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In Overcoming Youthful Anxiety

Statistics gathered from approximately 20,000 Koreans in their twenties show that six out of ten people feel as if they are falling behind others in a number of ways, and a further 25% of those people emphasized such emotions regarding employment preparation. The concept of employment uncertainty in young people is dealt with in the film *Midnight Runners*, a 2017 film by Kim Ju-hwan starring Kang Ha-neul and Park Seo-jun. Two years after their enrollment into the National Police University, Ki-jun and Hee-yeol, the two protagonists, develop growing uncertainties regarding their future as police officers. Amidst such concerns they become witnesses to the kidnapping of Eun-jung, a runaway girl. Upon realizing the impossibility of an immediate police investigation, they decide to launch an amateur investigation of their own. Through this process Ki-jun and Hee-yeol experience the appeal of working as policemen and cement their resolve to pursue the profession. **The film unfolds the emotions of distress that young people go through in preparing their career paths whilst sending out the message that one can rid oneself of these emotions by indulging in a certain field with passion and gaining a true grasp of its appeals.**

To begin with, the plot revolves around two main conflicts that complement one another; an internal conflict that deals with the protagonists' anxiety regarding their future, and an external conflict involving the antagonistic force that highlights the need for passion in dealing with such feelings of anxiety. They complement one another as it is through the

process of solving the external conflict that the protagonists begin gaining certitude regarding their future. The film illustrates the concept of youthful anxiety through internal conflicts with its use of foreshadowing, symbolism, and contrast. Additionally, in the process of dealing with the external conflict, the concept of irony is employed in order to emphasize the importance of passion in dealing with these uncertainties. To explain the exposition of the film, the story takes place in modern day Seoul with most of the events being centered around Daelim-dong and the national police university. There are two main characters, Ki-jun and Hee-yeol, both of whom are police cadets enrolled into the police university. The film's main antagonistic force is the 'Joseon-jok' gang that forcibly extracts runaway girl's eggs and sells them to various hospitals. The plot revolves around Ki-jun and Hee-yeol's struggles in rescuing the victimized girls held captive by the antagonists. The rising action, which marks the beginning of their involvement with the gang, takes place at the scene of Eun-jung's kidnapping. The previously lighthearted, comical theme gains suspense as they fail in their initial attempts to pursue the suspects. The subsequent launch of the protagonists' investigation leads them towards the conflict where they are helplessly beaten by members of the gang. It is through this process that they discover the details of the gang's endeavors and develop a longing desire to establish justice. Therefore, the conflict acts as a turning point that marks the beginning of the protagonists' progress towards gaining certitude regarding their future as policemen. Following their escape from the gang, Ki-jun and Hee-yeol persevere in their pursuit of the case and their newfound passion is depicted through a series of scenes dedicated to showing their rigorous training process. These scenes provide evidence for their resurgence in the battle against the gang that takes place in the climax of the film. The falling action deals with the protagonists success in stopping the gang's operation and the movie is resolved with the rescuing of the kidnapped runaway girls. The plot contributes towards

highlighting the concerns of young people regarding their future whilst sending out the message that one must engage in their field with passion in order to escape from such concerns.

Throughout the development of the story lie various hints at the aforementioned implicit meaning of youthful anxiety. **The putting forth of main characters who are yet to form a concrete self-identity leaves room to explore the concept of uncertainty regarding one's future in a realistic manner, and by endowing such characteristics to the protagonists, it successfully foreshadows the type of motifs that will be further dealt with during the film.**

This is exemplified in the university dormitory scene where each roommate states their reasons for wanting to become police officers. When Ki-jun is asked about his motives, a puzzled look immediately flashes across his face as he realizes that he himself does not know the answer to this question. Ki-jun's sense of perplexity is evident in his quick, repeated blinking of the eye. 'Who am I?', 'What is it that I truly would like to do?'. Ki-jun is depicted as pondering upon these ontological questions from the outset of the film. From these scenes that illustrate the protagonist as someone who is easily subject to growth and change, one can deduce that the theme of youthful insecurity will be dealt with later on in the film and are in turn, able to prepare for symbols that are being used to develop such a theme.

Some symbols that a successful career is often attributed with in society are money and fame, and the film makes use of these symbols in developing the previously mentioned theme of youthful insecurity in the scene where Ki-jun and Hee-yeol visit a nightclub. Right from the beginning, their entrance is shadowed by the coincidental appearance of a famous celebrity. Upon hearing this on his earpiece, the guard who had initially been speaking with Ki-jun and Hee-yeol immediately cuts them off and rushes over to greet the celebrity instead. In showing the clear difference in treatment due to one's field of profession, the symbol of fame is

used to stimulate the main characters' doubts regarding the career path they are pursuing. The next use of symbolism is apparent when Ki-jun's attempts to flirt with girls are neglected multiple times by the same question: 'What kind of work do you do?'. The response of one of the girls leaves Ki-jun baffled and scratching his head; 'Why would you pursue a career that makes no money?'. Ki-jun's increasing concerns are emphasized by the repeated switching of the camera focus from Ki-jun's slumped shoulders to the partying celebrity, creating a contrast between the two characters. Through the use of money and fame as symbols for success, the film draws light upon the anxiety that plagues young people in their search for a future profession; the pressure that one must become distinguished from others, and also, that one must be able to earn lots of money from it.

If the internal conflict within the protagonists dealt with the characters' concerns about their future as police officers, the process of solving the external conflict depicts their finding of the appeal of police work, with the concept of irony being employed in order to provide evidence for Ki-jun and Hee-yeol's newfound passion. The main source of external conflict lies within the Joseon-jok gang's endeavors in selling forcibly extracted eggs to hospitals. When considering that there can only be supply where there is demand, one can deduce that there are people who benefit from these inhumane endeavors. The irony in this case is that the exploitation of a helpless girl results in a newfound hope of life for somebody else. Perhaps the essence of many criminal acts can be deemed as ironic; where one gains benefit from sabotaging or undermining the well-being of another. The realization of this essence is what fuels Ki-jun and Hee-yeol's passion in attempting to solve this criminal case. Ki-jun's clenching of his teeth as well as the uncontrollable shaking of his body upon hearing the aims of the gang successfully depict his newfound passion for engaging in the investigation. Through the process of tackling

the external conflict with such passion, the protagonists eventually come to grasp the appeals of being policemen and are depicted as having gained certitude in the pursuit of their careers.

Through the protagonists' success in escaping from their feelings of uncertainty, the film sends a message that one must engage in a certain field with great passion and determination prior to being discouraged by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty.

This film is unique in that it tries to highlight the distress of young people regarding their future and then subsequently hands out advice in getting through such concerns. The process of two, initially dreamless students gaining certitude in their career choices through experiencing the elements of police work serves as an encouragement for people agitated by uncertainty in their profession. It is these implicit meanings beneath the plot of the film that allow for a more interesting watch of a film which may at first seem like a classic comedy action movie. By drawing light upon the passionate, devotional manner through which Ki-jun and Hee-yeol tackle their uncertainty, the film tries to empathize with the concerns of young people whilst sending out a general message that one must always try their absolute best in their own respective fields in order to grasp its true appeals.

Works Cited

Midnight Runners. Directed by Kim Ju-Hwan, performances by Park Seo-joon, Kang Ha-neul, Park Ha-sun, Sung Dong-il, Go Jun, Bae Yoo-ram, Lee Ho-jung, Lee Jun-hyuk, Lotte Entertainment, 2017.