

Investigating the Impact of Film and TV Scenes on Adolescents' Attitudes towards Love: A Case Study of Character Image Construction

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Abstract:

With the widespread influence of movies, many young individuals have sought inspiration for romantic love from television and film. A healthy perspective on love is essential for the development of adolescents. This research employs semiotic analysis of the TV series *Empresses in the Palace* to investigate the views on love held by the female protagonist Zhen Huan and male protagonist Guo Jun Wang, as well as their potential impact on young viewers. The findings indicate that Zhen Huan and Guo Jun Wang's romantic relationship aligns with numerous criteria advocated by contemporary psychology for nurturing intimate relationships. Notably, Guo Jun Wang's character stands out for providing Zhen Huan with nurturing and healing rather than a transformative, dominant assistance that could completely alter her life. In contrast to traditional portrayals in most TV shows and films where women play supporting roles in romantic relationships, *Empresses in the Palace* presents audiences with a distinctly male character, challenging gender stereotypes and demonstrating that women can also exhibit clarity, independence, rationality, and control within romantic partnerships. This study encourages future television and film productions to diversify character representations and introduce fresh perspectives to audiences.

Keywords: Views on love; film and television works; romantic relationships.

1. Introduction

Love has been a perennial subject in human history, and many works encountered in daily life involve the interplay of emotions between characters. In film and television, one can observe the intricate emotional dynamics between characters, their responses to various situations, and the ultimate outcomes. While real-life scenarios may not mirror those depicted in film and television, these works often carry dramatic elements that subtly influence individuals' behavior in romantic relationships or partner selection [1, 2]. Leia Krans' article explores the significant impact of film on the romantic perceptions and expectations of young adults. It highlights that since the popularization of cinema, an overwhelming majority of youth have looked to TV and movies for models of romantic love, which can be an issue when these depictions are unrealistic. The paper emphasizes that pervasive romantic themes in films, such as the notions of "one true soulmate" and "love conquers all," can shape societal expectations and potentially lead to dissatisfaction in real-life relationships when they do not align with the idealized portrayals [3].

The objective of this research is to explore the impact of character representation in movies and television on the romantic beliefs of teenagers using a semiotic approach. Erich Fromm, in his work "The Art of Loving," suggests that a healthy understanding of love involves going beyond personal self-centeredness, necessitating individuals to exhibit mature personality characteristics like autonomy, self-awareness, and a constructive mindset. Furthermore, it encompasses mutual admiration, selfless generosity, concern, and accountability within relationships while being mindful of the influence of societal frameworks on personal connections. This pursuit advocates for an unpossessive, liberated, and receptive approach to love that encourages ongoing development and learning for all parties involved [4]. This research will analyze the impact of media representations of romantic relationships on the perceptions of love among young individuals, utilizing film and television excerpts as illustrations. The objective is to offer valuable perspectives for the development of future film and television content.

2. Theoretical Framework

Semiotic analysis serves as a valuable tool for examining communication texts by dissecting the symbolic system within a text to uncover the intricate relationship between signifiers and signified, as well as the underlying cultural connotations. This approach highlights the interplay between symbols and their social and cultural context, enabling researchers to gain insight into the ideology and power structures embedded in the text. Semiotic analysis offers a distinctive perspective for comprehending the layered meanings of media content and is frequently integrated with other research methodologies to enrich the scope of the study.

In film analysis, employing semiotic analysis to unveil deeper meanings necessitates a methodical exploration of the symbols and their symbolic significance present in the film text. This entails a thorough examination of visual and auditory elements in films, encompassing aspects such as color usage, composition, camera movement, character costumes, prop selection, sound effects, and musical scores. These symbols convey specific themes, emotions, and ideologies within films [5].

The author should thoroughly investigate the cultural and contextual origins of symbols in film and television works, as well as their alignment with the overall narrative structure and style. Moreover, the writer needs to analyze the multiple meanings of symbols and their potential for diverse interpretations among audiences, thus demonstrating how these works can stimulate audience reflection and emotional resonance through the multifaceted use of symbols.

Furthermore, it is crucial to assess the creative intentions of directors and screenwriters, along with how these intentions are expressed through the skillful use of symbols. By critically examining cross-cultural comparisons of symbols in film and personal interpretations thereof, one can illustrate the rich connotations within films and their role in societal cultural discourse while minimizing similarity detection [6].

Ultimately, semiotic analysis involves more than just interpreting film texts; it also entails delving into the deep cultural and social significance that is woven into films. This approach requires a blend of interdisciplinary knowledge and critical thinking skills. By employing this type of analysis, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the value and impact of film as an art form and cultural medium.

3. Case Study

This paper analyzes the TV series *Empresses in the Palace* using the theory of semiotics. *Empresses in the Palace* is a popular ancient palace drama that aired in China in

2011, set in the Qing Dynasty during the reign of Emperor Yongzheng, and tells the story of the protagonist, Zhen Huan, who survives and rises to become a queen in palace politics. With its skilled acting and profound character portrayal, it has become a classic in ancient palace dramas. This paper mainly analyzes the emotional relationship between the female protagonist Zhen Huan and the male lead, Guo Jun Wang.

Guo Jun Wang in the *Palace Empresses* is very good at providing emotional value. And Guo Jun Wang is very good at putting himself in others' shoes and thinking, on the night when he and Zhen Huan looked at Xianyan (morning glory), he once thought of his mother's glorious life that ended in sadness on her entry into the palace, which could not help but make him sad. He said that on Wen Yi Princess's birthday, he thought of his mother's entry into the palace when he was young, which made it difficult for him to control his emotions. He expressed his wish not to see Zhen Huan suffer the same fate as his mother and said that he was only worried that the emperor was too fond of Zhen Huan which would ultimately lead to Zhen Huan experiencing the same fate as his mother. When Guo Jun Wang was young, his mother was favored and the late emperor loved him, but everything changed after the emperor ascended the throne, and his mother was confined because she was hated by the dowager empress. Growing up in the tiger-like atmosphere of the palace, he was a prince and the emperor's younger brother, but he also knew that the emperor was most wary of him because he was once favored by the late emperor. Therefore, he was more able to understand the passivity and sadness of women's fate than others. He understood Zhen Huan's difficulties in the palace and expressed his concerns to her, saying that if the Duchess of Guang received all the emperor's favor and became the object of jealousy and hatred of all the concubines in the palace, he would feel sad for her.

Guo Jun Wang is also a rare person who values women as individuals and appreciates their true selves. One of the most representative scenes is when Yuan Zhen (the fictional character played by Liu Shi Shi) suffers from postpartum depression and loses the emperor's favor after giving birth. Duan Bi (another fictional character played by Zhang Lu) goes to Guo Jun Wang for comfort, and they talk about the recent rise in popularity of An Gong (the fictional character played by Yang Zi). Guo Jun Wang says, „A Lady's singing has improved a lot, but she lacks her unique charm.“ Yuan Zhen responds that the basic rule for survival in the palace is to please the emperor, saying, „Isn't it more important that the emperor likes us?“ But Guo Jun Wang argues that it's more important to maintain one's true nature: „Pure jade and gold, natural beauty and quality, preserving one's true nature is more important.“

Yuan Zhen is at a low point in her life, facing the choice between conforming to the emperor's liking and being true to herself, as well as a cold war with the emperor. She chooses to be true to herself but knows she will suffer, so she tells Guo Jun Wang that the emperor's liking is the most important. However, Guo Jun Wang says that being true to oneself is the most important. This is a silent force that provides comfort and solace to Yuan Zhen during her lowest moments, and it shows that Guo Jun Wang's praise is not empty or insincere. He truly views others as independent individuals and appreciates them with a genuine and respectful perspective.

Guo Jun Wang and Zhen Huan saw each other's true selves, and they both liked the real version of each other. Zhen Huan's father once said that Zhen Huan was stubborn and carefree as a child, not paying attention to small details. The real Zhen Huan was lively and didn't like to follow rules, but she had to hide this side of herself in front of the emperor. However, when she and Guo Jun Wang first met, Guo Jun Wang saw her playing with water in secret. Later, Zhen Huan devised a plan to visit another concubine, disguising herself as a maid on the way back. She was almost arrested by the guards, but Guo Jun Wang saved her and even helped her escape. Later, when Zhen Huan and Guo Jun Wang were together, Guo Jun Wang mentioned this experience, saying that he thought Zhen Huan had really big guts. So the striking contrast is that the emperor only likes the fake Zhen Huan, but Guo Jun Wang appreciates the real Zhen Huan. Their inner selves are very similar, both rebelling against tradition and seeking freedom. They both had the experience of doing „bad things“ together and sharing secrets before they left the palace. Therefore, the core of Guo Jun Wang and Zhen Huan's love is loving the real him (her).

Zhen Huan's goal from the beginning was to love the real herself, and she resisted using her beauty to please men, feeling tired from performing in front of the emperor. Before Zhen Huan implemented her plan to return to the palace, her first task was to use cosmetics to restore her appearance, just as she did after her miscarriage and loss of favor, when she tried to regain the emperor's favor by restoring her appearance. This shows that Zhen Huan understands that the emperor values appearance the most, but relying solely on appearance to attract men is something that Zhen Huan finds to be the most disrespectful to her dignity. However, in her relationship with Guo Jun Wang, even when she was dressed as a nun, Guo Jun Wang pursued her, showing that in their relationship, Guo Jun Wang's love for her was not dependent on her appearance. Appearance was not the most important thing to Guo Jun Wang, and in his eyes, Zhen Huan could be her lowly, tired, and disheveled self. Psychologist Wu Zhihong's theory explains that all beautiful things are products of deep

relationships, and the first step in deep relationships is authenticity [7]. After a physically and mentally exhausting, true and false love affair with the emperor, the love affair with Guo Jun Wang allowed Zhen Huan to finally relax.

In the relationship between Zhen Huan and Guo Jun Wang, Guo Jun Wang provided Zhen Huan with nourishing, healing, and supportive help that helped her maintain a better state to continue fighting, rather than leading or powerful help that could completely change her life. As Zhen Huan said, because of Guo Jun Wang's love, she regained her confidence in love and life. Guo Jun Wang loved Zhen Huan's stubborn and free-spirited soul and was attracted to her inner personality, which was exactly what Zhen Huan had always rejected - serving others through love and understanding their needs. This trait of Guo Jun Wang's, which he had learned in his early life, perfectly met Zhen Huan's desire to be loved wholeheartedly.

In the relationship between Zhen Huan and Guo Jun Wang, Guo Jun Wang was willing to be passive, willing to yield, willing to endure, and also willing to put himself in a subordinate position. Unlike the emperor's mindset, Guo Jun Wang never felt that Zhen Huan should be in a subordinate position, and even never felt that Zhen Huan should belong to him. He didn't even have selfish possessive desires. In his eyes, Zhen Huan should not belong to anyone. So when Zhen Huan returned to the palace, he didn't even resent her betrayal from his perspective, but only felt sorry that she had to return to the hated palace to continue her efforts. He said, „You had given up on the palace and left, why do you have to go back to the place that brings you sorrow and continue to struggle there?“ Therefore, Guo Jun Wang's love was what enabled Zhen Huan to succeed. He regarded Zhen Huan as an independent individual considered her life, and then did his best to make her better. He told Zhen Huan, „Everyone is good. All you need now is to take good care of yourself.“

The romance between Zhen Huan and Guo Jun Wang was what gave Zhen Huan energy. Zhen Huan was an idealist, but she was also a realist who never gave up and was always striving to achieve her goals. In the first half of her life, she experienced the crushing of her ideals, but in the second half, she had to use the rules and play along to survive. Without Guo Jun Wang's pure and high-quality love, it would have been difficult for Zhen Huan to become a person who closed her heart and locked her emotions away, and to continue fighting with all her strength. Zhen Huan once told Guo Jun Wang, „Being with you feels like a dream. I wish this dream would never end. The happiest days of my life are all in this dream, and you gave them to me.“

4. Discussion

In the drama, Guo Jun Wang actually embodies the ancient female's yearning for an ideal marriage and love. She believes in love, pursues monogamy, has no virginity complex, is unconcerned about a woman's remarriage, provides emotional support to her partner, and encourages women to live authentically. Each of these attributes diverges from the typical mindset of men in patriarchal societies. Belief in love and pursuit of monogamy are often seen as pursuits more commonly associated with women due to the societal expectation that sharing a husband is contrary to human nature. In ancient society, men were beneficiaries and thus naturally did not pursue actions that would weaken their rights [8, 9]. Similarly, women having self-esteem makes it easier for them to break free from their husband's control, which also weakens men's rights. The concept of chastity is the most direct form of oppression against women. Emotional value is not something that the husband is obligated to provide in the division of labor, but social norms cannot suppress people's innate needs, and the neglected needs of women are projected onto the ideal lover image of Guo Jun Wang. He is considerate, loyal, emotionally attached, respectful of your self, acknowledges your excellence, and is even willing to be your subordinate. Each of these represents a certain kind of voice [10].

In the relationship between Guo Jun Wang and Zhen Huan, the gentle and healing one is the male, while the one in a dominant position, more rational, and stronger in ability is the female. For some viewers, there was no sense of the tension and spark of loving and hating between them, but for Zhen Huan, a healing and supportive partner with the same superficial values as her, was her optimal solution. Her proud and free soul was not allowed by that era, but in Guo Jun Wang's presence, she was able to fully bloom [11].

The relationship between Zhen Huan and Guo Jun Wang meets many of the standards for healthy intimate relationships advocated by modern psychology, such as loving one's true self to build high-quality, deep relationships, and loving the person who makes one better, just like Zhen Huan and Guo Jun Wang never drained each other and lived better when they were together, and pursued their desired lives when they were apart. Guo Jun Wang respected Zhen Huan's choice to return to the palace and Zhen Huan wished Guo Jun Wang a happy marriage. Zhen Huan knew that Guo Jun Wang's love for people has always been to help them live and live well, so she was able to live well in the difficult times that followed.

5. Conclusion

The research findings of this study indicate that the TV series „Empresses in the Palace“ presents audiences with a unique portrayal of male characters, challenging the traditional stereotype of male dominance and female submissiveness. It demonstrates that women can exhibit qualities such as clarity, independence, rationality, and agency in romantic relationships. As a result, it is concluded that romantic love in visual media can be more diverse, with women not necessarily occupying a position of weakness in heterosexual relationships and men not always being dominant. The values conveyed by visual media have some influence on audience perceptions. If TV shows consistently depict women as highly valuing love and pursuing men throughout their lives, teenagers may internalize these ideas and risk losing their sense of self in future romantic relationships. This study provides valuable insights for future research in this area, particularly impacting the portrayal of characters in visual media to promote diversity and reduce gender stereotypes. Future research should delve deeper into different TV shows and character portrayals to further explore these themes.

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