



Exploring Isolation and Bizarre Voyages in Morten Tyldum's *Passengers*

***¹Lavinia Prince A. and ²Virgin Nithya Veena V.**

¹Department of English, Stella Maris College,

Affiliated to University of Madras, Chennai

²Department of English Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Nagercoil - 629 004

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli - 627 012

ABSTRACT

Morten Tyldum's Passenger provides a narrative space for exploring themes like isolation, exploration, bizarre psyche and epic voyages within the context of travel writing narratives, "Travel writing is examined as a metaphor for imagination, subjectivity and representation, and its influence on other literary genres" (Zilcosky, 2008). This term paper looks deeper into the multifaceted layers of the film, showing the portrayal of isolation and the human psyche in the vast wild environment. Through the analysis of characters, dynamics, setting, and thematic elements, the paper aims to showcase how the movie taken for study navigates the psychological aspect of loneliness and discovery. The study emphasises the value of human connection in the face of isolation and the attraction of exploration by looking at the experiences of the characters and the existential issues they encounter in the expanse of space and unfamiliarity of travelling into the unknown.

Keywords: *bizarre voyage, travel narrative, space.*

Introduction

Morten Tyldum's *Passengers* gives the essence of exploration, isolation, and the human psyche within the vastness of space. The movie provides a captivating narrative space, related to classic travelogues, where characters go on epic voyages, facing the challenges of solitude and the search for purpose. This term paper looks into the complex layers of the film, analysing its portrayal of isolation and the human psyche through the lens of travel writing narratives.

"The travel narrative metaphor is a powerful tool for understanding personal life and mental development."(K. Mikkonen, 2007). By examining characters, dynamics, settings, and thematic elements, this paper aims to explain how the movie, "Passengers" shows the psychological complexities of loneliness and discovery, providing a wider view into the existential bizarre that arises during long-distance space travel.

Movie and Fiction

The movie presents a modern interpretation of classic travelogues, using the context of space travel to explore themes of exploration, isolation, and self-discovery. It tells the story of Jim and Aurora, two passengers aboard the spaceship *Avalon*, who are awakened from hibernation decades too early on their journey to a distant colony. Their situation, trapped on a massive spaceship with no way to return to hibernation or reach their destination during their lifetimes, mirrors the experiences of early explorers. Like those adventurers, they are thrust into an unfamiliar and vast environment, far removed from the familiar, and forced to adapt to the challenges and opportunities their isolation provides.

Classic travelogues often chronicled journeys into unknown territories, documenting not just the physical landscapes encountered but also the psychological and emotional journeys of the travellers. This movie builds on that tradition, but instead of the earthly terrains of deserts, oceans, or mountains, it uses the infinite expanse of space. The ship *Avalon* becomes a microcosm for the human experience of exploration, a confined and self-contained world drifting through the uncharted universe. Jim and Aurora's story reflects the shift described by M. Pfister, where "travelogue narratives have evolved from accounts of journeys to more self-reflective forms of self-writing and self-staging" (2019). Their journey is not just about moving through space but about navigating the depths of their own psyches and emotions.

The psychological impact of isolation is a central theme in the movie. Early in their awakening, Jim and Aurora experience the vastness of their loneliness. With over 5,000 other passengers and crew members still in hibernation, they are surrounded by people yet utterly alone. Their sense of isolation is heightened by the knowledge that the ship is on a 120-year journey to its destination, leaving them no hope of outside help or eventual escape. This mirrors the feelings of solitude and alienation described by explorers and travel writers throughout history. As Svetlana Haraz points out "Solitude can enhance resilience by providing cognitive processing and problem-solving capacity, but excessive isolation can have negative effects" (2023).

At first, the solitude forces both characters to confront their situation in different ways. Jim, who wakes up first, experiences the crushing weight of being alone for over a year before Aurora's hibernation pod malfunctions which is deliberately tampered with by Jim, a morally complex decision. During that time, he grapples with intense loneliness, which leads to despair and even thoughts of ending his life. His decision to awaken Aurora, while ethically questionable, is born from his overwhelming need for human connection,

highlighting the psychological toll of isolation. Aurora's initial response to her awakening is one of confusion and disbelief. As she learns the truth, her emotions evolve from gratitude to anger, and she must navigate feelings of betrayal alongside the existential reality of their shared predicament.

As the two begin to interact, their relationship becomes a central part of their journey. Their companionship provides moments of relief from the burden of their isolation, allowing them to find joy and purpose in each other's company. These interactions reflect the duality of solitude that Haraz describes: while solitude can foster introspection and problem-solving, the lack of connection can be deeply damaging. The bond between Jim and Aurora becomes both a lifeline and a source of tension, as they must reconcile their individual needs and ethical dilemmas while navigating their shared fate.

The movie also explores the concept of purpose and meaning in the face of overwhelming odds. Both Jim and Aurora had boarded the *Avalon* with dreams of starting fresh lives on a new colony. Their premature awakening shatters those dreams, leaving them to grapple with questions of what their lives mean now. This existential crisis drives much of the narrative, as both characters attempt to find purpose in their current circumstances. Jim, a mechanic by trade, pours his energy into repairing and maintaining the ship. Aurora, a writer, turns to documenting their experiences and reflecting on what it means to live under such unique circumstances. Together, they face challenges that test their resilience, from mechanical failures on the ship to the emotional strain of their isolation.

Ethical and existential questions are woven throughout their journey. Jim's choice to awaken Aurora raises issues of morality, agency, and the lengths to which humans will go to avoid loneliness. For Aurora, the revelation of Jim's actions forces her to confront questions of trust, forgiveness, and survival. The movie's exploration of these dilemmas underscores the complexity of human relationships and the moral ambiguities that arise in extreme situations. Their experiences also highlight the broader theme of adaptation, how humans can adjust to even the most challenging circumstances and find ways to create meaning and purpose.

The ship *Avalon* itself becomes a metaphor for their journey. As a self-contained ecosystem traveling through the void, it mirrors the human condition: a fragile existence in a vast and indifferent universe. The ship's malfunctions and the characters' efforts to repair it symbolize the delicate balance required to maintain life and hope in the face of adversity. The physical challenges they face, fixing the ship's systems, surviving near-death experiences,

and preserving the lives of the other passengers, parallel their emotional struggles. Each challenge forces them to confront their fears and grow as individuals and as a pair.

Ultimately, the movie shows the resilience of the human spirit. Despite the profound losses and challenges they face, Jim and Aurora find ways to live in the moment and embrace their reality. This acceptance does not come easily; it is the result of emotional growth, mutual understanding, and a shared determination to make the best of their circumstances. Their journey becomes one of self-discovery and salvation, not in the traditional sense of escaping their predicament but in finding peace within it. Their story reminds viewers that even in the most isolating and hopeless scenarios, humans have the capacity to adapt, connect, and create meaning.

Conclusion

The movie reimagines the classic travelogue for a modern audience, using the lens of space travel to explore timeless themes of exploration, isolation, and human resilience. By focusing on the psychological and emotional journeys of its protagonists, it shifts the travelogue's focus from the external to the internal, aligning with M.P. Fister's observation about the evolution of travel narratives. The story of Jim and Aurora is a testament to the complexity of human relationships and the enduring quest for meaning in the face of adversity. Their journey aboard the *Avalon* is not just a physical voyage through space but a profound exploration of what it means to be human in an unforgiving universe. This combination of physical and emotional exploration makes the movie a compelling and thought-provoking reflection on the nature of travel, isolation, and the search for purpose.

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