

# Harold and Maude Film Analysis

Film meets philosophy: Intertextuality!!!

The film is a cult classic from the 1970s starring Bud Cort and Ruth Gordon with an original soundtrack by Cat Stevens.

We will watch the film with attention to the philosophical lenses we have been studying : **existentialism, Aristotle's Eudaimonia, and transcendentalism.**

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND WRITING PROMPTS

Think of a film as a text. Annotate it as you watch, analyze, look for evidence. Refer to the specifics of the film in your analysis paragraphs! Connect to philosophy and our project inquiry!



1. Is *Harold and Maude* an existentialist film?
2. What are the roots of Harold's angst and alienation? How do his ideas about happiness and meaning evolve as a result of his relationship with Maude? How does his character change?
3. Has Maude achieved Eudaimonia at the end of her life (deathbed question)? Would Aristotle see her as having cultivated *virtue* and the *Golden Mean*? Or do you see her as an existentialist? Or perhaps a transcendentalist?
4. What message is this movie trying to transmit? What might it be trying to teach us about Happiness and Meaning? About life on Earth?
5. What intertextual connections might we make between this film and other texts?

## ANALYZE THE "TEXT"!

Make an **interpretive claim** about the film and support it with evidence. Your claim may be something you develop further from the discussion questions, or it may be an idea that occurred to you in your own heartmind as you watched. As with *Into the Wild*, you are welcome to hone in on Cat Stevens' soundtrack if you prefer! Write 2-3 paragraphs in support of your claim.

### ○ RESOURCES ON MAKINGS CLAIMS

- [Handout](#)
- [Powerpoint](#)

Here is [a link to some movie quotes](#) that you may want to integrate into your analysis.

## TIPS!

- Avoid too much *summary*. That is not the point of this assignment. You are trying to determine meaning and connect this film to philosophy and our big questions about life on Earth. Know the difference between summary and using evidence/examples to support your analysis.
- Avoid the first person in your claim. This isn't a casual journal entry asking you to weigh in on how the movie hit you personally. Use an academic tone and let the TEXT (in this case, film) be the subject of your analysis.
- If you use the film title in your claim, it goes in *italics* OR underlined! (Not quotation marks, and not both.)

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD LITERARY CLAIMS YOU GUYS HAVE MADE THIS YEAR ABOUT TEXTS:

### On "The Summer Day": (\*note: quotation marks here because poems are shorter works that are part of a whole)

- In "The Summer Day," Oliver distills a striking revelation that the beauty of the natural world in the present moment is a significant purpose to life itself.
- In "The Summer Day", the reader is prompted to realize that the purpose of life is nothing more than the beauty of now.
- In "The Summer Day," Oliver expresses how she feels like life doesn't have specific meaning to it, so you need to make your own meaning through the beauty of your experiences.
- Mary Oliver's poem "The Summer Day" highlights the importance of appreciating the small beauties of life so that we do not waste the fleeting time that we have to experience it.
- Mary Oliver's 'The Summer Day' is an ode to the freedom that one can experience when they come into contact with the absurd; she speaks to the mindset of enjoying the pure existence that you embody.

### On *Stranger than Fiction*:

- *Stranger than Fiction* attempts to communicate the idea that it is difficult to find meaning and happiness in our lives when we do not accept and realise the inevitability of our death.
- *Stranger Than Fiction* expresses that individuals are unable to intimately control their fate; however, they can control the way they respond to it.
- Harold Crick exemplifies an absurd hero; by the end of the film, he ultimately accepts his fate and learns to live with authenticity.
- *Stranger than Fiction* is a layered portrayal of an existential crisis experienced by one or multiple of the characters. This movie challenges typical ideas of the meaning of life as well as offers a perspective on accepting one's own absurd condition.

### On *Into the Wild*:

- *Into the Wild* allows us the reader to live out our deep desire to abandon society and wander the wild in search of a life of true living.
- *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer is more about a broken man than it is about a great journey.
- *Into the Wild* explores the physical and philosophical journey of a young man with some daddy issues.
- The story of McCandless is rooted in a rejection of capitalism from a fundamentally individualistic perspective, not from a leftist perspective but from a right wing one.
- *Into The Wild* by Jon Krakauer describes how a person's past trauma can cause them to go to great lengths to find their purpose of life.