



Soul's separation from the body in *Phantom Boy*

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ABSTRACT: This article is about the ways with which Franco-Belgian film *Phantom Boy*, a family friendly comedic and adventurous story, depicts human soul and corresponds to the philosophical subject of soul separation from the body during lifetime and not only after death.

KEYWORDS: Soul, separation, body, life, death, existence

I. Introduction-Film plot

The Franco-Belgian production *Phantom Boy* (Felicoli, Gagnol, 2015), concerns the spiritual separation during one's lifetime, in an excellent, old-fashioned and cinephile animation.

Eleven-year-old Leo suffers from cancer and has a unique ability. To detach himself from his body whenever he wants, but only for a specific period of time. If his soul is absent from his body for too long, he will never be able to return. The body will fall into a coma and may die. The soul, in turn, will cease to exist and be lost. The film begins the night before Leo is admitted to the hospital.

During the separation of soul and matter, little boy's body seems to be asleep. It enters a state of inertia. His soul can float wherever she wishes. She does not have the ability to intervene in things, but she is an eyewitness to events that take place far away from where her body is. At the same time, despite the fact that it cannot move, her body has the ability to transmit to anyone in front of it, what the soul sees from afar.

In the hospital, Leo meets an injured police officer, Alex Tanner. He sits in a wheelchair, with a broken leg. Leo dreams of becoming a police officer. Alex, despite the fact that the police chief constantly demotes him, is brave and moral. He tries to arrest a deformed, extremely dangerous criminal, the "man with the broken face".

The dangerous criminal threatens to plunge the city into chaos through a computer virus that will be unleashed at next day's midnight, if he does not receive the ransom he demands. Alex's ally is the courageous journalist Marie Delaney, with whom he also has a romantic relationship.

But Alex can't do much from the hospital. Leo shares his secret with Alex and, with his unique ability, helps solve the biggest crime the city has ever faced.

II. The soul's independence

The creators of the film, Felicoli and Gagnol, design a story with two levels of reading in an elegant, traditional, two-dimensional design. A purely entertaining and humorous police mystery film that pays homage to classic film noir and, at the same time, a film about the state of existence between life and death.

The boy's ability corresponds to Tylor's (1871) unfounded soul. Tylor's theory is related to the "philosophical" separation. The question of the embodied soul that can nevertheless act independently of the material vessel and sever its connection with it, has been philosophically established since antiquity. The relationship between the two ideas, of incarnation and separation, is, seemingly, contradictory. Separation, however, does not necessarily refer to the moment of death but to a complete detachment of matter and soul even during earthly life. This is the term "philosophical separation", which includes the semantic scheme of a "philosophical" union of body and soul or rather a "fall" of the soul into matter and, by extension, its subsequent, voluntary separation (Smith, 1975).



Photo 1. *Phantom boy*, (Felicoli, Gagnol, 2015)

Plotinus claims that the separation of body and soul is not something negative, an avoidance of action, but, rather, an extremely positive act of union with the essence of existence as a whole (Smith, 1975).

The separation as an attempt of spirit to conquer and not to avoid life, is appropriated by the creators in *Phantom boy*. According to the script, the child's ability is not even exclusively his own.

When Alex arrives at the hospital unconscious, he, also, has an out-of-body experience (00:20:00). Then, Leo's soul approaches him and reminds him to return to his body soon, otherwise he will lose it permanently (Photo 1). If this happens, the spirit will remain lost in the universal beyond, and the body will be left without a soul. Death will occur. Leo confesses that he acts as a guide frequently with the souls of other hospital patients who forget to return to their bodies.

Thus, spiritual dissociation is not a superpower of the main character. It is a process of dual existence in general. As long as the individual is in a stage between life and death. When existence approaches death, then the soul tends to leave matter. Even if she returns afterwards. Within the plot of the film, somehow this resembles with a familiarization of the soul with the afterlife. A first sense of the new state in which she will soon find herself, in her final transition from the material to the immaterial world. The final separation will not necessarily occur soon in the life of the person who has the out-of-body

experiences. Alex experiences his one and only out-of-body experience when he has lost consciousness. He then recovers and remains injured, but his life is out of danger. Therefore, the outcome of the story as to whether Leo will finally defeat cancer and live or not is not predetermined.

III. Souls' visual depiction, script and optical semiology

The way soul is designed and animated captures, visually, the lightness of its intangible, spectral nature. Through the depiction of the soul, the characteristics of the afterlife are implied, figuratively. A peaceful, harmonious, serene suspension in the world until the union of the individual with the generative universe.

The young age of the protagonist corresponds to the sensitive age when human has a greater receptivity to spiritual forces. When we are children.

When the little protagonist is in the hospital elevator with an elderly patient (00:44:00), the semiology is given both by the age gap between the two figures and, also, by the role of the elevator itself. The young and the old are depicted as two poles of life. At the same time, the elevator raises and lowers the bodies in a manner corresponding to the ascent and descent of souls to and beyond the earthly sphere (Photo 2).



Photo 2. *Phantom boy*, (Felicioli, Gagnol, 2015)

In the adventurous escalation of the film, in order for little Leo to solve the case and help in the arrest of the great criminal, he stays outside his body for longer than he should. Then, his spectral self begins to acquire a chromatic texture of electric blue. In this case, blue refers to night, melancholy and the universe, due to its connection with the

color of Earth as seen from space. Leo's soul begins to fade (Photo 3). His fetal position suggests birth rather than death, as he transitions to a new, spiritual state. His soul does not have time to return to his body in time and disappears while his body falls into a comatose state (01:13:00).



Photo 3. *Phantom boy*, (Felicioli, Gagnol, 2015)

Finally, the Leo's little sister, Titi, a symbol of childhood innocence and the magical power it brings, reads him the story that Leo used to read to her. Their favorite story. A story about moral law enforcers and immoral criminals. The story uttered by Titi's lips wakes Leo up and brings his soul back to his body.

So, in the end, there is also a symbolism about the power of storytelling. The nature of stories is to remind us of the essence of existence. To bring us back to cosmic truth and connect matter with the power of the spirit.



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V. Filmography

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