

decades. Although we have some fears that Salander's character may heighten the public perception that traumatized or mentally ill individuals all have the potential to be very violent, we also feel she may represent a new type of fictional role model.

From the opening credits of the American adaptation reminiscent of recent James Bond films, to the final scene of our anti-heroine riding off on her motorcycle, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* belongs to Lisbeth Salander. She is a Batman-esque superhero for this millennium. As is true of other movies centering on a dark hero, the film is rich in examples of psychopathology and forensic questions.

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Flight: The Descent of Addiction

Written by John Gatins. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Produced by Laurie MacDonald, Walter Parkes, Jack Rapke, *et al*. A Parkes & MacDonald and ImageMovers production distributed by Paramount Pictures. Released August 8, 2012, 139 minutes.

Flight presents a dramatic story line and graphic action that maintain audience interest through the more than two-hour film. The film examines an an-

guished man caught in the grip of addiction and the consequences of a misguided life. As the film begins, a strongly atmospheric scene foreshadows coming events, as powerful weather and personal turbulence intersect during the flight and crash of a passenger airliner. While the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigates the incident, the audience experiences its own challenge in defining responsibility for the failure of the flight. How should one make sense of this man, his life, and his actions?

Director Robert Zemeckis uses a rich set of literary allusions and visual images to illuminate *Flight's* thematic content of determinism and choice, accountability and redemption. The leitmotiv of inversion informs not only the physical movement of the airplane, but also the pilot's life and the functioning of the legal system. The director is masterful in creating a feeling of turbulence that encompasses both the action and our assessments. The visual excitement of the film combines with a powerful and destructive personal story for a compelling viewing experience.

Flight captain and former Navy pilot Whip Whitaker is skillfully played by Denzel Washington. Whip's extensive use of alcohol and cocaine before the doomed flight may have contributed to the crash or may have been its salvation. In the military, pilots have been given stimulants in the recent past to improve performance. The complex presentation of drug abuse and gifted ability in flying make it difficult to decide clearly on his individual culpability. What is clear is that Whip's personal life has been in a descent that has alienated him from his former wife, his son, and some of his flight crew.

Whip survives the crash of his plane which occurs after an evening of drunken excess with his flight attendant Katrina. To compensate for his alcohol intoxication and lack of sleep, he prepares himself for the flight by snorting cocaine. He stumbles around the plane during his preflight assessment, but despite his compromised appearance, the other flight crew members do not stop the flight from taking off. He then makes a bold and frightening ascent through a storm, ultimately reaching clear skies and demonstrating an unusual ability to find a path through the turbulence. When he achieves a safe altitude, he pours himself a drink from the in-flight alcohol bottles and places them in the trash.

Later in the flight, the plane develops a critical handling failure because of a catastrophic event in the plane's flight mechanism. In short order, Whip

grasps what is necessary to save the plane. He manages to fly the plane upside down to decrease its speed. This harrowing decision allows a controlled crash landing with only six fatalities. He is lauded as a hero for making an incredible landing, but the Transportation Safety Board's after-crash assessment begins a critical series of events. If there is pilot error, manslaughter charges will be made.

Required blood testing reveals that Whip had a substantial alcohol level. He realizes then that he must avoid alcohol and an effective scene shows him pouring out all the liquor at home. However, the personal pressure on him increases during the investigation. Despite his best intentions, he returns to severe alcohol abuse and ugly scenes of social dyscontrol. In an ironic moment, he tells his girlfriend, "I choose to drink." For the audience, the tragic personal descent does not feel like a choice. His comment is more reflective of his chronic lying to himself and others. His continued drinking, despite his intentions to stop, has the force of a determined outcome.

The viewer has a clear picture of a broken man with an addiction; a portrait that is echoed by the broken plane that failed in flight. The concurrence of the broken elements (man and plane) makes it difficult to ascertain responsibility for the plane's crash.

For understanding the core meaning of the film, the metaphor of flying upside down (inversion) yields a useful approach. Inversion is an honored, classic technique in asserting surprising moral relationships. A biblical example would include "the first shall be last." Swift's satire, *Gulliver's Travels*, uses the inversion of the intelligent, fictional group of horses (the Houyhnhnms) as a contrast to the vile human beings, the Yahoos. The contrast highlights the moral failings of mankind.

In *Flight*, the inversion speaks not just to the aircraft's flying upside down but also to the inversion of legal processes and the truth. Whip's legal team provides talented and assertive advocacy in keeping an incriminating substance abuse blood level from becoming evidence.

As Whip readies himself for his testimony before the NTSB, he has an unexpected access to alcohol in an honor bar, becomes drunk, and cuts his head in a subsequent fall. This further downfall is a painful and compelling portrait of the power of addiction.

His legal team finds him collapsed in a bathroom. At first glance, Whip does not appear to be able to provide testimony. His lawyers contact his eccentric drug dealer who brings the necessary stimulants to enable him to testify. They pay for the illicit drugs and knowingly place the drunken Whip on the stand to give false testimony. The broken legal system provides a further challenge in assessing Whip's individual responsibility and produces a further inversion of values.

The hearing starts well for Whip. His remarkable skill as a pilot is acknowledged and praised. However, he is required to identify which of the crew members was most likely to have consumed the alcohol from the telltale bottles found in the trash at the crash site. It would have been easy for Whip to implicate the deceased Katrina, since she had a postmortem alcohol level. However, Whip knows that she died in the crash while trying to assist a child passenger.

The testimony is a pivotal moment. Although he could have easily implicated Katrina as the one who consumed the alcohol, Whip declares that he was intoxicated during the flight and that he is intoxicated at the hearing. He does not allow himself to betray the memory of his lover. His personal moment of truth results in his being found guilty of manslaughter and a subsequent imprisonment.

The final inversion is that during his incarceration he is able to find sobriety, begins to reconnect with his family and friends, and starts to heal. The possible justice of being found responsible for manslaughter is overtaken by the merciful beginning of his healing, developing friendships, and reconnecting with his son. Despite the initial direction toward the tragedy of a heroic man, the direction of the film moves toward his redemption.

Ultimately, the film functions as a morality play in which the struggle of a man's soul is demonstrated and the consequences observed. The matters of responsibility and guilt are identified but not resolved. The concurrence of a broken man, plane, and legal system is a useful challenge to Whip's culpability. Overarching questions of communal responsibility constrain the simple notion of individual responsibility.

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