

## Life in the Glass Case

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Films have played an integral role in society for decades. They impact our lives by exposing multiple sides of controversial topics, reminding us of past experiences, projecting possible futures, and illustrating for us what our lives could look like if things were different. Movies can educate and indoctrinate their audiences by exploring ethical dilemmas present in society. The two movies *Iris* and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* focus on how neurodegenerative diseases affect those involved, attempting to impact and educate their viewers with sentimental narratives of individuals suffering from brain diseases. *Iris*, directed by Richard Eyre in 2001, tells the story of the novelist Iris Murdoch (played by Kate Winslet and Judi Dench) and her husband John Bayley (played by Jim Broadbent) as they battle with the serious effects of Alzheimer's Disease. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, directed by Julian Schnabel in 2007, tells the true story of Jean-Dominique Bauby (played by Mathieu Amalric) as he fights with the rare Locked-in syndrome. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* does a better job of depicting how neurological disorders affect people's lives by integrating artistic cinematography with a clear focus on the treatments and prognosis of the disease.

The effectiveness of portraying the neurology of Locked-in Syndrome and Alzheimer's in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* and *Iris*, respectively, is directly related to the depth of the characters and the connection the viewer has to the protagonists. Imagine opening your eyes to a wash of clear fluid creating a blurry white vignette out of your field of vision. With white walls as a backdrop and clear tubes circulating around the room, blue-gray blankets swish on the bottom of your world's canvas. Warped figures wearing light green scrubs hustle around the room coming close to your face and then moving away again. You realize they are trying to assess your health and you are given directions to respond to a yes or no question. It becomes apparent that they cannot hear you, and in fact you're not speaking at all. You are told to be patient. Jean-Dominique Bauby, the world-renowned editor of *Elle* magazine, has had a stroke and is now trapped in an isolated world suffering from Locked-in Syndrome. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* tells Bauby's story from his own physical perspective creating a natural connection between the viewer and himself, the protagonist. *Iris*, on the other hand, depicts straightforwardly the journey of a couple as they grow older and run into the difficulties and pressures created by Alzheimer's disease. The work of Eyre creates a linear report of two people rather than a beautiful story of struggle, patience, and accomplishment as *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* does.

Dynamic characters play a big role in the effectiveness of a film. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* has a number of supporting characters that are very clearly invested in helping Bauby recover. Two of these are his therapists, who are completely dedicated to helping him regain movement while Bauby is in the hospital. Through a series of blinks, Bauby was able to communicate; his first words were "I want death". His speech therapist did not lose hope in his recovery even after Bauby expressed a complete loss of faith. Henriette, a young journalist, was brave to help Bauby write a memoir of his experience while still in the hospital

because this was a seemingly impossible task. She took a risk that the project would succeed. The supporting character's dedication to helping Bauby highlights the helplessness he felt, but illustrates for the viewer the positive prognosis of the disease. Seeing people who are helping Jean-Dominique makes us like him, and wish for his recovery. The choice Schnabel made to have everyone around Bauby be optimistic makes the main focus of the movie the disease and Bauby's promising but tedious treatment and rehabilitation. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* accurately depicts Locked-in Syndrome as being mentally stressful, but not completely debilitating. In *Iris*, there is only one other major character besides Iris herself: her husband, John. He does not seem fully supportive of Iris as she develops Alzheimer's. Early on in her neurodegeneration their relationship seems strained, and eventually he has a breakdown, yelling and saying he doesn't want her anymore. He is stressed out and does not know how to help her. The film provides little information on how Iris was diagnosed or what her medical future looks like, and consequently, John's internal struggle becomes a subplot distracting the viewer from Iris and the disease itself. Due to the lack of medical information presented and the distracting subplot focused on John, *Iris* becomes more about the stress Alzheimer's puts on Iris and John's marriage than the diagnosis, prognosis, and management of the disease.

I would highly recommend *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* due to the artistic quality of the film. Schnabel's cinematic decisions and the depth and likability of the characters contribute to the film's effectiveness as an educational tool. This movie is accessible to the layperson, interesting enough for a science professional, and artistically unique enough for artists to admire. *Iris* still has a unique quality to it, but does not have either of the necessary aspects to be successful in neurological education: a likable protagonist with supportive characters and information on Alzheimer's disease. *Iris* is a film that would be more appealing to someone who has experienced the effects of Alzheimer's first hand. It serves as a basis for reflection rather than a means of education. It forces its viewers to connect and reflect on their own life and relationships to give it depth, and this makes the film cater to a more specific audience. If a movie is aiming to educate the public on a neurological disease it should be made to the same cinematic caliber as a movie for pure entertainment and also contain interesting scientific information to be informative. Neurological diseases are complex life-altering illnesses that affect many people, and those who do not experience them first hand should be educated on their importance, severity, and influence through films such as *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*.