by the uncaring crowd. John waits patiently outside an employment office - he is passed over for a job which is given to a more hopeful and energetic man in the group - ironically, the lucky individual repeats what John said years earlier

Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

John is back in "the crowd", but what is different now? What has happened to his physical appearance? Why? When we witness scenes of tragedy, is it easy to erase the memories? What is effective about the mixing of the numbers and the images of his daughter?

How is Mary coping with the death of her daughter? How does Mary try to help John in this scene?

Notice the use of close-up and eyeline match in this scene. Why are they effective?

How does Mary continue her support of John? We still have "the crowd".

Note all of the houses are alike. How does this tie in with the shot of the office building toward the beginning? What's wrong with John's sales pitch?

Is Mary truly excited or condescending? How do you know?

How is Mary's attitude toward her husband beginning to change? Notice facial expression. Note they both ignore the boy. Why?

Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

How does the camera reveal what is happening to John in this sequence?

as he rode the ferry to New York to fulfill his dreams:

Young Man: *All I need is an opportunity.*

To make ends meet for the family, Mary industriously hangs up a sign and becomes a dressmaker. John, however, is a tragic failure - unable to find himself and consequently swallowed up by the crowd.

Brothers (to John): *Do you expect to take a vacation for the rest of your life? I suppose we'll have to get you a job...or you'll be starving on our hands.*

Brothers (to Mary): *On your account, Sis, we've decided to give him a job.*

Mary: *Johnny! My brothers are going to give you a job!*

John: (No they're not.)

Mary: *You mean you won't take it?*

John: *Don't you see, Mary...I can't take a charity job...I...I...I think I've got a line on something big.*

Mary: (distracted) *That's all you've been saying for months!*

Brothers: *If she was wise she'd quit you and come back home with us.*

You've never been anything but a big bag of wind...and that's all you ever will be! (The brothers leave.)

Mary: *You bluff! You quitter!* (She slaps him across the face and shuts the door on him.) *I'd almost rather see you dead!*

John reaches out toward the door, bends down for his coat and hat, feels his bruised jaw, and then walks down the street.

With his young son following along behind him in one of the film's most poignant scenes, John stands on a railroad bridge above the freight yards, contemplating suicide by leaping to his death below. But even on the brink of suicide, the frightened, timid man can't find enough courage to let himself go. His adoring, idolizing son, playing a game of ball with him, won't leave his father's side—not knowing that he's about to commit suicide. The young boy provides the fortitude for John to carry on with his sober life:

Son: *Why don't you never play with me any more? I like to play with you. Doesn't Momma like you? I like you. When I grow up I wanta be just like you.*

John: *You still love me? You still believe in me, boy?*

Son: *Sure I do, Pop!*

John: *We can do it, boy! We'll show them!*

Back in the city, John scrambles, with a redeemed change of heart, along with dozens of other men toward a "100 Men Wanted for City Work" sign which has just been posted. He tries to break into the line [although the film was made in the late 20's, it forecast the long job queues of the Depression Era]:

John: *I've got to get a job! I've got a wife and kid!* Another man: *So have lots of us!*

Another job at the Atlantic Employment Agency, better suited to John's talents, is offered: *"Who can juggle balls...to attract attention to a sign?"*

This is John's line from the opening. Why repeat it here?

Why do we have so much conversation in this section? Again, be aware of the use of close-up and eyeline match. Why is it effective in conversation?

Why have John stammer here?

How does the camera help us anticipate the slap?

Why is John's reach for the door effective?

John does not seem to even notice his son. When the camera cuts suddenly to the train, what do we anticipate will happen?

Notice that long shot of the child running across the bridge.

"A little child shall lead you". How does this biblical reference fit here?

Note the cemetery in the background as John comes "back to life".

We're back to the pushing, shoving, crowd again.

Difficult to see individuals when so many have needs.

John raises his hand and volunteers to juggle and wear a clown's outfit and a sandwich-board sign on the streets of the city to advertise: "I AM ALWAYS HAPPY BECAUSE I EAT AT SCHNIEDER'S GRILL - 52 E. 14th St." - it is the same menial job that he once mocked from the top of a double-decker bus.

When he returns home with his son, his wife has packed and is being led away by her unsympathetic brothers. John tells Mary of his modest job and shows her the few coins he has earned.

John: *I got a job today, Mary -- and I'm going back tomorrow - . It isn't much, Mary...but it's a start! I'll make good now...believe me.*

Brothers: (to Mary) *We'll be waiting for you outside.*

John: *Do you still feel you must go, Mary?*

Mary: (I've got to go, John.)

John: *Whatever you think, Mary...but I'll always love you and work to win you back.*

Mary: *I fixed your dinner. It's in the oven. I darned your socks and washed everything. They're in the bureau. I guess that's all. Good-bye, John.* (She leaves and joins her brothers on the porch.) *You don't understand...he has always depended so on me - and I've got to make sure he has everything he needs.* (I've got to go back to him.) (She enters the house.) *I came back to tell you that you can see Junior any evening you're lonesome.*

John: *Thank you, Mary. Do you think Junior and you could go to the show just for tonight? You see, I bought tickets when I thought everything was going to be all right.*

He holds out three tickets for the variety theatre show, slowly winning back her affections. Then he gives her a conciliatory present that he also bought with his meager earnings - a small bunch of violets. She pins them on her dress:

They sure look pretty on you, Mary.

He winds up the gramophone to play a Victrola record: "THERE'S EVERYTHING NICE ABOUT YOU" by Johnny Marvin with his ukulele. They dance around the room to the disc - hearing the music from outdoors, the brothers heave Mary's bags onto the porch, give up on her, and depart. The couple spin around in each other's arms until dizziness sends them into spasms of laughter and they fall on the couch. Their son comes in and joins them during the reunion.

A close-up of them in their own house dissolves into a second close-up of the family celebrating in the theatre - they're still laughing as they watch a vaudeville show with two clowns on stage. Mary proudly notices John's winning slogan ad in the show's program for "SLEIGHT O' HAND - The Magic Cleaner," picturing a juggling clown in a wispy cloud above the city. They are caught up in the dreamy spell of escape from the city's doldrums, with hope, pure joy, and excitement.

In an audacious, pull-back overhead trolley shot, the camera pulls away from their row in the center, further and further until they are lost and disappear in the midst of a sea of laughing faces in the audience's crowd - indistinguishable from everyone else. They cannot escape the crowd, but

What's the irony of this job? Remember the clown near the beginning?

How does Mary's compassionate, sympathetic, unfaltering, caring and loving nature set up an internal struggle in this scene? Pay close attention to her facial reactions.

Be especially aware of lighting and close-up in this scene. Watch the interplay between John and Mary.

Watch John's poignant hesitancy before he plays the record.

How is this "dancing scene" different from the one earlier in Bert's apartment? It's also a reminder of their trip to the amusement park when they met.

Notice this is the reverse of the camera shot going up the building and into the office. Why end the movie with this shot?

now, they are protected by their love for each other and the anonymity of the surrounding masses. There's still hope that they can adjust to the painful experiences they have had, and enjoy a life together.	
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"The Crowd (1928)." *The Crowd (1928)*. Web. 21 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.filmsite.org/crow.html>>.

One more interesting item - Not about *The Crowd*

The Undead by Richard Wilbur

"Knowing how far my mind's eye must have been conditioned by motion pictures, I venture with diffidence the opinion that certain pre-Edison poetry was genuinely cinematic. Whenever, for example, I read *Paradise Lost*, I, 44-58 (the long shot of Satan's fall from Heaven to Hell, the panorama of the rebels rolling in the lake of fire, the sudden close-up of Satan's afflicted eyes), I feel that I am experiencing a passage which, though its effects may have been suggested by the spatial surprises of Baroque architecture, is facilitated for me, and not misleadingly, by my familiarity with screen techniques....

...glancing at my own poems, as the editor has invited me to do, I find in a number of pieces—"Marginalia" for instance—what may owe as much to the camera as to the sharp noticing of poets like Hopkins and Ponge: a close and rapid scanning of details, an insubordination of authenticating particulars, abrupt shifting in lieu of the full-dress rhetorical transition. Here is a bit of the poem mentioned:

Things concentrate at the edges; the pond-surface
Is bourne to fish and man and it is spread
In textile scum and damask light, on which
The lily-pads are set; and there are also
 Inlaid ruddy twigs, becalmed pine-leaves
 Air-baubles, and the chain mail of froth...

...Finally, I wonder if the first four lines of "An Event" are not indebted to trick photography:

As if a cost of grain leapt back to the hand,
A landscape of small black birds, intent
On the far south, convene at some command
At once in the middle of the air...

...there is not doubt about two of my poems, "Beasts" and "The Undead". Each owes something to a particular horror film, in respect of mood, matter, and images. "Beasts" takes some of its third and fourth stanzas from *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, and the "Undead" obviously derives in part from Bela Lugosi's *Dracula*. Neither of these films is great art, though the latter comes close, but both are good enough to haunt the memory with the double force of reality and dream, to remind one of the deeper Gothic on which they draw, and to start the mind building around them. One would have to be brooding on a film to produce such a visual pun as "Their black shapes cropped into sudden bats."

The Undead by Richard Wilbur

Even as children they were late sleepers,
Preferring their dreams, even when quick with monsters,
To the world with all its breakable toys,
Its compacts with the dying;

From the stretched arms of withered trees
They turned, fearing contagion of the mortal,
And even under the plums of summer
Drifted like winter moons.

Secret, unfriendly, pale, possessed
Of the one wish, the thirst for mere survival,
They came, as all extremists do
In time, to a sort of grandeur:

Now, to their Balkan battlements
Above the vulgar town of their first lives,
They rise at the moon's rising. Strange
That their utter self-concern

Should, in the end, have left them selfless:
Mirrors fail to perceive them as they float
Through the great hall and up the staircase;
Nor are the cobwebs broken.

Into the pallid night emerging,
Wrapped in their flapping capes, routinely maddened
By a wolf's cry, they stand for a moment
Stoking the mind's eye

With lewd thoughts of the pressed flowers
And bric-a-brac of rooms with something to lose,--
Of love-dismembered dolls, and children
Buried in quilted sleep.

Then they are off in a negative frenzy,
Their black shapes cropped into sudden bats
That swarm, burst, and are gone. Thinking
Of a thrush cold in the leaves

Who has sung his few summers truly,
Or an old scholar resting his eyes at last,
We cannot be much impressed with vampires,
Colorful though they are;

Nevertheless, their pain is real,
And requires our pity. Think how sad it must be
To thirst always for a scorned elixir,
The salt quotidian blood

Which, if mistrusted, has no savor;
To prey on life forever and not possess it,
As rock-hollows, tide after tide,
Glassily strand the sea.

"A Poet and the Movies." *Man and the Movies*. Ed. William R. Robinson. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1967. 224-226.
Print.