

# Memoir of a murderer (director's cut)

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'You become me. I become you' (Won, 2017, 1:10:29.) The South Korean Film *Memoir of a murderer, director's cut* (Won, 2017) estranges you and makes one doubt oneself, just like the main character does. The theatrical version of *Memoir of a murderer* has minor differences with some cuts and some changes in its scenes. This action thriller film is directed by Kim Young-ha and is based on the book *Diary of a Murderer* (Young-Ha, 2020). The film begins with Kim Byeong-Soo (Sol Kyung-Gu) narrating his story to a prosecutor who scrutinizes Byeong-Soo's personal diary. His narrative revolves around himself, a self-proclaimed "former" serial killer suffering from Alzheimer's disease, who begins to suspect that his daughter's Eun Hee's (Kim-Seul Hyun) new boyfriend, Byeong-man (Oh Dal-Su), may be a serial killer as well. As the plot of the film unfolds, the audience is taken on a suspenseful journey filled with twists and blurred lines between reality and delusions. The film utilizes unique cinematic and narrative techniques to delve deep into the psyche of its characters, exploring themes of identity, nature of evil, and fragility of memory.

## Neuropsychology and the Nature of Evil

Neuropsychology is the study of how the brain and behavior are related (Berlucchi, 2009). Neuropsychology plays a significant role in understanding Byeong-Soo's behavior. The film subtly hints at the possibility of a psychological disorder, such as antisocial personality disorder, that may have influenced his actions, especially his psychopathic tendencies. By exploring the intricacies of his mind, the audience is compelled to question the extent to which nature and nurture shaped Byeong-Soo's identity and choices. Byeong-Soo's first kill was his abusive father when he was just a teenager. He then goes on killing more people of the same nature, calling it an 'obligatory murder' to cleanse the society of bad humans like his father. With the exception of a delayed response to humor, he described himself as a person who is unable to express many emotions. The film explores the complex psychology of Byeong-Soo, delving into his twisted sense of justice and the dark path he had chosen. The juxtaposition of his occupation as a veterinarian and as a father set to protect his daughter with his secret life as a serial killer adds an intriguing layer to the narrative, highlighting the duality of his character and the potential to make the audience sympathize with Byeong-Soo.

Alzheimer's disease is a neurodegenerative disease that is the leading cause of dementia and progressively worsens over time. The pathophysiology of Alzheimer's disease is characterized by loss of synapses with the presence of beta-amyloid plaques and tau tangle aggregates as one of the known biomarkers (Sheppard and Coleman, 2020). In *Memoir of a murderer*, Byeong-Soo's doctor diagnoses that his dementia is due to progressing Alzheimer's, and that his hippocampus had shrunk. Based on Byeong-so's medical history, the doctor speculates that this could be because of an aftereffect or hemorrhage from a brain surgery he had due to a car accident he was involved in 17 years ago. The key symptom of Alzheimer's is memory loss that progressively gets worse over time and affects one's ability to function at work or at home. Other symptoms include impairment in the ability to make sensible decisions, judgments, and changes in personality and behavior. However, regardless of the decline in some cognitive skills, people with Alzheimer's disease are often able to preserve skills that are usually related to procedural memory.

In the narrative, Byeong-so embodies most of these symptoms. His impairment of memory is apparent, but while some of his actions after the car accident could be attributed to Alzheimer's, such as the delayed reaction to humor, some aspects could still be part of his co-occurring psychopathic personality. As a veterinarian, he was able to preserve some of his treatment skills, but eventually his episodic memory loss affected his work. A key procedural memory skill he had possibly preserved was his act of killing, as he once narrated "my hand remembers like a habit, the killing" (Won, 2017, 1:03:21).

## Cinematography

In this director's cut version of the film, I personally find Director Won Shi-Yun's use of certain cinematic elements and the visual style very appealing. The way he utilizes lighting and color palettes created a distinct atmosphere that heightened the tension and suspense throughout the film. He seems to have built a certain theme of color palettes that matched the settings and the weather, apparent from scenes in the snow, greenery of the bamboo forest, the grey encounter in the fog, hues of blue and the shades of yellow used throughout the film.

## Narrative

Non-linear storytelling refers to a narrative structure that does not follow a chronological order. The non-linear storytelling and the circular narrative structure brought about the uniqueness of the film. Through the voice-over narrative, we seemingly gain insight into Byeong-so's inner thoughts and motivations. The film skillfully weaves together flashbacks from his past, revealing fragments of the truth or what could just be a figment of his deteriorating mind. This kind of narrative and the use of non-chronological bookend and autobiographical flashback techniques serve as a parallel to Byeong-Soo's fading memory. Byeong-Soo keeps a voice recorder to record some of the important things he wants to remember. As his dementia progresses, he has evolving moments of lucidity and dementia, analogous to the audience doubting whether his daughter's boyfriend, Dal-Su, is really the recent maiden serial killer targeting women or if Byeong-Soo himself is unknowingly involved in the recent crimes due to his deteriorating mental state. Even towards the end, when it is seemingly revealed that one tried to manipulate the other, some audience members are still left somewhat apprehensive about the true proprietor of the statement 'I become you, you become me' (Won, 2017, 2:04:13).

*Memoir of a Murderer (director's cut)* is a compelling movie for those who enjoy confusion and unreliable discourse. The suspenseful plot twists between Byeong-Soo's struggle with dementia and the mystery surrounding Dal-Su create a gripping narrative that keeps the audience on the edge of their seats. The atmospheric cinematic and unconventional narrative styles work together and produce a visually captivating work addressing thought-provoking themes such as identity, memory, and the nature of evil. Additionally, the outstanding performances by the cast, particularly the lead actor's portrayal of a complex and morally ambiguous character, further enhance the movie's impact and make it a must-watch for fans of psychological thrillers.

## References

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