

Films: Accurate Depiction of Neurological Diseases?

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A movie's purpose is to inform viewers and convince them that they are seeing reality. Whatever genre the movie is based on, the sole purpose is to lure the viewers into the storyline, almost as if they were in the situation the characters are in. Two specific movies do just that; as biographies, these films accurately describe the process of neurological diseases, such as dementia and paralysis. The movie about dementia, specifically Alzheimer's disease, is called *Iris*, directed by Richard Eyre in 2001. A well-known author and philosopher, played by Judi Dench and, in her younger years, Kate Winslet, falls to the hands of Alzheimer's disease, which takes away her memory and draws her away from the people who adore and care for her. Another movie, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, is a monologue of a patient who suffered from a stroke, leaving him paralyzed except for the movement of his left eye. Directed by Julian Schnabel, *Diving Bell* is based off of a book written by Jean-Dominique Bauby, who is the paralyzed patient. Both movies depicted diverse forms of neurological diseases, yet they intended the viewer to understand the similar struggles of not only living with the disease, but the effects it takes on everyone else. Therefore, because *Iris* and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* were based on true stories and showed realistic scenarios of both the disease and the reactions of others, both movies taught the effects of neurological diseases and the impacts on human beings.

Iris starts off with an optimistic protagonist: a well-known philosopher, a loving wife, and an open-minded woman. Iris Murdoch lives a wonderful life, including 26 published books and a loving husband, John, who deeply cares for her. However, the movie focuses on her steady decline in memory, creating the curiosity of why Iris was suddenly incapable of doing everyday things, such as finding her way around the house and speaking comprehensively. Slowly, the audience and supporting characters begin to realize that Iris is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. They see how Alzheimer's slowly takes away functions from a human being and how the disease creates a struggle for their loved ones. John was a major supporting character because, wherever Iris was, he was always there for her. When she's giving speeches or settling at the hospital, he was her rock; John deals with the slow decline of the woman he loves due to Alzheimer's. A huge factor in the movie is the aspect of love and how it aids in keeping relationships strong, no matter how difficult the situation may be. The human brain, no matter how damaged from disease, is an organ vital in survival and emotions. For example, when they were leaving Iris's friend's funeral, Iris falls out of a car out of panic and John stops the car and falls right after her. At the bottom of the hill, she tells John for the first time since having the disease, "I love you." This scene shows that even though she's deep in the later stages of Alzheimer's, her love for John is still there.

Contrasting the previous theme, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* relays a different message than the first movie. Almost the entirety of the movie is an internal monologue of the patient, Jean-Dominique, who still possesses all human function.

Yet, he cannot physically move anything besides his left eye, as he suffers from Locked-In Syndrome. Despite the unfortunate circumstances, the audience finds the movie humorous at some points; Jean-Dominique is able to laugh and make jokes internally despite his disability. Due to the internal monologue, it's obvious that Jean-Dominique still keeps a clear mind and the thought process of an average human being. However, the audience does not experience his physical emotions, knowing that he is paralyzed from head to toe. There are supporting characters in the movie observing the immediate decline of movement in the protagonist. Jean-Dominique's children, lovers, and friends are all affected by his condition. Even his speech therapist and translator, played by Marie-Josée Croze, feels a deeper connection with him throughout the movie. In Jean-Dominique's conscious mind, there's always the constant thought of guilt as he thinks of events from his past. The point of living a life every day before something takes it away from you is relevant to the theme of this movie. There may be guilt in life, but one must take advantage of having the opportunity to live. For example, Jean-Dominique, who didn't want to live a life as a paralyzed patient doing nothing except therapy, decided to write a book with the help of a translator. Rather than pitying himself, he takes advantage of narrating his life through his own eyes.

Both these movies depict neurological diseases, and the tolls taken on the victim and his or her peers. Not only are the plots intriguing and the rising actions show up constantly, but also the accuracy of what goes on in these diseases is superior. Both movies are easy for the audience to understand. Although some technical and scientific terms are left out of the hospital diagnosis, it's an easy understanding for scientists and regular viewers. The emotional factor is present in both movies; *Iris* shows more emotions because she lives at home while *Diving Bell* is more hospital oriented, but still shows the emotion factor. There are also accurate testing methods for the neurological disease. In *Iris*, the MRI scans showed significant loss of brain cells, and her identification test showed that she struggled identifying the words and objects shown on the screen. Similarly, in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, tests were done on his eyes to see whether or not he was fully functioning. They were able to diagnose Locked-In Syndrome while Jean-Dominique was in his coma. And, with therapy, they were able to create a system where Jean-Dominique was able to communicate with others by only blinking with his left eye. In addition to acknowledging the accuracy of the tests of diagnosis in both movies, it was well appreciated that it didn't only concern the protagonist's well being, but also the people connecting with the patient.

Overall, both movies showed realistic reactions of neurological diseases. Although vastly different scenarios, the message still comes across. The patients suffer from the disease, and their family and friends are constant supporters who suffer in a different way. It is hard to imagine the situation the patient's loved ones are in, and how the significant others react depends on their love for them. Love was what helped them survive, and remains the theme for the entirety of the *Iris*. For Jean-Dominique Bauby, his supporters were the hospital staff and his family. Even as he was paralyzed and communication was limited, they were always patient and willing to stay by his side. They helped him live the life he was deprived of because of his condition. The tolls of the unfortunate situations on human beings can be seen through the emotions of the characters; with love and support, these two movies effectively showed the aspects of neurological diseases.

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