

Mikayla Hill

26, September 2022

THE1132

Professor Maxwell

### Black Swan (2010)

Nina Sayers is our protagonist, a 20 something ballerina who hopes to get the lead part in their upcoming production of Swan Lake. The director of their company Thomas decides to take a different approach by searching for a lead who can play both the white and black swan. Nina really wants this part, but the director can only see the white swan and innocence in her not the black swan. One day she goes to ask for the part, and he attempts to kiss her, and she bites his lip and leaves. This was a different side of her that he'd never seen before, which influenced her to land the part.

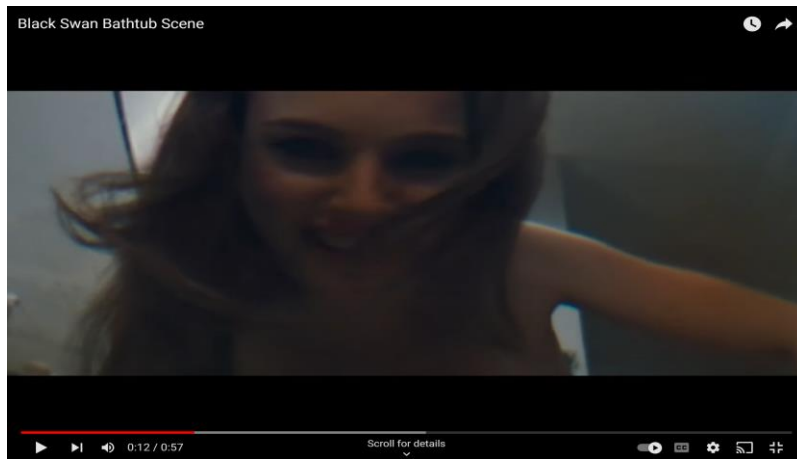
Nina is ecstatic but she still struggles to embody the black swan. She's too structured and won't let loose, causing her to have a hard time at rehearsals. Thomas would critique her on how frigid and uptight she is and would sometimes sexually take advantage of her thinking he's helping her embrace the character of the black swan. There is also a new dancer who joined the company named Lily. Compared to Nina, Lily is more carefree, confident, and edgy. She naturally has the appeal to embody the black swan which causes Nina to think that she is after her part, despite Lily trying to befriend her. Nina is trying so hard to strive to perfection she loses herself while doing so. She does try to let loose and behave in ways that's unusual for her. She parties, takes drugs, explores her sexuality and rebels against her mother who is overbearing and treats her like a child. The biggest obstacle that Nina faces is herself, she would accidentally harm herself by constantly picking at and scratching her skin, to the point where she'd bleed. She'd also overwork and stress herself along with doing unhealthy things to lose weight such as forcing herself to vomit. Along with this the more she prepares for the role the more she experiences psychological breakdowns. She hallucinates that a darker version of herself is stalking her and is trying to prevent her from succeeding. There are moments in the film that are shown but never actually happened because Nina fantasized it, losing a sense of reality. Nina sees herself literally transforming into the black swan which is both her rise as a great dancer who gives the performance of a lifetime, to her downfall that is so damaging she may not be able to save herself from it.

In the film, Nina is often dreaming so there must be use of show don't tell to help reveal things because Nina isn't reliable. For one instance where this is used well is in the final act of the film. After dancing well as the black swan, Nina goes back to her dressing room; Lily stops by to congratulate her and leaves. Nina is confused and removes the towels she placed in front of the door and the blood is gone. Earlier her and Lily had a fight and Nina stabbed her with a piece of glass killing her and moved her body to a closet and placed a towel in front of it to cover up the blood. Once she sees that the blood is gone, she opens the door and nobody's in there. After that the camera is focused on her face and slowly pans down to her stomach as we slowly come to the

sad realization that this whole time, she stabbed herself. I believe this is a good moment of show don't tell because it was the subtlety that made it emotional. The music in the background went from joyous as Nina did so well in her performance to somber when we realize she took finding perfection too far and really hurt herself. Eventually everyone else will see what Nina did after the final act of the recital.

One moment of brilliant acting is when Nina wakes up after having a psychological breakdown and her mom tells her that she told the company she was too sick to perform. She notices the mom removed the doorknob and tries to get it back. Her mom asks her what happened to her sweet girl and Nina squeezes her wounded hand stating that she's gone which causes her mom to yell in pain and move so she can get the doorknob. Her mom is begging her not to go stating that she Nina can't handle this, and Nina says "I can't? I'm the Swan Queen. You're the one who never left the corps." and walks away. This is one of my favorite scenes because it shows how determined Nina is and how much she believes in herself. She went from this shy and frigid person to someone owning the fact that she has the lead role and nothing and no one is going to get in her way. Her mother was constantly trying to shelter her, Thomas was always hard on her, and she felt that Lily wanted her part. The way she says she's the Swan Queen shows how she's over everyone and everything and just wants to do a great job as that character. (Time stamp 1:26:32) Another brilliant acting moment is when Nina dances the part of Odile at the recital. In the first act as Odette, she makes a few mistakes and is nervous. After the confrontation in the dressing room, she fully embodies the Black Swan and is more confident than ever. I'm not sure if Natalie Portman was the actual dancer or if she had a stunt double, but the way she moves her arms up and down and her facial expressions are captivating. This was some major character development as Nina finally loses herself and embraces her talent. She looks like she's enjoying it rather than striving so hard to be perfect and to get every step right. Everyone is in awe of her performance and gives her a standing ovation.

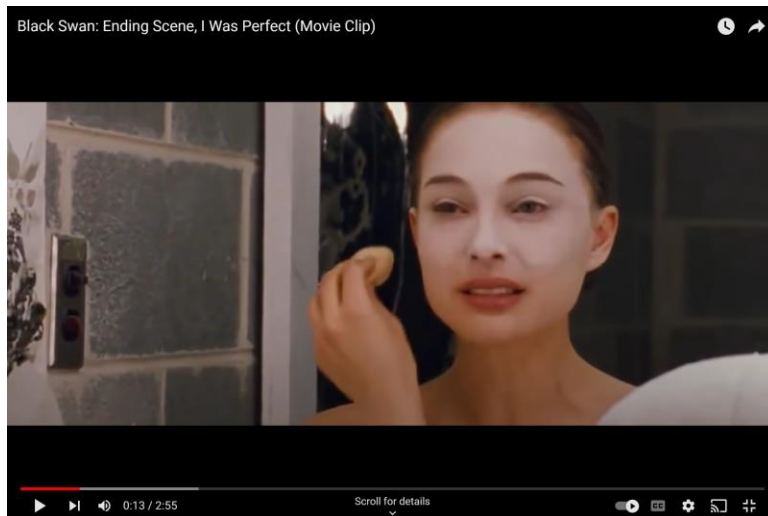




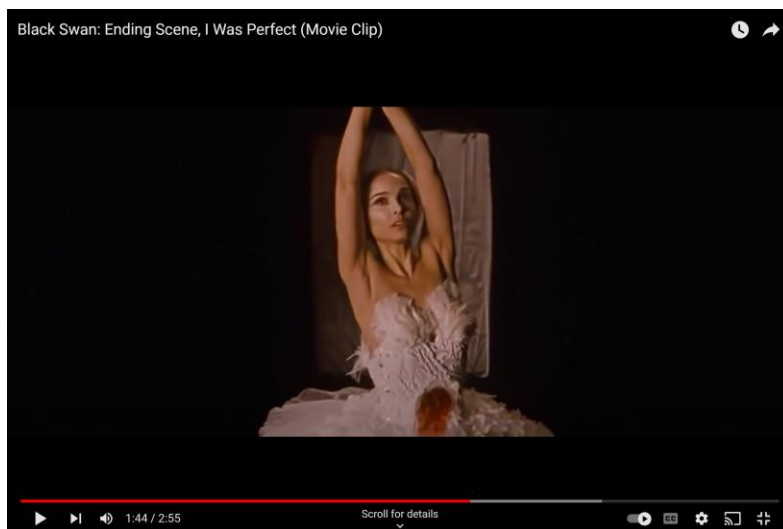
This is a medium close-up, low angle, and point of view shot of the evil Nina looking over Nina as she's taking a bath. This is when Nina begins to hallucinate that someone is after and is trying to harm her. This shot is effective because we see Nina's point of view and it's almost like we're hallucinating with her and understand her fear and frustration while preparing for this role.



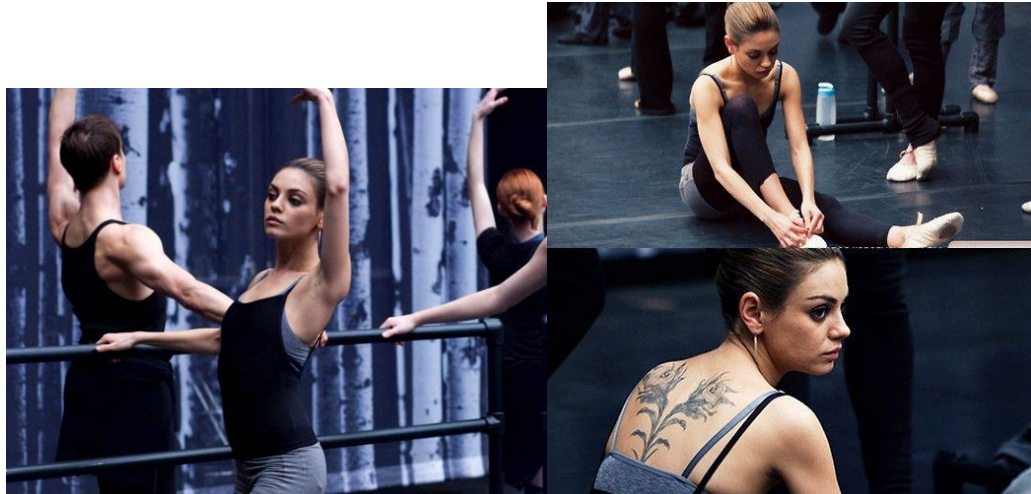
This is a master wide and full shot with an eye level angle with a dirty single composition. Nina just successfully danced the part of Odile, and the audience is in awe of her performance. We see them giving her a standing ovation. The shadows behind her reflect swans, I'm not completely sure if this was a part of the show or just Nina's fantasy because while she was dancing, she imagined herself growing feathers and wings as she felt like she transformed into the Black Swan.



This is a medium close-up, over the shoulder composition with an eye level angle. Nina is hysterical after she realizes she wounded herself. She's crying in the mirror while trying to do her makeup and quickly pulls herself together with a "the show must go on" look. This shot shows how determined Nina is to finish her part despite the circumstances.



This is a medium full shot with a slight overhead angle and a single composition. In this scene Nina falls onto the cushion after her breathtaking finale. Her wound has gotten worse, but she isn't too much worried about it. The look on her face is full of fulfillment as she was perfect. All that she went through has finally paid off. She did it.



Lily is a character that Nina sees as her competition. While Nina is timid, innocent, and wears pastel light colors such as pink, Lily wears darker colors, and is more carefree and confident. The main costumes of this film are warm up clothes and tutus the dancers wear while rehearsing. I think Lily's tattoo represents the type of bold and edginess she has compared to Nina, she perfectly embodies the Black Swan character.



A prop that I feel like the film emphasizes is Beth's red lipstick. Nina steals that out of Beth's old dressing room, along with her earrings, perfume, and nail file. I think this shows how desperate Nina is to be perfect. She wants to be like Beth who was a well renowned dancer. Once she retired and Nina got the lead role, she felt like she needed to live up to her. There is also another scene where after Nina tells her mom she got the part in a restroom stall she comes out and sees this.



I think this was some form of symbolism that tied to the red lipstick she stole. Beth was rumored to have had a romantic/sexual relationship with Thomas. So of course, once Nina got the role that's the assumption people made thinking that's how she got it. However, I am not sure if someone literally wrote this or if Nina was caught up in her own head.

The film is set in New York, New York and I believe it was set on location because there are shots of Nina taking the subway and walking through the city to get to her studio. The studio is the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. I think that this particular set just shows how talented and dedicated these characters are to the performing arts.



Tchaikovsky's score of Swan Lake is played throughout the movie. When the movie first started and I heard the orchestra, I felt like I was at a ballet. I think this was a smart move to have the score of Swan Lake throughout the movie because although it isn't the exact story, it fits into Nina's story and her journey as a dancer. The finale score fit perfectly with the last act of the movie as Nina as the Swan Queen leaps off a boulder killing herself while Nina herself is actually dying.

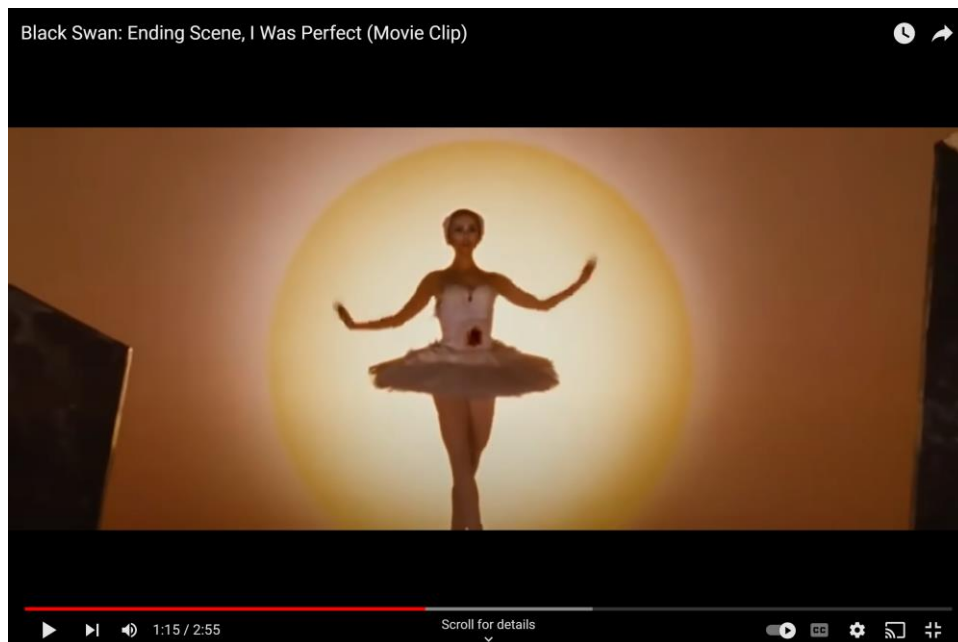
One scene where the lighting was effective was when Nina and Lily were dancing at the club. It is dark with neon colors such as green and red and there is a lot of flashing. I feel like this represents Nina letting loose and exploring her wild side. She also hallucinates again seeing the dark version of herself, but Lily brings her back to reality. I feel like the lighting in this scene



shows how the movie is about to take a darker tone and Nina's hallucinations will become worse.



Another scene where the lighting works is the final dance where Nina as the Swan Queen is on top of a boulder before she leaps to her death. The light is bright and beautiful as well as the performance itself. It looks like the sun is setting behind her. This scene is emotional for the Swan Queen who is heartbroken and Nina who is wounded but happy to be finishing her performance.



I feel like the film uses color to compare Nina to other characters. Her room for example is mostly pink with stuffed animals, reflecting her innocence and how her mom still sees her as a child. Nina usually wears soft pastel colors with light makeup. When Nina fantasizes about her dark alter ego she wears darker colors and smoky makeup.



Overall, I believe this film has a message on perfectionism and how it can damage people. This is one of my all-time favorite movies. The acting is brilliant. The story is both captivating and tragic. This is a movie that I like to randomly watch, and I never grow tired of it. I think people should watch this movie if they are into psychological thrillers. This is one of those movies that leave you thinking of it after watching, and you'll be searching for analyzations all over the internet trying to understand what it really meant.