

Waiting for guffman: the rise of the documentary:1994 to 2013 movie review exampl...

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The study of irony is rather broad and studying irony in film is as challenging as studying irony in drama or literature. Christopher Guest's *Waiting for Guffman* falls in a range of humorist tradition in which small-town culture is treated with irony and nostalgia (Frye 122). Through representations of small-town culture, irony in the film asks the audience where they stand on the issues of meaning, knowledge, subjectivity and values. *Waiting for Guffman* is full of implicit and ironic messages, and the goal of this critical analysis is to give thoughtful consideration to them.

The film does not have a directorial presence, which gives the film a sense of direct cinema, and Guest's documentary style makes the film appear more realistic. Guest's faux documentary style allows the audience to closely identify with the film's characters and events by foregrounding the irony of the story. The audience identifies with the characters based on what they demonstrate in their life action portrayal and what they say during their self-reflexive interviews. This is where the irony in the film typically comes from. Guest gives the audience the sense that they are watching a documentary of real events that were already taking place before the camera started rolling. In documentary film, the audience is shown real-time activities in chronological order so they know that the story is moving forward. Although most of the scenes in the film represent this motif, what is ironic is that the many interviews with the cast and community members do not dictate the chronological forward movement of the film's story.

Christopher Guest's *Waiting for Guffman* is also on a path of performance i. e. a series of events that will ultimately lead to the musical retelling of Blaine's 150-year history directed by Guest's character Corky. The film hooks

the audience's attention and sets the tone by beginning with a really brief montage of shots showing small-town life then cutting to the city council's discussion about the upcoming celebration. This is followed by a set of interviews that provide exposition of Blaines colorful and rich history and the upcoming celebration. Thus, the narrative ebb and flow of live action moves the audience even closer to the theatrical production, while the interviews flesh out both the characters and their motivations, which are the reason behind the action.

The fact that Guest juxtaposes live-action scenes showing the theatrical process with interviews that reflect the emotions of acting enable the film to capture the magic of community theater. Community theater is a representation of the opportunity for people to become someone extraordinary by stepping outside their boring and mundane lives. This is the ironic twist in the film, the comic turn, and what can be referred to as transformation (Burke xix). The narrative structure of the film represents this ironic transformation. The greatest irony is that a dentist, a DQ employee and a travel agent are also actors, but they do not accept this.

The characters in the film also help in developing the irony of the film, much more than the juxtaposition of live action and interview sequences discussed above. For Guest, his film revolves the Community theater players, their actions, relationships, and traits. On the surface, it seems that the progress of the play is the only objective that matters. However, taking a character perspective to look at the story will reveal that it is in fact that question of who will progress is what matters. For instance, upon Corky's departure, Lloyd Miller, the music director willing stepped in, offering to correct

problems that Corky's direction had created in the musical. However, the players instead file a petition for Corky to return, and it was not until he did return that the production actually progressed.

So, the primary principle in Guest's film is not to make a parody of documentary style. The documentary style narrative structure has been used as a representation of how ordinary people can somehow become “larger than life.” In interviews, Guest has repeatedly mentioned that people would not believe it he was to portray people and situations for what they really are. This is the irony and the paradox in the film and Guest presents fiction on the basis of his own observations by using a documentary structure to address this irony. Guest juxtaposes live action and interview sequences to create performance-driven narrative trajectory that moves the story to a theatrical conclusion, and the overall irony of Guest's film can be regarded as social criticism.

Work Cited

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