

Letter from an Unknown Woman (1948) Max Ophüls (1902-1957)

OVERVIEW

Auteur: Maximillian Oppenheimer, known as Max Ophüls, was a German-born film director. He was born in Saarbrücken, the son of Leopold Oppenheimer, a Jewish textile manufacturer, and his wife Helene Oppenheimer (née Bamberger). He took the pseudonym Ophüls during the early part of his theatrical career so that, should he fail, it wouldn't embarrass his father. Initially envisioning an acting career, he started as a stage actor in 1919. He became creative director of the Burgtheater in Vienna in 1926. He turned to film production in 1929. He worked in Germany (1931–1933), France (1933–1940 and 1950–1957), and the United States (1947–1950). He made nearly 30 films, with the most notable ones being: *La Ronde* (1950), *Le Plaisir* (1952), *The Earrings of Madame de...* (1953), and *Lola Montès* (1955). Ophüls died from rheumatic heart disease on 26 March 1957 in Hamburg, while shooting interiors on *The Lovers of Montparnasse*, and was buried in Paris. The annual film festival Max Ophüls Preis in Saarbrücken is named after him.

Film: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is a 1948 American drama romance film directed by Max Ophüls (listed as Max Opuls in the opening credits sequence). The film stars Joan Fontaine, Louis Jourdan, Mady Christians, and Marcel Journet. It is based on the novella of the same name by Stefan Zweig. The producer of the film is John Houseman. The screenplay is by Howard Koch. The cinematography is by Franz Planer. The music is by Daniele Amfitheatrof. In 1992, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being 'culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant'. In July 2021, the film was shown in the Cannes Classics section at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival. *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is very highly regarded by today's critics. Tim Dirks of Filmsite has listed it among the 100 greatest American movies of all time.

Historical background: The film was adapted by screenwriter Howard Koch from the Stefan Zweig novella *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (German: *Brief einer Unbekannten*). Stefan Zweig (28 November 1881 – 22 February 1942) was an Austrian writer. At the height of his literary career, in the 1920s and 1930s, he was one of the most widely translated and popular writers in the world. Zweig's best-known fiction includes *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1922), *Amok* (1922), *Fear* (1925), *Confusion of Feelings* (1927), *Twenty-Four Hours in the Life of a Woman* (1927). His *Letter from an Unknown Woman* was published in 1922 and tells the story of a rich and well-known author (R.) who returns home to Vienna from one of many holidays and finds a long letter from an unknown woman (Fräulein). While reading this letter written by the woman he does not remember, he gets glimpses into her life story. There are divergences between the film and Zweig's novella.

CHARACTERS

Lisa Berndle: The narrator of the film who has been in love with Stefan Brand since her teenage years

Stefan Brand: A pianist, and neighbor of Lisa who never seems to remember who Lisa is

Frau Berndle: Lisa's mother who marries Herr Kastner and moves to Linz

Johann Stauffer: An old general who marries Lisa while knowing all about her affair with Stefan

John: Stefan Brand's loyal butler, mute

Herr Kastner: A military tailor living in Linz, marries Frau Berndle, Lisa's stepfather

Marie: Lisa's friend and neighbor

Lt. Leopold von Kaltnegger: A young man who courts Lisa

Colonel: Leopold's uncle, a military man

Stefan Jr.: Son of Lisa and Stefan whom Lisa names after him

Madam Spitzer: A woman who owns a dressing business, Lisa's boss

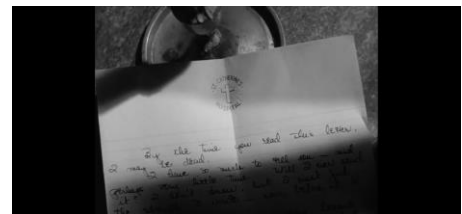
SYNOPSIS

In around 1900 in Vienna, Stefan Brand has to duel the next morning but plans to flee town. He receives a letter from an unknown woman named Lisa: Decades ago, Lisa is a teenager living in an apartment building. A new tenant, concert pianist Stefan Brand becomes her neighbor. Lisa is fascinated by Stefan, yet she admires him from a distance. Despite her admiration, they only meet once, and Stefan hardly notices her. Soon, Lisa's mother announces a marriage arrangement to a wealthy man from Linz. Lisa runs away from the railway station before they depart for Linz and goes back to their building. She knocks on Stefan's door, but no one answers. After waiting there for hours, Lisa sees Stefan return home with another woman. Lisa decides to go to Linz. Several years later, Lisa is a respectable woman. She rejects a young military officer's marriage proposal saying she is engaged to a musician from Vienna. After this, Lisa is disowned by her parents, she returns to Vienna and starts working as a dress model. She waits outside Stefan's window every night. One of those nights he notices her. They go on a long, romantic date. Soon after, Stefan leaves for a concert in Milan. He promises to return within two weeks but doesn't. Lisa eventually gives birth to their child, never contacting Stefan. Ten years later, Lisa is married to Johann, an older general. One day at the opera, Lisa sees Stefan. Feeling uneasy, she leaves. Stefan follows her outside while she is waiting for her carriage. He tells her he feels they must have met before. A few nights later, Lisa travels to Stefan's apartment. Stefan talks about his past life but still does not recognize who Lisa truly is. Lisa realizes Stefan never truly loved her. Soon after, Lisa's son Stefan dies of typhus. While Lisa also is gravely ill, she writes a letter to Stefan, recounting her life and feelings. When Stefan grasps the truth, he experiences a haunting vision of their first encounter. The story concludes as he heads to a duel.

SCENES

Stefan's duel The film is set in Vienna in the year 1900. On a rainy evening, we see a carriage stopping by a house. A man is accompanied by his two friends. His friends ask him whether he's made up his mind and going through with it (referring to the duel on the next morning). The man says he doesn't mind being killed but it is difficult for him to get up in the morning. He says goodbye to his friends and heads toward his apartment building. Back in the carriage, his friends talk about how this time Stefan has picked a fight with the wrong man. Stefan goes up the stairs of his apartment. His butler John opens the door to whom Stefan says to cheer up. He has no intentions of participating in the duel: 'Honor is a luxury, only gentlemen can afford'. He wants his things packed for an indefinite stay and plans to go out in an hour as there is a cab waiting for him. At that moment, the mute butler John hands Stefan a letter that came during the night. Stefan asks for coffee with cognac.

Stefan starts to read the mysterious letter Stefan opens the letter and starts reading it while he is washing his face. The letter was sent from St. Catherine's Hospital. It starts with: *'By the time you read this letter, I may be dead. I have so much to tell you, perhaps very little time. Will I ever send it? I don't know.'* After having read these introductory lines and then reading the rest of the letter: *'I must find the strength to write, now before it's too late. And as I write, it may become clear that what happened to us had its own reason beyond our poor understanding. If this reaches you... You'll know how I became yours... When you didn't know who I was, or even that I existed.'*



A new tenant arrives at the apartment building where Lisa lives Narrator narrates that: 'Nothing is vivid...or really my memory. Before that day in spring...When I came home from school and found a moving van in front of our building.' We see a blonde teenage girl curiously looking at and examining the items of her new neighbor that are being transported to the



apartment. At that moment, she sees men trying to lift a piano with ropes.

Lisa is enchanted with the musician The narrator says: 'I didn't see you that day or from many days thereafter. But I could listen to your playing.' We see her riding on a swing and listening to the piano music coming from the open windows of her neighbor. Soon a friend of hers joins her saying she wished he'd stop that noise. Lisa defends her neighbor saying it is not noise: 'Mr. Brand is playing.'



Lisa and Mr. Brand's first encounter After the music finishes, Lisa quickly goes to the entrance of the building where Mr. Brand might come out. We see Mr. Brand going down the stairs and Lisa opens and holds the door for him. They look at each other for a few moments and Mr. Brand says to her: 'Thank you. Good morning.' Lisa looks very shy and stands holding the door for many consecutive moments. Her friend comes up to her and says that she is all red in the face, blushing. Lisa runs to catch her friend.



Lisa tries to make herself more graceful The narrator keeps telling her story: '...hard as it may be for you to realize...From that moment on, I was in love with you.' From that moment onward, she quite consciously prepares herself for him. She keeps her clothes neater, takes dancing classes to be more graceful, and visits the library to study the lives of the great musicians so she would know more about him and his world. As the months go by, she also observes and begins to know his friends most of whom were women.



Lisa stays up late to listen to the music Mr. Brand plays 'But I really lived for those evenings when you're alone. And I pretended that you were playing just for me. I know you didn't know it...You were giving me some of the happiest hours of my life.' We see Lisa staying up late when she is supposed to be asleep, listening to the sound of the music Mr. Brand is playing. She goes near his apartment and opens one of the windows to better hear the music. She is enchanted by the magic and beauty of the music.

Lisa secretly enters Mr. Brand's apartment Then comes a Thursday, the rug-beating day. Lisa and her friend help the butler John carry Mr. Brand's rug to his apartment. The butler gives thanks to Lisa. Lisa keeps staying in front of the door and tells her friend to go down. Then she sneaks into Mr. Brand's apartment. She looks blessed as she enters the apartment and curiously looks around the environment. She examines the rooms, looks at the statues, enters Mr. Brand's living room smilingly, and looks at the pictures of the musicians hung up on the wall. However, she drops a pile of papers which the butler hears. When he sees Lisa, she runs out.



Frau Berndle is to marry Herr Kastner As Lisa is standing near the stairs, she sees her mother kissing another man. Her mother notices her and tells her that she has got good news which will make her happy. They go to their apartment and she tells her: 'I can understand that you must've been startled...When you saw Herr Kastner and me in the hall.' She goes on to tell her that she is not very old and can still have admirers. She explains that Herr Kastner has a comfortable business in Linz as a military tailor and wishes to marry her. Lisa asks her mother whether they'll have to live in Linz. Frau Berndle thinks there is nothing keeping them in Vienna. But Lisa runs into her room uttering that she won't go.



Lisa runs away from the railway station Lisa, Frau Berndle, and Herr Kastner are at the railway station. Herr Kastner counts the number of boxes they have. He seems to be in a hurry and tells Frau Berndle: 'Don't worry, dear. I'll take care of everything.' As her mother and stepfather deal with the boxes in an excited state, Lisa goes near the exit (Ausgang). She realizes that she has to be with Stefan: *'Suddenly I knew I couldn't live without you. I didn't know what I had in mind, or...what my parents would do when they found me missing. All I wanted was to see you once more. To throw myself at your feet, cling to you, and never leave you. Nothing else. Nothing else mattered.'*



Lisa tries to see Stefan once more Lisa arrives at the apartment building. The porter opens the door for her and she tells him that she forgot something. She runs up the stairs and knocks on Stefan's door. However, no one answers the door. So, she tries the other entrance to Stefan's apartment. Yet, still, no one seems to be home. Lisa decides to wait. She goes to her own apartment the rooms of which were once filled with Stefan's music. For hours she sits outside his door trying to keep herself awake. Early in the morning, Stefan comes home with a woman. Lisa narrates: 'And so, there was nothing left for me. I went to Linz.'

Lisa meets Lt. Leopold von Kaltnegger Lisa is eighteen. We see Lisa, Frau Berndle, and Herr Kastner walking on a street. They greet a colonel who introduces to them his nephew Lieutenant Leopold von Kaltnegger. Leopold and Lisa start walking together. He asks her if she likes it in Linz and that it must seem very restful after Vienna. Lisa says that she loved Vienna because of the music. Leopold responds that every other Saturday afternoon there is a concert on the Kursalon. He offers to escort her one day to one of the concerts. Meanwhile, Frau Berndle talks to Herr Kastner about how there's nothing wrong with Lisa and how she only needs to meet the right people.



Lisa rejects Leopold's marriage proposal We see Lisa and Leopold listening to a concert being performed. Frau Berndle and Herr Kastner are sitting in a coffeehouse with the Colonel. Frau Berndle hopes that they will soon get an announcement regarding their engagement. Lisa and Leopold sit on a bank. Leopold talks about how ever since Lisa came to his attention, he's been favorably impressed. He also talks about his qualifications for an outstanding military career. Soon after, Lisa interrupts him and says that it is impossible. She says she is engaged to a musician living in Vienna which her parents don't know anything about. Leopold is shocked to hear that but shows understanding toward her.



Lisa's parents disown her and she goes to Vienna Lisa and Leopold go near Frau Berndle, Herr Kastner, and the Colonel. Leopold talks to his uncle and they immediately leave. Frau Berndle asks Lisa about what happened and what she said to Leopold. Lisa says: 'I only told him the truth...I told him, I wasn't free.' Lisa keeps narrating: 'My poor parents, for them this was the end. For me, it was a new beginning. Vienna, when I saw it again, seemed to have taken on a new splendor.'



Lisa is a dress model at Madam Spitzer's Lisa finds work as a dress model at Madam Spitzer's. We see Lisa trying on beautiful and elegant dressing gowns. One day, as she is presenting one of these gowns, an old man tells Madam Spitzer about Lisa that she is very charming. Madam Spitzer says she is not like the other girls: 'As soon as these shutters are closed, off she goes straight home'.



Lisa waits outside Stefan's window night after night Lisa narrates that Madam Spitzer spoke the truth. Night after night, Lisa would go to the same spot in front of Stefan's apartment. She would wait for him. But he never noticed her.

Lisa and Stefan's encounter One of those nights when Lisa waits for Stefan, there are street players playing music and singing. Stefan passes by Lisa and gives money to the street players. He notices her waiting in the corner, approaches her and tells her that he's seen her a few nights before in the same corner. They start walking together. Stefan wishes to introduce himself but Lisa says she knows who he is. Stefan says he has something he should call off. They go into a coffee house. Stefan tells a man that he won't be coming to the rehearsal. The man asks what he should tell Lily. Then he says he'll tell her that it was most important and Stefan had to work. Stefan leaves the coffee house. Lisa and he get in a carriage.



Lisa and Stefan in the restaurant Lisa and Stefan are in a restaurant. The waiter brings the meal and tells Stefan that the lady in the next room, Countess Newesky, is asking if he could sign her the program for this afternoon's concert. He adds Countess Newesky says about Stefan's playing that: 'Mozart himself could not have done better'. Lisa tells Stefan that four years ago when he played the D minor, *Morning Review* also compared him to young Mozart. Stefan is surprised she remembers that. Lisa wants Stefan to talk more about himself. He says: 'The truth is, I've had rather an easy time of it. People accepted my music very quickly. Perhaps too quickly. Sometimes it's easier to please others than oneself.' Lisa hesitatingly remarks that she felt when he was playing that he hadn't quite found what he was looking for. Stefan likens Lisa to a sorceress and thinks she might be able to help him one day.



Stefan buys a single white rose for Lisa We see Lisa and Stefan traveling in a carriage. Lisa asks Stefan about how she could help him. Stefan says that she is a very strange girl. Soon, Stefan asks the driver to stop. Then he goes to a flower seller. He buys a single white rose for Lisa saying that it is a 'special occasion'. When he gives the white rose to Lisa, he asks her whether he guessed it right and if it is her flower. Lisa responds: 'From now on it will be.'



In the amusement park Stefan and Lisa go to an amusement park. Stefan talks about how he never comes there in the season, and how it is more pleasant in the winter. Lisa guesses that it is because he prefers to imagine how it will be in the spring. Soon after, the two get on a pretend train where on the windows are projected various photographs from world countries. Lisa talks about her father and various traveling locations. At some point, Stefan sits near Lisa and holds her hand. She asks him why he likes to climb mountains. Stefan says it is because no matter how high one climbs, there's always a higher one. Lisa completes his line of thought: 'And you like to imagine that the other one is even more wonderful. Like the spring in the park.' Stefan says she knows far too much about him. Then he hugs her.

Dancing, playing the piano, and the end of a long date night

We see Lisa and Stefan dancing to the music of a live orchestra. It seems that the musicians of the orchestra are tired of having played for them this evening and they want to go after their current piece ends. After the end of the music, Stefan says to Lisa that she's a sorceress or else they couldn't dance that way. Seeing the musicians are gone, Stefan proceeds to play the piano himself. As he plays, he wishes Lisa to promise to not vanish. Lisa says: 'I won't be the one who vanishes.' After this long romantic date night, they go to Stefan's apartment. There, Stefan and Lisa embrace and kiss each other.



Stefan goes to Milano Stefan visits Lisa at the place where she works. He tells her that they have to put off their plans for the night. Lisa learns that he will go to Milano as the whole orchestra he is playing with is going to play at the Scala. He tells Lisa that he will only be gone for two weeks and the train for Milano leaves at 5.30. At 5.30, Lisa comes to the train station. When Stefan recognizes her, he goes near her and says that he doesn't want to go and adds that he still knows so little about her. Lisa says he likes mystery to which Stefan responds: 'That a woman like you exists, and I found you. That's mystery to me.' Soon, the train leaves and so does Stefan. Lisa narrates that that train took him out of her life.



Lisa gives birth to their baby Months later, Lisa gives birth to a baby on 12 November. She names him after his father: Stefan. However, she does not tell the nurses what the name of the baby's father is even though they insist she does. We hear Lisa's narration once again as she writes in her letter to Stefan: 'You may wonder why I never came to you for help. I wanted to be one woman you've had known, who had asked you for nothing. My deep regret is that you never saw your son.' At this point, we go back to the present and see Stefan, with a magnifying glass, smilingly looking at and examining the photographs of his son.



Lisa marries Johann Stauffer When Lisa's child is nine years old, she marries Johann Stauffer as much for her child's sake as hers. Johann Stauffer knows all the truth about Lisa, Stefan, and their past; and still loves Lisa. We see a scene from Lisa's birthday where Johann gives a present to her. He tells her: 'You know, I'm not good at saying such things. But... Lisa, I want you to be as happy as you've made me.' And then he asks her if she is happy to which Lisa responds: 'Why shouldn't I be?'



Little Stefan has a talent for music Lisa and Johann go to little Stefan's room where he is playing harmonica. Lisa tells her son to drink his milk and brush his teeth. Little Stefan talks about how his music teacher Herr Frank thinks he's got a natural talent for music. When he says this, Johann Stauffer's face darkens and he wishes goodnight to little Stefan. Before Lisa goes out, little Stefan asks his mother whether he can sleep in her bedroom which she allows. She also says to her son that she wishes him to address Johann as 'father' instead of 'sir' which he accepts.



Lisa sees Stefan at the opera That night, Lisa and Johann Stauffer go to the opera. The opera is Zaubrerflöte. Lisa narrates: 'The course of our lives can be changed by such little things.' She thinks that nothing happens by chance. Before Lisa and Johann enter the opera hall for the second act of the opera, Lisa hears people talking about Stefan Brand. People say it's a wonder he's still alive given the way he's burning himself up. They also say that ten years ago, he showed great promise and could've been a great pianist. But perhaps talent is not enough. Then they laugh. Meanwhile, Lisa recognizes Stefan from away and looks at him. However, she soon joins Johann as the opera is about to begin.



Lisa feels unwell during the opera performance

Lisa sees Stefan during the performance sitting some steps in front of her. She feels unwell and uncomfortable by his presence as she says: 'Suddenly, in that one moment. Everything was in danger. Everything I thought was safe. Somewhere out there were your eyes. And I knew I couldn't escape them. It's like the first time I saw you. The years between were melting away.' She tells Johann that she has a headache and leaves the opera hall. She wants a member of the staff to give a message to her husband and asks another to call her carriage. However, soon after, Johann leaves the opera hall too.



Lisa and Stefan speak to each other after ten years

As Lisa is nervously waiting for her carriage, Stefan shows up. He says to her: 'I've seen you somewhere, I know. I followed you upstairs. And watched you in your box. But I couldn't place you. And I had to speak with you.' He asks her if he's seen her at any one of his concerts, yet he adds he hasn't given any concerts in Vienna lately—or anywhere else. Lisa asks if he doesn't play anymore. He says that he tells himself he'd begin next week, yet when next week comes, it becomes this week, so he waits for next week again. Lisa asks him what he's waiting for. Stefan thinks it is a disturbing question. Lisa's carriage arrives. Stefan does not want her to go and thinks she can help him. He feels drawn to her unknowingly and asks her who she is. Lisa goes to her carriage where Johann is waiting for her, Stefan asks her to promise that he'll see her again. Lisa says she does not know.



Johann and Lisa's conversation in the carriage

Johann is disturbed that Lisa and Stefan encountered each other again. He asks her what she is going to do: 'Lisa. We have a marriage. Perhaps it's not all you once hoped for. But...You've a home and your son. People who care for you.' So, he doesn't want her to see Stefan again. He tells Lisa that what she will do is not out of her hands and she has a will: 'You can do what's right, what's best for you. Or you can throw away your life.' Lisa says, however, that she can't help it and that now Stefan needs her as much as she's always needed him.



Lisa is proud of her son, little Stefan

Lisa and Johann arrive home. Lisa goes to her bedroom where her child is sleeping. She wakes him up and tells him to go to his own bed. While they are walking between the bedrooms, little Stefan addresses Johann Stauffer as 'father' as he wishes him goodnight. In his bedroom, Lisa says to little Stefan that he's a wonderful boy and she's always proud of her. However, after her son has fallen asleep, Lisa goes near the window and starts crying.



Lisa's son Stefan goes away

We see Lisa and her son getting on a train. Little Stefan tells his mother that two weeks will go like an express train. Soon we learn Stefan is traveling by himself and going to a village. One of the officers changes their place and takes them to the next cart because their compartment is quarantined. After the train departs, Lisa looks devastated. As she is leaving, people carry a sick person. Others talk about how there's typhus on the train.

Lisa searches for Stefan Lisa goes to the coffeehouse that Stefan frequents. Yet, she finds out that Stefan is no longer a customer of theirs and is to be found at the Ritz. Lisa goes to the street where Stefan lives and sees his apartment lights on. A flower seller says to Lisa he's saved her a bouquet. Lisa takes the white roses. Lisa rings the doorbell of the building and is let in. Meanwhile, Johann Stauffer observes her from a distance on his carriage.



Lisa meets Stefan Stefan's mute butler John lets Lisa in. Lisa looks happily around the rooms. Stefan is pleased by Lisa's arrival and says to her that she's more beautiful than he's imagined. He sends John to buy some things for a late supper. Lisa asks him why he doesn't play anymore and he explains that one day he looked in the mirror and saw that he was not young anymore, neither was he considered a prodigy. So, he found other things to occupy himself with. He kisses Lisa. Lisa wants to talk to Stefan about them. But Stefan doesn't seem to remember who Lisa is. He asks her if she's traveled a great deal, apparently having forgotten their long, romantic date many years ago. Lisa leaves the apartment quietly, leaving behind the white roses: *'I've come to tell you about us. To offer you my whole life. But you didn't even remember me.'*



Lisa's son dies and she writes her letter to Stefan After she leaves Stefan's building, she doesn't know what to do. She goes to her son. Little Stefan soon dies of typhus. Lisa narrates that she also caught the fever and is gravely ill. She writes: *'If this letter reaches you, believe this... That I love you now as I've always loved you. My life can be measured... By the moments that I've had with you and our child. If only you could've shared those moments. If only you could've recognized what was always yours. Could've found what was never lost. If only...'*



The flashbacks of memories and narration are over. Attached to Lisa's letter is a notice from the sister in charge in St. Catherine's hospital which says: *'This letter was written by a patient here. We believe it was meant for you as she spoke your name just before she died.'*

Stefan remembers Lisa and heads for the duel Stefan has tears in his eyes. He remembers her encounters with Lisa, their dance, their conversations, their time at the amusement park, the time she listened to him playing the piano... He asks his butler John if he remembered Lisa. He nods and writes her name on a piece of paper. Soon they hear the sounds of the carriage that has arrived. On the carriage is Johann Stauffer, his duel opponent. Stefan asks John to bring his things. Before he heads for the duel, he looks at the white roses in his vase. Then he shakes John's hands. As he is leaving the building, he sees the ghostly image of Lisa opening the door on their first encounter. He slightly smiles. The carriages leave heading for the duel.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Lisa Berndle

Lisa is the protagonist of the film and the one who narrates the story through her letter. She is a teenage girl when we first meet her, yet a gravely ill person by the time she writes her letter to Stefan Brand. Her love story with Stefan and the passing of the years through which she grows builds the major part of the film.

Shy: Lisa is a shy and introverted girl. We can see her shyness, timidity, and reservedness in her facial expressions, restricted body language, and lack of talkativeness. One scene that shows us her withdrawn and timid nature is when she, as a teenager, opens and holds the door for Stefan in order to get his attention. However, when their eyes meet and Stefan gives thanks to Lisa, she cannot say anything and seems to be frozen as a result of the anxiety she feels near Stefan. Her neighbor friend also comments on how she is blushing. Thus, she indeed has a shy nature from an early age.

Sensitive: Sensitivity refers to being easily emotionally hurt or damaged. One scene where we witness Lisa's sensitivity is when her mother, Frau Berndle, tells her that she'll marry someone and they'll have to move to Linz. Because of the possibility of never seeing Stefan again, Lisa feels shattered. She cannot say anything but runs to her room, closes the door, and repeatedly utters that she won't go. Her reaction and deep suffering is an example of her sensitivity.

Loving: Lisa deeply loves and cares for Stefan from the moment of their first encounter in front of the apartment building. Because of her love for him, she runs away from the railway station as her family is about to depart for Linz. She goes to his apartment and waits near his door for hours so she can see him and be near him. She remarks she cannot live without him.

Obsessional: Lisa's love and affection for Stefan borders on a psychological or psychiatric obsession. Her sneaking into his apartment as a teenager, secretly listening to his music and imagining he's playing the piano for her, standing in front of his window night after night after she returns to Vienna from Linz are all signs of her deep passion for him that can better be reframed as an obsession.

Art-loving: Lisa loves art almost to the degree she loves Stefan. First of all, she loves listening to the piano. Also, she takes dancing lessons (to impress Stefan), studies the great musicians' lives, and goes to opera performances. All these examples show us how close she is to art, in particular, music.

Stefan Brand

Stefan Brand is a concert pianist whom Lisa falls in love with. He is a talented artist, even considered a prodigy. However, as the years go by and he gets old, people's perceptions of his musical abilities change and he takes up other pursuits. Despite Lisa's undying love for him, he does not remember who she is when they encounter each other several times during their lives.

Artistic: Stefan is a very talented piano player who first impresses Lisa—unknowingly—with his music. He travels to many places to give concerts. In the film, we see him traveling to Milano with the whole orchestra to play at the famous Scala. Even his son, little Stefan, seems to have inherited his talent for music from his father.

Hedonistic: The pursuit of pleasure or sensual self-indulgence plays a major part in Stefan's life. His friendships and romantic relationships with many women, his alcohol and tobacco consumption, and his passion for music all point toward a love of sensual pleasures, such as those of sights, sounds, and so on.

Forgetful: Lisa is shattered every time she meets Stefan and he does not seem to remember who she is. When Lisa returns from Linz to Vienna, Stefan does not remember that she was once his neighbor. A decade later, when Stefan sees Lisa at the opera and she visits his apartment a few days later, he also does not remember that she was the girl with whom he went on a romantic date many years ago. Stefan's forgetfulness deeply breaks Lisa's heart.

Frau Berndle

Frau Brendel is Lisa's mother. We do not get much insight into her personality except that she decides to marry a military tailor and move to Linz which upsets Lisa because she won't be able to see Stefan anymore. Later in Linz, Frau Brendle also wants Lisa to become a respectable member of society.

Pragmatic: Frau Berndle deals with things realistically in a way that is based on practical considerations. She decides to marry Herr Kastner because he is a wealthy man who can provide both for her and Lisa. She thinks nothing is keeping them in Vienna. Thus she's not receptive to the deep emotions and feelings of her daughter. In Linz, she wants Lisa to marry Lieutenant Leopold because of pragmatic and financial considerations. All these emphasize her practical nature.

Johann Stauffer

Johann Stauffer is an older general whom Lisa marries when her son is about nine. She marries him to financially secure herself and her son. Johann knows all about Lisa's past life and her affair with Stefan, yet she accepts her unconditionally.

Caring: Johann Stauffer is a caring person. In the scene when we first see him, he asks Lisa if she's happy: 'You know, I'm not good at saying such things. But... Lisa, I want you to be as happy as you've made me.' This piece shows us that he loves and cares for Lisa.

Solicitous: Johann shows interest or concern toward Lisa and her well-being. He becomes deeply disturbed after seeing Stefan and Lisa together at the opera. He tells her out of deep concern and to warn her: 'Lisa. We have a marriage. Perhaps it's not all you once hoped for. But... You have a home and your son. People who care for you [...] You can do what's right, what's best for you. Or you can throw away your life.' Thus, he's anxious about the mistakes Lisa might make that might ruin their lives together.

Unforgiving: Because of being a military figure (a general), he is courageous and has an unforgiving side to his personality. This is the reason he wants to duel with Stefan so that he can revenge on him for what he has done to Lisa. He is principled, honorable, and loyal to those he loves which makes him unforgiving toward those who hurt the ones he loves.

John

John is Stefan's mute butler. We first encounter him when Stefan is moving to his new apartment and he kindly smiles and greets Lisa while the working men are lifting the piano with ropes. He never speaks, yet he is a loyal and wise man who observes his environment.

Loyal: John is a loyal and dependable employee. He remains Stefan's butler for years and takes care of him. He serves his master well. Stefan even tells him to cheer up on the night before his duel. From this, we can assert that John is also concerned about the well-being of his master.

Wise: Wisdom refers to the quality of having experience and knowledge. Through the years John serves Stefan he gains a lot of experience and observes his surroundings. In particular, he is aware of Lisa's affection for Stefan. After Stefan finishes reading Lisa's letter and asks John if he remembered her, he writes her name on a piece of paper. This shows us his sensitivity to the environment and his awareness of events.

Herr Kastner

Herr Kastner is a military tailor who owns a business in Linz. He is a wealthy man leading a comfortable lifestyle. His finances might be one reason for Frau Berndle to marry him. He seems to be interested in the well-being of Frau Berndle and Lisa. For instance, he tries to ensure Lisa and Leopold get together as a couple.

Nervous/Excitable: Even though we do not get much insight into Herr Kastner's personality, from the few scenes where we see his behavior, we can conclude he is a nervous or excitable man. In particular, in the railway station scene where they're preparing their boxes and pieces of luggage, Herr Kastner seems to be in a state of excitement and hurry as he wishes to ensure everything works smoothly. He says to Frau Berndle: 'Don't worry, dear. I'll take care of everything' which again shows us his concern about everything running smoothly.

Lt. Leopold von Kaltnegger

Lt. Leopold von Kaltnegger is a young military man. His uncle is a colonel who introduces him to the Berndle/Kastner family. He courts Lisa and expects to be engaged to her. However, his dreams and plans get disrupted when he learns the truth from Lisa.

Disciplined: We witness the disciplined lifestyle of Leopold through the way he moves and body language and through the way he greets the members of the Berndle/Kastner family. As Leopold mentions, he has qualifications for an outstanding military career which requires a lot of discipline and self-determination. Thus, we can conclude that Leopold is a disciplined young man.

Art-loving: When Lisa talks about how she loved Vienna because of the music, Leopold answers that there are concerts in Linz, too. He adds that they can attend those concerts together. He also says he played the trumpet. All these examples show us Leopold's art-loving character.

Stefan Jr

Little Stefan or Stefan Junior is Lisa and Stefan's son. He is around ten when we first meet him playing the harmonica in his room. He is a talented, docile, and obedient young boy. Lisa and his stepfather Johann love and care for him.

Talented: Even though we do not get to know a lot about little Stefan, we see that he plays the harmonica. His music teacher Herr Frank thinks he is musically talented. He seems to have inherited his talent for music from his father Stefan.

Docile: He is a docile boy and does as his mother tells him. When Lisa asks him to address Johann Stauffer as 'father' instead of 'sir', he accepts her wish without difficulty. Lisa also remarks that he is a wonderful boy and he has always made her proud. We can also see his docile nature in the train scene when he is being sent to a village by Lisa and in the way he talks with her.

THEMES

RELATIONSHIP

Marriage Marriage is a legal institution uniting two people as partners in a personal relationship. Lisa marries Johann Stauffer when her son reaches nine years old. As she narrates, she marries Johann Stauffer as much for her child's sake as hers. So, she wants a comfortable and financially secure life for herself and her child. Their marriage is not filled with passion but consists of mutual respect and peace. Johann also loves Lisa but he is aware that Lisa's love of her life is and will always be Stefan. Therefore, Johann harbors negative feelings toward Stefan. Moreover, he wants to protect Lisa from Stefan's influence and is ready to do anything to defend their marriage. As he remarks when returning from the opera: 'Lisa. We have a marriage. Perhaps it's not all you once hoped for. But...You have a home and your son. People who care for you.' This means that Johann is aware how Lisa has always wanted to be with Stefan, but wishes her to divert her concentration to her family and child.

Caring Caring relates to feeling or showing concern for others. We see caring exemplified in several scenes of the film. Lisa deeply cares for Stefan even before she meets him. For instance, in the scene where she is riding on a swing, her friend—referring to Stefan's playing—says that she wishes he'd stop that noise. At that moment, Lisa tries to defend Stefan by saying that it is not noise: 'Mr. Brand is playing.' Thus, even before their first encounter, Lisa cares for Stefan. She also shows how much she loves and cares for him when she stands in front of his apartment night after night after she has returned from Linz. On their romantic date, Stefan also shows that he cares for her as he takes her to a beautiful restaurant, the amusement park, and so on. He buys her a single white rose. This rose possibly signifies Lisa's naiveté and innocence which impresses Stefan. All these acts show that Stefan cared for Lisa, at least during those moments when he could remember her existence. Another caring character is Johann

Stauffer who is protective of Lisa and her son and is ready to do anything to protect his marriage from Stefan's influence.

Love/Attraction Tragic love is the major theme of *A Letter from an Unknown Woman*. Lisa has an undying and passionate love for Stefan which she never expresses as much as she feels. Because of her shyness, introversion, and sensitivity, Stefan never finds out how much she loves him until he reads her letter. Lisa's love for Stefan begins the day when she holds the door for him and their eyes meet for a few moments. However, at this point, Stefan barely notices her. It is only after Lisa returns from Linz and starts to wait in front of his window night after night that Stefan finally notices her. So, the two go on a romantic date where they are both attracted to each other. Yet, Stefan's love for her is not as strong as her love for him. After going to Milano, he forgets about her. When he sees her a decade later at the opera, he does not remember her. When she comes to his apartment a few days later, he still does not remember who she truly is. Only after having read the letter can he collect the pieces of the puzzle and recollect his memories.

PSYCHOLOGY

Revenge Revenge is 'the action of hurting or harming someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands'. Johann Stauffer wishes to take revenge on Stefan Brand for having ruined the lives of Lisa and —indirectly—her son little Stefan. Had Lisa not met Stefan at the opera, she wouldn't have sent her son to a village. Thus, he wouldn't have gotten infected with typhus during the train journey. Moreover, Johann Stauffer is aware of how many times Stefan hurt Lisa by either not acknowledging her existence, or simply forgetting who she was, even after they spent a considerable amount of time together and had an affair. Because of these reasons, Johann wishes to hurt Stefan the way he hurt Lisa. As he deeply cares for and loves the members of his family, he is unforgiving toward those who hurt them. We do not know what happens as a result of the duel. However, Stefan will probably be killed as he is not experienced with weapons as the general certainly is.

Sadness Sadness is 'an emotional pain associated with feelings of disadvantage, loss, despair, grief, helplessness, disappointment and sorrow'. We see sadness embodied in Lisa and Stefan in certain scenes of the film. The first of these scenes is when Frau Berndle notifies Lisa that she'll marry Herr Kastner and they'll have to move to Linz. Lisa is shattered when she hears this news because she knows she won't be seeing Stefan again. She feels helpless and desperate as she does not know what she can do to prevent this situation. Another scene where we witness her sadness is when she runs from the railway station back to Stefan's apartment and waits for his return for hours. When Stefan finally returns home in the morning, he is with another woman which disappoints and gives sorrow to Lisa. A third scene of sadness is Stefan's departure for Milano. Lisa cries after seeing him get on the train and leave as this is the train that takes Stefan out of her life. A fourth scene of sadness is when Lisa and Stefan meet a decade later and Lisa realizes that Stefan doesn't remember anything about her or anything of their affair in the past. After having read Lisa's letter to him, Stefan also has tears in his eyes, finally understanding the truth and feeling sorry for his irredeemable forgetfulness.

Regret Lisa and Stefan both have regrets. Lisa regrets that Stefan never saw his son. As she writes in her letter to Stefan: 'You may wonder why I never came to you for help. I wanted to be one woman you've had known, who had asked you for nothing. My *deep regret* is that you never saw your son.' So, she has always wanted Stefan to meet his son, however, her feelings of pride and wanting to have a special place in Stefan's heart and mind stopped her from contacting him. We also understand from Lisa's letter that she wanted to express all her feelings, thoughts, and emotions to Stefan so that he would finally remember and never forget her. This shows that Lisa may regret that she hasn't been more direct, open, and uninhibited when interacting with Stefan. Being a shy, timid, and withdrawn character; Lisa was always reserved when it came to stating her options and feelings. If she had voiced those feelings more pronouncedly, perhaps she could have made a more lasting impression on Stefan's mind. Her writing him a letter as a final act before she passes away can thus be seen as her trying to salvage what she has failed to do beforehand. As she writes: 'My life can be measured...By the moments that I've had with you and our child. If only you could've shared those moments. If only you could've recognized what was always yours. Could've found what was never lost. If only...' Thus, she regrets that Stefan never

remembered who she was. After having read Lisa's letter, Stefan also regrets that he could never remember who Lisa was.

Anger We see anger most pronouncedly in Johann Stauffer's character. Possibly related to his being a military figure, he is disturbed and angered by Stefan's presence in Lisa's life. He observes their interactions from afar, such as when he sees Stefan talk to Lisa in front of the opera building while he is waiting in his carriage or when Lisa goes to Stefan's apartment to talk to him. He does not intervene in the situation and lets Lisa make her own decisions despite warning her that she will throw her life away. It is because of his anger that he wants to duel Stefan and take revenge on him. Another character in whom we see anger embodied is Lisa. When she finds out about her mother's marriage plans to Herr Kastner and their moving plans to Linz, she runs to her room helplessly and angrily. She closes her door suddenly and repeats in a nervous state that she won't go. This scene might be considered another one where we see despair and helplessness intermingled with anger.

Loss Lisa loses Stefan several times in the course of the story. She first loses him when she has to move to Linz and become separated from him. She loses him again when she waits for him near his apartment door only to see him come home with another woman. Yet, all these emotional losses do not stop her from loving him. Another loss occurs when Stefan departs for Milano, saying it is only for two weeks. In actuality, he never tries to contact Lisa again for a decade. Another emotional loss and heartbreak is when Lisa and Stefan meet a decade later and Stefan does not remember who she truly is and that they had an affair many years ago. All these can be considered as emotional losses that might even hurt more than physical loss (death). Lisa also loses her son to typhus. Moreover, after reading her letter, Stefan realizes that he lost Lisa even without knowing who she was.

QUEST

Explore Through Lisa's letter and her narration, we become witnesses to her life and her exploration of her environment. We first meet her as a curious girl looking around at the beautiful items her neighbor has. Later, she explores the world of Stefan as she listens to the music he plays. She takes dancing classes and reads books about musicians in the library. Thus, she explores the world of the arts. Soon, she has to move to Linz and thereby explores another musical town and its members such as Leopold who courts her. After rejecting Leopold's marriage proposal, she is disowned by her parents, returns to Vienna, and becomes a dress model at Madam Spitzer's which gives her a new experience of the world and Vienna. Later on, she experiences married life and what it means to take care of a child. As she remarks: '[Her] life can be measured...By the moments that [she's] had with [Stefan] and [their] child.' Therefore, alongside the other experiences she's had, her most memorable exploration of the world relates to being with Stefan and her child.

Introspection Introspection refers to the examination or observation of one's own mental and emotional processes. Lisa examines herself, her life, feelings, and emotions thoroughly when she writes her letter to Stefan. It is through this letter that we gain great insight into her world, feelings, impressions, and so on. She certainly decides to write to Stefan after a lot of heart-searching. She knows that this is her last chance to finally express herself to him and so she does. She narrates her life journey from the moment she became conscious of her environment until her grave illness. From her writings, we learn that she is acutely aware of her deep, undying love and passion for Stefan; her sensitivity to the reactions she gets from him; and her despair and sadness when she realizes Stefan does not even know or remember who she is. Even the loss of her child seems of secondary importance when compared with the greatness of feelings she has for Stefan or this is the impression we get from her letter.

APPEARANCE

Secrets Lisa hides a secret from Stefan. She does not tell him that they have a child. Lisa writes: 'You may wonder why I never came to you for help. I wanted to be one woman you've had known, who had asked you for nothing. My deep regret is that you never saw your son.' As we see in the film, Stefan forgets about Lisa after he departs for Milano and never contacts her. Lisa does not contact Stefan though, not because she has forgotten but because she is too proud to contact him and does not want to

disturb him with her burdens, troubles, and worries. However, this secret is revealed when she finally writes her letter to Stefan.

PAST

Memory The film's narration consists of Lisa's memories of her life. Her memories are the impressions she has from her environment and interactions. Her memories consist of those related to Stefan and her love and passion for him. For instance, her first conscious memory is that of seeing the items of her new neighbor Mr. Brand being transported to the apartment building. Also, we only see a brief account of the time she's lived in Linz even though she lived there presumably for years. Likewise, she does not tell much about what she's done during the decade when she has not seen nor heard from Stefan. As she writes: 'My life can be measured...By the moments that I've had with you and our child.' On the other hand, we do not get insights into Stefan's memory. The first time Stefan and Lisa encounter each other, Stefan hardly notices her and gives thanks to her for holding the door for him. When he sees her many years later standing in front of his window, he does not remember that she was once her neighbor. So, his memory seems to be rather weak. And lastly, a decade after their affair, Stefan once again does not remember anything about Lisa: neither that she was once his neighbor nor that they had an affair a decade ago. Only after reading Lisa's letter can he retrieve and recollect his memories. Before he heads for the duel, he sees a ghostly image of Lisa holding the door for him on their first encounter. Finally, his memory is intact and he remembers. So, memory, contents of one's memory, forgetfulness, or weak memory are all important themes of *A Letter from an Unknown Woman*.

Transience We see Lisa narrate her life starting from her teenage years to adulthood. The causal series of events that occur after one another reminds us of life's impermanence and temporariness: A new tenant moving to his apartment, Lisa listening to Stefan play, their first encounter, Lisa's attempts to improve her perspective of the world, moving to Linz, returning to Vienna, second encounter with Stefan and a romantic date, birth of their son, marriage to Johann Stauffer, and third encounter with Stefan at the opera before her grave illness...All these events lining up one after the other show us the transitory, ephemeral, and fugitive nature of time. In the end, time leads all persons to physical death. Lisa's son, Lisa, and presumably Stefan die, emphasizing the tragic nature of their love story.