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*The Silver Linings Playbook*

The novel, *The Silver Linings Playbook* by Matthew Quick is an inspiring story that looks into the complex culture of Pat Peoples' life as a mentally unstable man reentering the world. After years of delusion at a mental health facility he is finally back home trying to find the perfect silver lining to the movie that he considers his life. This book was not as widely read until getting critical attention once made into a major motion picture. The transition from text to the big screen depict many of Pat's problems that he has to overcome regarding his own mental demons, problems with his father and family, realization of his failed marriage, and many other issues along the way concerning new love. This plot is best examined through the lens of cultural studies, reader-response criticism, and New Critical close reading to understand its complexities.

Examining the culture of the people in this book, and the transition this novel takes into popular culture, is one way to look at the novel and film. A major aspect of this plot is mental health, which the story provides the audience with two main characters, Pat and Tiffany. Pat and Tiffany are both seen as mentally unstable in their own ways. In the book and in the film there are clear double standards between mentally stable people and "sane" people, and within gender roles of those categories. The readers and viewers see this most obviously shown between Pat and Tiffany and their interactions with other characters. Pat has been in a mental facility, takes pills daily, goes to therapy, and is on a long road to recovery trying to get to his silver lining and happy ending to his movie. He has violent outbursts, goes through depression, is delusional, which people have labeled insane and mentally unstable. To himself, he sees no problem and is just trying to find the silver lining of his life after finally leaving the bad place. He knows that everyone thinks of him as the crazy one and explains it while describing an infrequent encounter

with his father in the novel: “The way he talks to me—never really pausing long enough for me to say anything—makes him sound crazy. I know, even though most people think I am the crazy person in the family” (p.97). Pat does not necessarily think of himself as mentally insane, but takes on other people’s perceptions of him and uses those opinions to reason with his behavior. Tiffany is not necessarily “crazy” in the same sense as Pat is viewed by the audience and the other characters. Tiffany was “normal” up until having an emotional breakdown and going through extreme depression after her husband was killed. She is now on medication and goes to therapy, similar to Pat, and is still seen as unstable. Tiffany seems emotionally unstable due to the events and trauma of losing her husband, not clinically insane though. Instead of saying Tiffany is crazy in the sense of she needs to be put in a mental health institution, it comes off as she is a crazy and blunt, bitch about things.

The scene in the film when Pat, Tiffany, Ronnie, and Veronica are at their dinner party, Pat says to Tiffany, “You have poor social skills. You have a problem.” This comes off to the audience as she is just rude, not actually insane. Tiffany replies to Pat with, “I have a problem? You say more inappropriate things than appropriate things.” This conversation almost comes off as playful, once the viewer gets past their hard exterior anger issues, because they can joke about their mental health with one another because in the end, they both know they are a little insane and can relate to one another. The way Pat and Tiffany view each other is very different from how the others view them. In the film and the novel, Tiffany says to Pat, “We’re not liars like they are,” inferring that the sane people are the liars; they lie to themselves and they lie to everyone to maybe even try and keep sane. Pat and Tiffany do think of themselves differently than the “others” or the sane people in their lives and it is humorous how they can communicate with each other in their own culture about being labeled crazy. In the film, when they are at

dinner they are joking and discussing the various types of pills they have been prescribed and how it affected them. Of course, Ronnie and Veronica find this odd because they have almost no opinion on the topic besides the fact that they find it odd and not normal. Pat and Tiffany create a double standard for the sane people just like there is a double standard of mental health projected from the sane people onto the insane people.

The dynamics of Pat and Tiffany's relationship are complex because the whole time they are just calling each other crazy. It comes off as ironic and eventually jokingly because they are both labeled crazy by sane people, so it is okay for them to joke around about being crazy. This seems understandable because they can relate to each other, unlike the others can. Pat's family writes Tiffany off as a crazy bitch, who is dangerous and unstable, but not necessarily medically diagnosed unstable. Nobody really wants to be seen as crazy, but Tiffany embraces her label and even makes it known. The characters rationalize Pat's craziness because he is a male, which means he is bi-polar or some other medical problem. In Tiffany's case she is a female and actually insane or not, is still a bitch. While talking to Pat at one point in the film they get in an argument and instead of just calling herself crazy she rationalizes her craziness, "I'm just the crazy slut, with a dead husband! Fuck you!" Tiffany even flips out when Pat infers that Tiffany is crazier than him, who was actually in a mental hospital for years. Pat is trying to reassure himself that he is not actually as crazy as Tiffany, because it would be insane to be as crazy as a woman. Ironically, she dramatically leaves by yelling, cursing, and throwing the dishes off their table at the diner.

Pat's family has more sympathy for him compared to Tiffany because his craziness seems more legitimate than Tiffany's mental issues. This is shown when Ronnie is talking to Pat about Tiffany, "Tiffany is a little odd. Do you understand what I mean by *odd*, Pat?" (p. 77) Pat

calls him out on it and asks him what he means by odd, even though he knows exactly what he means. Ronnie replies with saying she is on medication and sees a therapist and to watch out for her, implying that if you do those things you are odd, or crazy. As everybody knows, Pat is also on medication and sees a therapist, and from there Ronnie realizes what he has said and tries to talk his way out of basically calling his friend psychotic, like he thinks of Tiffany. The sane people in the novel and film hold a double standard of what it actually means to be mentally unstable. For Pat it is okay and acceptable, but for Tiffany she is seen as the bad guy. Pat seems to have always had mental instability, but it took his wife cheating on him and beating his wife's lover from an inch of life to realize he had these issues. The double standard between the two comes in when looking at how Pat and Tiffany's friends and family view them, and how they view each other. Tiffany is almost played off as a crazy-psycho- female, who is just rude instead of actually doctor diagnosed mentally unstable. Although Pat has more mental problems to deal with and overcome, they both understand each other because the pain they have gone through that led to the realization of their unstable mental health. Even though the two cases are both very serious, Pat's illness is seen as greater. This may be because he is a man, and a woman's craziness is almost seen as natural in other's eyes. Tiffany is seen as the bad guy, and other characters even brush off her illness as just being crazy in the sense of a wild and moody woman. This idea is seen in both the novel and the film. Combining these two cultures of sane and insane is complicated for the characters. There is a fine line between helping a friend out and offending them when you say they are crazy.

Another approach to consider while examining the novel and film would be reader-response criticism. Indeterminacy is an aspect of this approach and is seen in this story when looking at Pat's relationship with Tiffany and Nikki. A little past half way he does not bring up

Nikki as much as in the beginning of the novel. The reader starts to think that maybe Pat is getting over her, and then randomly he will talk about her and still act as if he thinks they are getting back together. When Pat's mother told him they were having a birthday party for him, Pat immediately asked if Nikki was coming to his birthday party. His mother instantly says no, but once he is at the party, he is wondering why Tiffany is not there. At this point in the novel nobody is happy with Tiffany because, in a roundabout way, she is the reason he was mugged and almost killed. His family and friends obviously do not understand his thinking and reasoning, but Pat just keeps asking about Tiffany. At this point, the reader has noticed that Nikki is not being brought up as much by Pat, and he seems more interested in Tiffany's whereabouts. The reader starts to think that he is losing interest in Nikki. As a reader, it is hard to determine whether he is thinking about Tiffany on a romantic level or a level of friendship based on his curiosity. Also, the reader is still concerned whether Pat's opinion of Nikki and his ideal silver lining with her, is still the same as in the beginning.

Another example of indeterminacy is regarding Pat's father's actions. In the novel, he is always in his study. As the reader, we do not know if he is in there to avoid his family, or because he is hiding his gambling problem from them, or for a completely other unknown reason. The family knows he relies heavily on the Eagles emotionally and financially, but it is not until you watch the movie that you know for sure what he is doing when he is not watching an Eagles game, and that is studying the Eagles to make meaningful bets. Each reader will read this novel differently and each viewer will take something different from watching the film. In the novel, Pat speaks about God a lot and relates his relationship with God to his outlook on silver linings and happy endings. In the film, God is not brought up nearly as much. Someone might prefer the film to the novel based on the lack of connection to God or vice versa. The film

might offer something the novel doesn't to a certain reader. For the reader-response approach, this is crucial for the novel and film to be similar, but also give more to the viewers who are getting the story in two hours, compared to almost 300 pages of build-up and character repertoire. Pertaining to Pat's father, this topic is very interesting. Everybody has a specific view of what the father role should be and/or compared to what theirs actually is. This is, for the most part, based on the viewer's and reader's own personal family history with their own fathers, or lack thereof. The indeterminacy placed on the father role in the novel almost seems intentional so the readers could apply their own feelings with the father role and sympathize with Pat, even though he is mentally unstable. Not everybody can relate to someone who has mental issues, but everybody can relate and compare their own personal experiences with the father role in their lives.

As much as the "father role" is important to people, it is also important to Pat, especially for someone who is not mentally stable and needs reassurance in life. The family dynamics and their relationship with the Eagles football team directly relates to the understanding of the family. Through reading the novel, the audience understands that the Eagles football team is a large part of the functionality of the family. It is not really described why, but everyone knows the moods and actions are affected by how the Eagles play. After Pat has been mugged and taken to the hospital, he realizes what he has done to affect the family. He is not concerned at all that he is badly hurt, but instead how he has affected the happiness of his family because he had made them miss the Eagles win on Christmas Day against their rivals, "And now I realize why my father is not with the search team—there was no way he'd miss such an important Eagles game, especially against Dallas. I can't help feeling guilty, as it probably would have been a really nice Christmas, especially since my father would have been in a phenomenal mood, and I

am sure my mother prepared food, and Caitlin is even wearing an Eagles jersey, and I keep messing up everyone's lives, and maybe I would have been better if the muggers had killed me, and... (p.256)" The film does not actually have this section in it at all, but the viewer's still get a look at the father's obsession with the Eagles because of the parlay bet he makes. Pat goes so far as to thinking he might as well have died because he ruined his family's chance at happiness. This is not due directly to Pat's previous diagnosis of unstable mental health, but how he was grown up with that family and those rituals revolving all around football. The film provides something the book doesn't because we see first-hand how Pat's father is on Eagles' game day. The remotes have to be held a certain way, and specific people sit in particular spots to ensure an Eagle's win. He has a specific routine and is very cautious of bad luck and how certain things will affect the game. This directly affects the entire rest of the family, and hinders proper and healthy communication between the family members, which has a huge and negative impact on Pat's recovery.

There is no way to know the author's intentions of the book based just on reading the book. Every reader and viewer will take what they want from the novel and/or film. There are many different aspects of this book to look at, and one key concept that seems to be greatly overlooked is the similarities between Pat and his father. The father probably has the most drastic changes in character when switching from novel to film. In the novel he is more reserved, or at least seems that way to the reader. This is because he barely talks to Pat and has a hard time communicating with his son. The reader does not completely understand the distance created between father and son because it seems like built up history from years prior that we do not fully know about. It almost seems as if Pat's father is ashamed of him. In the film though, his father is not as reserved with Pat, but still has those tendencies of avoiding Pat. In the film, Pat's

father is shown more and his similarities to Pat are seen and his gambling is shown more which really solidifies why the Eagles are basically his religion. In the novel, the father still has his job and almost just seems obsessed with the Eagles, then actually relying on them for personal reasons. There is not a strong sign of him gambling in the book, but the reader can make their own assumptions because the father is always in his study. In the film, the father relies on gambling on the Eagles to support his family. Instead of just having a family that revolves around the Eagles because they love the sport and because their mental stability relies on it, the Eagles become an important source of income that they try to predict down to a science of superstitions and Ju-Ju's. When Pat does not go along with his father's charade and focuses on dancing with Tiffany, Pat gets a great amount of guilt from his father. The reader can also pick up hints that, regardless of Pat being different because of his mental health conditions, he is still very much like his father. They are both violent people and have mood swings.

There are many themes and plot complexities going on in the novel that seem to seamlessly transcend onto the screen. Pat is all about silver linings and finally realizes his after going through major mental health breakthroughs. He just needed someone who was equally, if not more, crazy than him to have his happy ending. As much as the reader wants to know about all aspects of Pat's life after his realization that he is not getting Nikki back and actually loves and needs Tiffany, there is not much closure with his family relations. At the end of the film Pat says, "The world will break your heart ten ways to Sunday. That's guaranteed. I can't begin to explain that. Or the craziness inside myself and everyone else. But guess what? Sunday's my favorite day again. I think of what everyone did for me, and I feel like a very lucky guy." Everyone will read this novel how they want to, and they will take what they want from the film, but regardless of Pat's mental health he lives by a nice concept, silver linings. No matter how

dark your days get, or how many times your teams loses in a row, there still has to be that last little glimmer of hope, even if you come off a little insane trying to find it. As mentioned before though, it is all how you perceive the things around you.

## Works Cited

Quick, Matthew. *The Silver Linings Playbook*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012. Print.