

# Related Text Analysis:

## *A Beautiful Mind* by Ron Howard

### BACKGROUND

#### Context

**About the director:** Ron Howard has been part of the film and television industry since he was eighteen months old. At eight years of age he was a central character in *The Andy Griffith's Show*. As a teenager he landed his first film, *American Graffiti* which was the inspiration for the sitcom *Happy Days*. Howard's experience as an actor fostered his directing abilities. Howard often chooses narratives which retell history from his own perspective—events he has observed in his own lifetime. He directed his first film *Grand Theft Auto* in 1977 followed by *Nightshift* in 1982 and *Splash* in 1984. He formed the production company *Imagine Films Entertainment* in 1985, which has produced movies such as *Cocoon* (1985), *Willow* (1988), *Backdraft* (1991) and *Far Away* (1992). In 1995 he won a Director's Guild Association Outstanding Feature for *Apollo 13*. In 1999 Howard directed Jim Carrey in *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. *A Beautiful Mind* won the Oscar for Best Picture (2001) as did *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), and the critically acclaimed *Frost/Nixon* (2008). Ron Howard's last film, in 2011, was the comedy *The Dilemma*.

**About the film:** *A Beautiful Mind* is an adaptation of the book written by Sylvia Nasar. Any discussion of Nasar's book must take into account that it is an unauthorised biography, written without the consent or cooperation of John Nash. The book is based on hundreds of interviews, some of which remain anonymous. Nasar's description of Nash's time at MIT is interwoven with McCarthy era paranoia and is linked to the relationship between Game Theory and Cold War Politics. Game theory has been applied to contexts of war, business, and biology. In game theory, the Nash equilibrium is a solution concept of a non-cooperative game involving two or more players, in which each player is assumed to know the equilibrium strategies of the other players, and no player has anything to gain by changing their own strategy. The screenplay, written by Akiva J. Goldsman, received an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay in 2001. Goldsman had an empathic understanding of mental illness from an early age. His mother was a child psychologist who opened one of the first group homes for children suffering from autism or childhood schizophrenia. This is one of the reasons Goldsman was initially drawn to adapting Nash's story. *A Beautiful Mind* is not a true biographical film. It was inspired by the architecture of Nash's life. It reconstructs the spirit and experience of a man transitioning from genius to forced institutionalisation because of severe mental health issues. The film depicts the effects this has on his career and family life, in particular his wife Alicia who supports Nash's journey to recovery.

#### Purpose

The film is an empathetic view of acute mental illness and a celebration of difference. Seen predominately from Nash's point of view, it explores the contrast between the intellectual genius of a man who can solve a puzzle which has great impact on the world of economics, and his private battle with mental illness which at times isolates Nash from his peers and his work.

#### Audience

*A Beautiful Mind* is an historically significant story. The atmosphere of the Cold War is used to make the film feel more realistic. This technique helps to place the audience in the correct context so that the film is experienced as an actual retelling of history. The audience, who may or may not have been alive to witness these events, will therefore feel a connection to the overriding narrative.

### KEY TERMS

- Cold War:** the state of fearful hostility that existed between the Soviet bloc countries and the Western powers from 1945 to 1990, which ended when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989
- Schizophrenia:** a long-term mental disorder involving a breakdown in the relation between thought, emotion, and behaviour, leading to faulty perception, inappropriate actions and feelings, withdrawal from reality and personal relationships into fantasy and delusion, and a sense of mental fragmentation
- Game Theory:** the branch of mathematics concerned with the analysis of strategies for dealing with competitive situations where the outcome of a participant's choice of action depends critically on the actions of other participants
- Insulin Shock Therapy:** a form of psychiatric treatment in which patients were repeatedly injected with large doses of insulin in order to produce daily comas over several weeks

- Communism** a social, political and economic system where each person works for communal benefit so that, in theory, all property is held in common with each person contributing and receiving according to their ability and needs
- McCarthyism** anti-communist hysteria caused by naming and blacklisting individuals who were suspected of holding left-wing or communist beliefs; inflamed and perpetuated by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the USA in the 1950s

## KEY IDEAS, CONCEPTS AND THEMES

### The Cold War

A Beautiful Mind is set predominately in the 1950s, a time that features as the Cold War period in the history of the United States. An atmosphere of paranoia was derived from the idea that the Soviet Union was planning a nuclear attack, and that Communist spies were infiltrating North America. In the opening scene Professor Helinger makes reference to the Cold War, setting the context. He declares that the 'stated goal of the Soviets is global communism' and directly invites the students to become the next Einstein in order to block such progress. He explains to the students that the 'battle lines' have been drawn and in order to triumph against the expansion of communism, 'publishable, applicable results' that he believes this new generation of mathematicians are capable of, are necessary. The camera cross cuts from the professor to a medium shot of Nash, indicating that he is capable of such promise. Other scholars are shown in long shots of the room. At one point Nash looks over to Hansen, who looks back in a medium shot panning towards Nash, indicating the impending competition between the two. The rivalry is later confirmed when it is revealed that the prestigious Carnegie scholarship was split for the first time ever—between these two young men. Nash insults Hansen when he suggests that he is getting used to miscalculation as he has read his preprints and does not believe there is a 'single seminal or innovative idea' in any of them. Similarly, Neilson is introduced to Nash as the man who broke a 'Jap code', helping to rid the world of fascism, representing that these men are highly intelligent leading mathematicians of the future that will play a pivotal role in US politics and its security. This also sets the scene for Nash's delusional involvement in US espionage.

The complexity of this film is in the direction. While events of John Nash's life are depicted in the context of a Cold War, America's paranoia during this period is neither portrayed, nor challenged. This is firstly a consequence of Ron Howard's delineation of the three act structure and, secondly a result of how the character of John Nash drives the narrative, through themes of alienation, which are conflicted by his yearning to belong as an imaginative mathematician. John Nash's delusions are not shown to be connected to an American ethos, but remain safely within the confines of John Nash's identity. In other words, Nash's paranoia is portrayed as solely connected to his brilliance and his acute mental health problems. As William Parcher, who Nash imagines works for the Department of Defence, says, conviction is 'a luxury of those on the sideline', when it becomes apparent to Nash that Parcher was involved in the atom bombs dropped on Japan that 'incinerated 150,000 people in a heartbeat' and ended the war.

However, the developing character of Nash runs parallel to a North American Cold War identity. In act two, Parker uses patriotic pressure to fuel Nash's code-breaking obsession. In addition, Parcher is intruded into Nash's private life when he appears immediately after Nash and Alicia's wedding. This depicts Nash's emotional turmoil and is also a comment on the prevailing social climate of McCarthyism, where the private and the public life of American citizens were under close scrutiny by government agencies. A connection can be made between those accused of being communist, or sympathisers by association, and Nash's forced institutionalisation. In America during the Cold War, citizens accused of communist affiliation, were subjected to aggressive investigations and questioning before government or private-industry committees and sometimes suffered imprisonment. In act three, the medication Nash is given makes it difficult for him to work, or to respond to his personal relationships. Similarly during the McCarthy era many people suffered loss of employment and/or destruction of their careers. It is not until Nash returns to the public sphere at Princeton University that he is able to determine for himself the difference between delusion and reality. However, it is in some respects a cold truce, as the delusional characters, in particular William Parcher, remain vigilant on the periphery of Nash's awareness.

### Dealing with mental illness

Nash's relationship with Charles provides Nash with the support that he is unable to find through friendships in the real world. As established in the opening scenes, Nash is competitive and socially offensive when he meets his peers at Princeton University. He insults his peer about his tie and later becomes distressed when he loses the game with Hansen. He is so focused on making a brilliant mathematics discovery and this isolates him socially. Meeting Charles, although imaginary, provides Nash with relief from the distress he finds in real-life relationships. He is like an alter ego. Charles is fun and spontaneous and self-reliant. At the same time, through Charles the responder becomes aware of Nash's own insights into himself and his work. For example in order to have some sense of identity, Nash believes that he must come up with a 'truly original idea' as that is the way to distinguish himself. As Charles identifies, it is the only way that he will matter, to which Nash agrees. Therefore his relationship with Charles to a certain extent continues his delusions, but at the same time, provides Nash with the motivation to develop a truly unique theory.

Despite Nash's social isolation, it is his interactions in the real world that provide the inspiration for his ideas. He does not deem it worthy to attend classes as they 'dull your mind' and 'destroy the potential for authentic creativity'. He believes it unworthy to read books written by 'lesser mortals'. Charles insists that the answer to his problem is not 'out there where you've been working' as he symbolically throws the desk and the papers on it into the world outside. Nash is visibly shocked by this, but it breaks the hold his mind has over him. In addition, in the scene at the pub, Nash realises that if they all go for the blonde girl no one will win. This leads him to grasp the essence of his Game Theory. As his lecturer declares, his theory flies in the face of 150 years of economic theory. His brilliance leads to his acceptance to MIT and ultimately a Nobel Peace Prize.

Nash's creation of William Parcher and the elaborate undercover operation he constructs indicate not only the significance of his mental illness, but the paranoia in America during the Cold War. Parcher describes to Nash a factory in Berlin that was secured by the Russians after the war where the Nazis were building a portable atomic bomb. The threat is very real to Nash—he believes that the Soviets intend to detonate an atomic bomb on U.S. soil. After Parcher declares that the intention of the Soviet's is to 'incur maximum civilian casualties' the camera cross cuts to a movie screen showing black and white images of the potential destruction—a building exploding and the iconic mushrooming cloud of an atomic bomb. Ironically, these images are reflective of the atomic bomb America dropped on Japan, ending the Second World War. The mission Parcher conscripts Nash for is called 'New Freedom' which communicates its messages through 'codes embedded in newspapers and magazines'. At one point Nash imagines he is being followed. As the gate opens to the house where he believes he is to drop off his codes, a high angle shot is used, looking down onto Nash as he enters the grounds, showing him to be vulnerable. Nash's paranoia is shown through the tilt of the camera and close up of Nash's face as he unlocks the gate. This is the height of his paranoia as a chaotic scene unfolds where Parcher picks him up and rushes him away. The camera tilts and cross cuts to cars approaching, reflecting the confusing nature of the internal world Nash occupies. There is a medium shot of the shadow of the car passing a dark building, indicating that Nash's reality is unclear. He screams and cowers into the seat as Parcher demands he 'take the Goddam gun', to shoot at their assailants. Diegetic sounds of bullets, smashing glass of the windscreen, screeching tyres and the splash of the car entering the water indicate that Nash's world is out of control. In Nash's mind, he is unable to extricate himself from the situation as Parcher threatens that if he does not continue working for him, the Russians may just find out about him and then not only he, but his wife will be in danger as well. Using dark lighting, the director illustrates the depth of his paranoia as he attempts to force Alicia to go to her sister's place to be safe.

In act three when schizophrenia has been diagnosed, Nash's medication significantly affects his ability to live his life authentically. He also loses his ability to see the solution to problems he is trying to solve, such as the Riemann hypothesis. Even though Sol tells him that there are 'other things besides work', Nash cannot see them. The medication makes him unresponsive to his wife, meaning he is impotent and lacking desire, and so he decides to go off his medication and deal with the illness himself. When he asks Alicia what other people do, her suggestions of 'talking to people', 'leaving the house' and 'taking out the garbage' seem banal compared to his intellectual pursuits. Nash eventually does overcome his illness by accepting and managing his condition. As he says to Thomas King 'like a diet of the mind, I choose not to indulge certain appetites', meaning that he sees his hallucinations for what they are and chooses to ignore them. The giving of the pens portrays how, despite his personal struggles, Nash has earned the respect of his peers.

### The enduring nature of love

The director focuses on the relationship between John Nash and Alicia as a way of exploring our human capacity for love. Alicia is a confident character as can be seen through their first meeting when she opens the window in the classroom after Nash closes it. Nash's own playfulness can be seen as he declares that there are 'a number of solutions for any given problem'. Alicia shows admirable gumption when she approaches Nash to ask him out. During their courtship, the director positions us to view Nash's own humanity, as he lifts Alicia's hands and draws out images in the stars, in a romantically intimate gesture, showing Nash's surprisingly gentle nature. Soft, romantic music begins, drowning out the sound of the fountain in the background, as the camera focuses on the sky, lighting up the shapes Alicia identifies, such as an umbrella and an octopus. The camera moves to a long low angle shot of Nash holding Alicia's hand up to the sky with the building in the background, symbolising the strength of this partnership, eventually panning across the night sky, suggesting that anything is possible between this 'pair of odd ducks', as Nash declares them to be. This is juxtaposed with a scene showing Nash scanning magazines and newspapers for codes. The camera focuses in close up on the words 'artificial life', indicating that despite the love that is blossoming between Alicia and Nash, Nash's mental health will pervade this relationship. Similarly, when he confesses that he is attracted to her and that he would really prefer to eliminate the social protocols and just have sex with her, she kisses him, indicating that she finds his behaviour endearing. Unlike the woman at the bar who slapped Nash across the face for being direct, Alicia responds playfully to his honesty. This is juxtaposed with a close up shot of Nash highlighting words in a newspaper as Marcee asks him what he is doing. The director uses dramatic irony as the responder is aware that Nash's mental health issues are significant, but Alicia does not know this. This sets up the nature of the relationship that Alicia is unknowingly entering into as we wonder if she will be able to cope with the reality of Nash's mental illness.

Through Nash's relationship with Alicia, the director positions the responder to view the enduring power of love as a way of overcoming insurmountable obstacles. Alicia displays an unwavering love for Nash, despite the impact

his mental illness has on her and their child. She stands by him when he reveals to her that he has been doing 'top secret work for the government' where the threat is of 'catastrophic proportions'. In the MacArthur Psychiatric Hospital, Nash is visibly shaken when Alicia tells him that there is no William Parcher. She helps him to confront his own paranoia and hallucinations by giving him the mail he has been depositing into the mailbox, to show him that it has never been opened, and telling him 'it isn't real' and that it is all 'in his mind'. In the following scene it appears that Nash has attempted to commit suicide by cutting his arm and wrist. The bloody scene, however, depicts Nash's attempt to find the code inserted into his arm, which proves futile. It is at this point that Nash realises that he is actually sick and willingly undergoes insulin shock therapy. Dramatic music underpins this scene as Nash allows himself to be placed on the bed. Close ups are shown of nursing staff locking his legs and arms into place, contrasted with close ups of Nash's face as he observes what is happening to him. It is a highly dramatic scene. Above, Alicia and Dr Rosen watch as electric shocks take over Nash's body. The reverse close up shots between Alicia's and Nash's grief stricken faces poignantly illustrate the devastating effect Nash's mental illness is having on them both. The director positions the responder to view both Alicia and Nash as having an enormous amount of courage as both are dedicated to his recovery. This is further developed through the mis-en-scene, where Nash receives the insulin shock therapy. In the forefront of the shot is Dr Rosen watching Nash, whilst Alicia has turned her back, unable to see her husband in this way. Between the two characters, the responder can see Nash shaking as the hospital staff attend to him. Alicia asks how often, as Nash's body thrashes and Dr Rosen reveals the number of times this will need to occur to achieve the desired effect—five times a week for ten weeks. The camera then moves into a long shot of Nash on the bed followed by a close up of his face, thereby developing great sympathy for Nash.

Alicia states that she is able to see past the illness to the man that she married and that this transforms him into someone she loves. The camera takes a medium low angle shot, revealing her strength and courage. The depth of her love is shown when she sends Rosen away after Nash's hallucinations resume. Despite Nash telling her it may be unsafe for her to be with him, she stays, offering him her full support. In a two shot of Alicia and Nash, she asks him if he wants to know what's real, and tenderly places her hand on his face. She then moves his hand to her face and then to her heart, suggesting that maybe the part that 'knows the waking from the dream' isn't in his head but in his heart, as she places her hand on his heart. The tenderness she shows him reveals that her love is crucial to Nash's recovery. When he wins the Nobel Prize in 1994 he ponders the true nature of logic and reason. He speaks of the most important discovery of his life—that it is in the 'mysterious equations of love' where no 'logical reasons can be found', publicly acknowledging the love and support his wife has given him. Ironically, Nash finds meaning in the mysterious, not in the mathematical or scientific.

## TEXT SUMMARY AND STRUCTURE

### Act One

**September 1947, Princeton University:** Professor Helinger informs a room full of young male mathematicians that it was mathematicians who won the first world war, mathematicians who broke the Japanese codes and built the A-bomb, and that the stated goal of the Soviets is global communism. Nash's fascination with patterns is revealed: his eyes catch the patterns on Martin Hansen's tie and the refracting light on a crystal punch bowl. Later, from Nash's point of view, his roommate Charles arrives. Later in the university grounds Nash observes the movements of a group of pigeons. Hansen challenges him to a game of Go, a game Nash feels is ultimately flawed. Nash is visibly shaken when he loses the game. Nash makes calculations for his Game Theory paper with a white pen on a leadlight window in the library. Charles enters and shows support for Nash and his beliefs. However Charles is aware that Nash has not taken a break in days, so he persuades him to do so. Nash is told by Professor Helinger that he will not be given a placement at any university and that he needs to attend class and finish his paper. Nash is extremely stressed. Charles physically and emotionally shocks Nash out of his obsessive mental anguish when he throws Nash's desk out the window. In the scene with the five women in the student bar, Nash realises how Game Theory operates in society. Consequently, Nash is able to present a paper to his professor and is offered a placement at MIT. He chooses Sol and Bender to assist him in his work there.

### Act Two

**Pentagon 1953–Five years later:** William Parcher observes Nash decode an encrypted Russian telecommunication for the Pentagon. Nash reluctantly teaches a mathematics class, where he meets Alicia. That night Parcher approaches Nash to work secretly for his country, breaking Soviet codes. He is taken to a secret MIT laboratory. A radium dye code for a secret drop box is implanted in Nash's arm. Alicia asks Nash out to dinner. Later he takes her to a university gala event, where Nash feels he is being followed. Nash becomes increasingly obsessive about searching for hidden codes, and believes he is being followed when he delivers his results to a secret mailbox. Alicia and Nash spend time together. When Charles visits Nash at MIT with his niece Marcee, Nash asks Charles how you can be certain you are in love. Nash arrives late for Alicia's birthday dinner, then gives her a crystal and asks her to marry him. Just after Nash and Alicia have been married, Parcher pulls up in the car and watches the newlyweds. Nash looks concerned. It is 1954. Nash makes a drop at the secret mailbox. William Parcher drives up and tells Nash to jump in. Parcher speeds off and a car follows close behind, shooting at them. Nash is traumatised when Parcher throws him a gun and implores him to shoot back. Nash returns home, shaken by the night's events. Alicia realises

her husband is struggling with his mental health. She calls a hospital. The next day Nash arrives at Harvard University to give a guest lecture. He is comforted by Marcee and Charles, who are waiting outside the lecture hall.

### Act Three

Nash has trouble focusing on his guest lecture at the Mathematics Conference at Harvard University. Several men enter the lecture hall. Nash thinks the men are foreign agents. He flees the lecture hall, but is caught by Dr Rosen. Nash is forcibly sedated and committed to a psychiatric facility, which Nash believes is run by the Soviets. Nash is diagnosed with schizophrenia. Dr Rosen tells Alicia that Charles, Marcee and Parcher exist only in Nash's imagination. Alicia goes to the secret mail box and finds a dilapidated mansion and a stack of unopened classified envelopes. She confronts Nash with the pile of unopened classified envelopes. He returns to his hospital cell and cuts his arm open to find there is no radium code implanted. He realises that William Parcher is not real and there is no conspiracy. John Nash submits to undergoing a series of insulin stock treatments. Nash feels that his life has no meaning anymore. Nash and Alicia's relationship becomes difficult. Nash secretly stops taking the anti-psychotic medication that makes him lethargic and unable to respond to his son and Alicia. This causes a relapse. Parcher reappears and the situation becomes dangerous for Alicia and their son. Alicia rings Dr Rosen. Against Dr. Rosen's advice, and with the support of Alicia, Nash decides to stop taking medication again. Nash believes he can learn how to separate what is real from what is a delusion. Two months later Nash approaches his old colleague Martin Hansen, now head of Princeton's Mathematics Department. Nash asks if he can work out of the library and audit classes. During his conversation with Hansen, Charles appears at the door, but now Nash understands Charles is a delusional character. 1978: Nash writes his equation on the leadlight window in the library, but is drawn away by a young student who seeks guidance. It is not long before he is helping a group of students. 1994: Nash is reinstated as a teacher at Princeton University. He is approached by a representative from the Nobel Prize committee. Nash is honoured by his fellow professors for his achievements in Mathematics. He wins the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics. Nash and Alicia leave the auditorium in Stockholm; Nash sees Charles, Marcee and Parcher standing to one side watching him. He simply walks away with Alicia on his arm.

## CHARACTERS

**John Nash:** He is a mathematical genius, who won the Nobel Prize in 1994. He studied at Princeton University and became a professor there. Nash suffered from and overcame a mental condition called paranoid schizophrenia.

**Professor Helinger:** He is the Head of Mathematics at Princeton University.

**Martin Hansen:** He is a brilliant mathematician who studied at Princeton, and a rival of Nash. He later becomes a supportive friend and head of the Princeton Mathematics Department.

**Richard Sol:** He is a friend and fellow mathematics student at Princeton. Nash chooses Sol to assist him in his research at MIT.

**Bender:** He is also a friend and fellow mathematics student at Princeton. Nash chooses Bender to assist him in his research at MIT.

**Charles Herman:** He is Nash's roommate at Princeton who studied English literature. (Note: Charles is an imagined friend who initially provides some comfort and balance in Nash's inner world.)

**Alicia Larde:** She is Nash's intelligent and loving wife who stayed with him despite the difficulties of living with a person with severe mental illness.

**William Parcher:** He is an agent of the US government who convinces Nash to help break secret Soviet codes, in order to prevent a horrible nuclear attack on the United States (Note: Parcher is an hallucinatory character, part of Nash's schizophrenic paranoia).

**Marcee:** She is Charles' young niece, and is a source of comfort to Nash. (Note, the fact that Marcee never grows up is the catalyst for Nash's realisation that she is a figment of his imagination.)

**Dr. Rosen:** He is a psychiatrist in Boston who identifies Nash's schizophrenia.

## SETTING

The film is predominantly set in two of the most prestigious universities in the United States

**Princeton University:** The university is located in the small town of Princeton New Jersey, about an hour from New York City.

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT):** This is where researchers worked on computers and radar guidance during World War II and the Cold War.

Other settings include:

**Pentagon:** The camera pans across a bird's eye view of the labs and then cross cuts to a long shot of the internal labs. Ominous music plays in the background indicating looming danger and a sense of seriousness.

**Wheeler Defense Labs: MIT Campus:** This is where Nash works with Sol and Bender. It is also where he works in private and where his room is covered in codes. The abandoned warehouses are where Nash believes the undercover operation is occurring.

**Harvard University:** This is where Nash gives a guest lecture and is captured by Dr. Rosen, a psychiatrist.

**Nash's family home:** This is in a suburban area where John Nash lives with his wife Alicia and their son.

**MacArthur Psychiatric Hospital:** This is where John is taken after he is captured by Dr Rosen at Harvard University. The director uses a film noir style to represent the mansion with the secret drop box. Classic film noir has been associated with an American social landscape depicting, in particular, the sense of heightened anxiety and alienation that is said to have followed World War II, namely the Cold War. The building is grand with a large cast iron gate, providing a barrier to access. It is through the code that Nash believes is on his arm that he is able to open the gate and access the letterbox where he believes he is to drop the envelopes with the codes he has secretly broken. The music is haunting and a dog barks, adding to the mood of possible danger that Nash believes pervades his world.

## LANGUAGE FORMS AND FEATURES

### Humour

The scene where Charles is introduced to Nash is humorously constructed by the director in order to show Nash's playful side, providing a significant contrast to his serious approach to academia. Charles enters the dorm room, confident and slightly swaying. He compares hangovers to dying of thirst, humorously noting that dying of thirst, would feel like a 'hangover that finally bloody kills you'. The humour is accentuated by Nash's look of surprise. Charles is a much more cheerful character than John and he immediately endears himself to Nash and the responder through his light hearted nature, something Nash is unable to relish in his own life. Charles asks Nash 'Is my room-mate a dick?' and brings out a hip flask of alcohol, proposing that they 'drown the ice' considering his efforts to break the ice with Nash are not succeeding. The flask symbolically provides the gateway for Nash to relax and begin opening up to Charles. Nash then begins to use humour himself as he reveals that he is quite well balanced as he has a 'chip on both shoulders'. In the library Nash confesses to Charles that he is trying to come up with an 'equilibrium where prevalence is a non-singular event where nobody loses'. He realises that this would have an invaluable impact on conflict scenarios and currency exchange. Charles uses humour to break Nash's concentration, allowing Nash some reprieve. It is Charles who urges Nash to eat, stating that he has enormous respect for pizza and 'of course beer'. Interestingly, despite Nash's determination to work relentlessly, it is only when he is able to break his concentration and join the world that significant discoveries are made. When Charles throws Nash's desk out the window he declares: 'that Isaac Newton fellow was right' about gravity, and the two laugh as they look at the desk sprawled in the snow.

Charles is also socially confident with women, something that Nash is not. This is shown through his witty use of language as he makes reference to Johnny Walker, a brand of whisky, referring to the drink as 'hitting him' in some kind of accident, meaning the alcohol metaphorically 'knocked him out'. Charles uses sexual innuendo when he tells Nash about the cocktails he had the night before as the 'cock' was his but the 'tails' belonged to a woman. Nash on the other hand is socially awkward. This can be seen through his abruptness and lack of awareness in his interaction with the woman at the university bar. At first he is silent, not knowing what to say. She suggests that he buy her a drink. He tells the woman at the bar that he does not know how to engage in chit chat so asks what he has to do to have sex with her. She slaps his face and walks away, calling him an 'asshole', to the delighted amusement of his peers who can be heard laughing in the background. To lighten the situation Charles arrives, sarcastically saying that he particularly liked the 'bit about fluid exchange' as it was 'really charming'. In a medium shot we see Charles walking out the door. This is followed by a shot of Nash laughing. The mis-en-scene shows Nash in the foreground with people around the bar and his peers looking from the pool table, suggesting that Nash has a different way of coping with the stresses of life that are separate from the real world. It is not his peer group he turns to for support but his imaginary friend. Later Nash relies on Charles to talk to him about his feelings for Alicia. Charles responds with mock shock when Nash declares that he met a girl and Charles asks if she is a 'human girl, a homo sapien'. He declares that 'there is no accounting for taste' as he mocks Nash about his attraction to Alicia. For Nash, Charles' return is synonymous with his need to talk about his feelings and to determine if marrying Alicia is the right thing for him to do. Charles acts as a support for Nash when he is in trouble and helps him to make significant decisions. John wants to know if you ever know for sure. Charles replies 'nothing is ever for sure'.

Nash uses humour to cope with his illness. When Sol pays him a visit, he invites Sol to sit down as he says 'have you met Harvey', to which Sol laughs nervously, unsure of how to respond. Nash tells him that there is no use 'being nuts if you can't have a little fun'. By this stage, Nash is aware of his illness and the director uses humour to indicate that Nash is successfully coping with it.

### Symbolism

The leadlight windows in Nash's dorm and in the library are significant motifs used throughout the film to represent Nash's perception and 'window on the world'. The windows create a place where Nash can view society and society can view his brilliance. For example when he first comes to his dorm, he pushes his desk up against the window and looks out at the students arriving in a convivial manner. Using subjective treatment the camera looks through the window so that the responder sees the students as Nash does. The windows with his equations scribbled on them make his work both public and transparent, foreshadowing the significance of his equations for society. The drawings also allow the director to show Nash's ability to see things lightly. As Charles says, he has invented 'window art'. Nash also describes the images as a 'group playing touch football' and 'pigeons fighting over breadcrumbs' and a 'woman chasing a man

who stole her purse'. Later when Nash comes up with his innovative idea on 'governing dynamics' the camera zooms out from the window looking into Nash sitting at his desk as it snows, organising his thoughts on his newly discovered theory. Dramatic music plays in the background as the sound of Nash muttering can be heard. The camera zooms out as the snow stops, indicating the passage of time as he works on developing his theory, with the image of Spring symbolising his mind expanding and his ideas blossoming now that he has found the insight he has been searching for. This is in stark contrast to his office at MIT where his work is kept secret. The secret laboratory at MIT is filled with computers, which act as clue to Nash's state of mind. In the height of his paranoia, Nash looks through the windows of his apartment out at cars on the street, with secret agents glimpsed through a window in the darkness. The light through the blinds casts shadows across his face emphasising his delusion. In a close up, he moves back so that he is almost in the dark. This is juxtaposed with a medium shot of Alicia where half her body is also in the dark and the dark lines run across her body and face, indicating that she is also affected and in the dark about her husband's illness as she reaches breaking point. In a medium shot we see that she is contemplating what to do. The juxtaposition of light and darkness symbolises the turmoil she is in. She moves from the darkness to the light as she turns the light from the lamp on and the camera cuts away to a close up of the phone cast in light, indicating that she intends to seek medical help for her husband. Thereby the director positions the responder to appreciate her decision as bringing light to the darkness. In the proceeding scene, representing the implications of Alicia's decision, Nash is captured by the psychiatrist Dr Rosen, when Nash is a guest lecturer at a Mathematic Conference at Harvard University. In addition, when Alicia drives to the mansion where Nash has been placing codes in the letter box, the rain on the window obscures our vision of her as well as Alicia's vision of the foreign surroundings. Similarly Alicia's face through the window is the last thing Nash sees before he undergoes insulin shock therapy. Alicia's face fades as Nash slips into sedation.

After Nash's hallucinations resume, Marcee provides the catalyst for him to realise that his hallucinations are not real. In the highly emotive scene where Parcher puts a gun to Alicia's head as Parcher urges him to 'finish her' as 'she knows too much', Charles and Marcee appear. The scene is chaotic for Nash, shown through the quick editing between the various figments of his imagination. The camera spirals, while focusing on a close up of Nash's face, interjected with flashbacks of his past. Here Nash perceives that Alicia and Charles never 'coexist in the same interactive field'. His uses his logic in order to solve the riddle of whether the hallucinations are real or not, something that is very important to Nash with his mathematical mind. Through the car window in the pouring rain, Nash stops Alicia, who has escaped the scene, telling her that he recognises that Marcee 'never gets older', therefore the people he sees cannot be real. The windscreen wipers move back and forth, blurring Alicia's vision, indicating that she is moving in and out of awareness. It is a pivotal moment for both Alicia and Nash as Nash finally realises the difference between what's real and what is not. From this point on he is able to solve the problem by managing his hallucinations.

The pen ceremony, reserved for department members who attain prominent recognition in their field and the respect of their peers through their life's achievement, highlights Nash's recovery and ability to manage his mental illness. In the beginning, Professor Helinger shows Nash this as another professor receives the pens of his colleagues. As the Professor tells Nash that his placement is no longer valid, the camera focuses on Nash's face in a close up. The camera zooms out so that Nash becomes smaller, indicating his sense of failure and loss. This is contrasted with a close up of Nash looking through the window as he attempts to draw a relevant equation. He is extremely distressed as he states that he 'can't see it', meaning that he hasn't found the equation to prove his theory. He declares that he cannot fail as 'this is all I am'. Ultimately, he does not fail as can be seen by the same respect from his colleagues being bestowed upon Nash as he sits in the dining Hall with the delegate from the Nobel Prize Committee. As Nash learns to work with others, he is symbolically honoured with the respect of his colleagues, as demonstrated by the giving of the pens ritual in the dining hall.

When Nash enters the classroom at Princeton, he declares that 'this will be my first class', symbolically indicating the value of traditional learning, something that Nash finally comes to appreciate. Similarly, in the library, he learns to 'talk to people' and share his knowledge in an indirect form of education, something that better suits his approach to learning. However, he is now able to combine both in a way that suits him.

### Film techniques

When Nash observes his peer's tie, the director illustrates that Nash has a knack for identifying patterns. The camera focuses on the light reflecting off the glass on the table. The camera pans across the table, moving the pattern of light over the slices of fruit up to the tie as sounds muffle in the background, indicating the point of focus for Nash is on the pattern of light, not the conversation, as it would be for most people. The director positions the responder to perceive Nash's difference as well as his preoccupation with making meaning from patterns. The camera halts on the tie where the pattern of light matches the pattern on the tie. The camera zooms in on a close up of the tie as the patterns light up. Nash's social isolation is further developed by the insult he directs at Neilson when he says 'there could be a mathematical explanation for how bad your tie is'.

The stress of competition is shown through reverse cut close ups between Hansen and Nash as they play the game in the yard at Princeton University. Hansen challenges Nash by asking how it would feel if he is chosen for Wheeler and Nash is not. Hansen notes that despite Nash's hubris, he has not actually produced any results as yet. The essence of Nash's insecurity is accentuated by the camera circling in on the board as Hansen questions Nash about what it would be like if he does not come up with an original idea. Hansen says to him 'What if you lose', as the camera spiral zooms

onto the board and Hansen makes his winning move. Diegetic sound emphasises the sound of the pebble being placed on the board, then cross cuts to a close up of Nash's bewildered face, angered by his defeat, which is contrasted with Hansen laughing at his victory. Nash claims the game to be flawed as he gets up and walks away. The mis-en-scene shows Nash close to the camera walking away, with the men around the board game watching him leave, dramatising the distress losing causes Nash and the stress he is under to come up with an original idea.

Special effects are used in the scene where Nash comes up with his innovative idea. Nash challenges the theory of Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, who states that "in competition individual ambition serves the common good". The camera focuses on a close up of Nash as he observes 'the blonde' who is the object of the group's interest. The camera zooms in to an extreme close up of the blonde woman's face, then light reflects off her face, reverse cutting back to Nash smiling. At first we think it is because she is attracted to him, but as he declares that 'Adam Smith needs revision' we realise that he has come up with a new theory that defies Smith's theory. The director demonstrates Nash's new theory through a series of camera shots and special effects. For example, as Nash states, 'if we all go for the blonde', the camera stays still then zooms in on the blonde, who moves away from her peer group. Nash claims that not one of them will get her as the camera moves to an aerial shot of the blonde as men approach and disappear in a puff of black smoke. As he states 'then we go for her friends', the camera stays still but the subject retracts from the camera and women come forward as the men approach. The women turn away from the men as Nash explains that no-one wants to be second best. He then poses the question, 'What if no-one goes for the blonde?' as the camera focuses on a medium shot of the blonde woman and then zooms out, indicating that she is isolated and alone, turning into a long shot of men and women dancing, indicating that all men and women are happily matched. The mis-en-scene shows the harmony between the couples as no one is in 'each other's way' and they 'don't insult the other girls'. Eventually the blonde woman fades out of the shot. In a close up of Nash, he declares: 'That's the only way we win.' He concludes in a series of reverse cuts between the group that Smith's theory is incomplete as the best result comes from everyone in the group 'doing what's best for himself and the group'. As he rushes out the door, he thanks the blonde woman as he realises he has the innovative idea he has been looking for.

The director uses film techniques to indicate Nash's state of mind as he copes with his mental illness. After Nash is captured by the psychiatric team, the camera fades to black. Close ups of Nash's face through the car window are shown as he observes the curious crowd that has gathered. In a long shot in the centre is Charles, holding Marcee, who comes forward. The fade effect continues into the next scene as Nash wakes up from the Thorazine drug used to sedate him. The director uses subjective treatment in order to show things from Nash's point of view. The blur and darkness indicate that this is Nash's darkest hour. Dr Rosen's voice over alerts us to the setting—a psychiatric hospital. As Nash becomes aware of his surroundings, so does the responder. The camera pans across and up objects halting on them when Nash is able to see what they are, such as the heater and the door. The camera tilts up as Nash makes sense of the body coming towards him—Dr Rosen. His dark suit creates an ominous mood so that we understand why Nash would be so frightened, prompting him to attempt to escape out of the wheel chair and handcuffs that bind him, which are also indicative on his vulnerable state. A series of reverse cut medium shots reveal Nash's belief that he is wrongfully held and that he is involved in a top-secret military operation. When Nash jumps off his wheelchair convulsing, the camera moves to an aerial shot showing Nash on the floor while Rosen calls for help. The camera then focuses on Nash's face on the floor. Using subjective treatment, the camera pans up from the floor to reveal a medium shot of Charles sitting, leaning forward in a state of distress. Nash calls for his help, but he does not move. Nash realises that he has betrayed him as Charles does not move to assist him and Dr Rosen tells him that no-one is there. Charles' betrayal therefore symbolises the beginning of Nash's healing as he is no longer able to rely on his delusions to help him in the world. As Dr Rosen and Alicia walk together through the hospital hallway, Alicia begins to realise that Nash has been having hallucinations as Dr Rosen questions her on whether she has actually ever seen Charles, which she has not. It is at this point that Alicia assists Dr Rosen in showing Nash what is real and 'what is in his mind'. Dramatic music plays as Alicia enters Nash's office with Sol and Bender. She repeats 'Oh my God' as the full extent of his illness becomes apparent. The camera pans across the room taking in the numerous magazines and newspaper clippings Nash has collected, zooming in to a close up of images of people and scraps of papers with number codes.

#### Key quotes

**Professor Helinger:** 'Mathematicians won the war. Mathematicians broke the Japanese codes.'

**Professor Helinger:** 'Who among you will be the vanguard of democracy, freedom and discovery?'

**Nash:** 'I don't like people much.'

**Charles:** 'Maybe you're just better with the old integers than you are with people.'

#### Key quotes

**Parcher:** 'Oppenheimer ... "A genius sees the answer before the question."'

**Nash:** 'I'm a lone wolf...  
People don't like me.'

**Nash:** 'So what am I now—a spy?'

**Alicia:** 'I believe in deciding things will be good luck.'

**Parcher:** 'You quit working for me. I quit working for you.'

**Dr Rosen:** 'The nightmare of schizophrenia is not knowing what's true.'

**Alicia:** 'I think often what I feel is obligation, or guilt over wanting to leave.'

**Nash:** [schizophrenia] 'It's a problem with no solution.'

**Alicia:** 'I need to believe that something extraordinary is possible.'