

The wedding banquet



“ The Wedding Banquet Comedic Explorations in Gay Culture Summary The film “ The Wedding Banquet,” released in 1993, centers on the sham marriage between a gay Taiwanese immigrant, Winston Chao, with his female, Chinese tenant for mutual benefit. Winston, who maintains a gay relationship with an American man, attempts to cover up his sexuality and deceive his parents by agreeing to marry a Chinese woman. His plans collapse when his parents insist upon coming to America to plan his all-important wedding banquet—a must in Chinese tradition. Ang Lee deftly directs this complex comedy movie steering the actors Winston Chao, May Chin, Ah Lei Gua, Sihung Lung and Mitchell Lichtenstein to produce comedic performances enhanced with the of understanding the deeper undercurrents of the social issues of this film. The wedding banquet represents the first attempt by Ang Lee to discuss gay relationships through the cinematic medium. Interestingly, Lee also makes a cameo appearance in the movies as a guest attending the wedding. The movie works as an intense comedy in the first half, and then it reveals the complexities of the how the secreted relationships burden all those involved. The characters Winston Chao and his lover Simon enjoy a convenient life style, until his parents demand a marriage and, more importantly, a quickly arriving offspring. This movie displays very intense emotional sequences as well as riotously funny movements that every audience expects in an intelligent comedy of this caliber. “ The Wedding Banquet never becomes bogged down by its own seriousness. Lee manages to keep the production buoyant by including scenes that are often riotously funny” (Berardinell. 1993). Although the movie offers Winston Chao’s acting debut, he exhibits no flaws or chinks in his acting skill. Overall, this ensemble cast offers audiences a splendid visual

treat as they clearly define their characters' perspectives and convey their characters' unique worthiness and integral aspect within this story. Plot of the movie The movie plot centers on the life of a Taiwanese immigrant Winston Chao who happens to be gay. Chao, who enjoys a stable relationship with an American man named Simon, lies to his parents about his sexuality and agrees to marry Wei-Wei, a Chinese woman. Wei-wei, his tenant, is desperate for a green card because she is facing immediate deportation charges. For their part, Winston Chao's parents not only expect a marriage to a suitable Chinese woman, they also expect a grandchild and want their son to lead a "normal" married life like others. The charade goes according to plan until Winston's parents arrive in the United States to plan his wedding banquet. In the initial stages, the film plays like a full-blown comedy but evolves into a more serious, multi-layered look at the different perceptions the older and younger generations have on their sexual and cultural choices. This movie seems like a romantic comedy in the beginning, but there is a strong dramatic undertone surrounding this movie that the audience realizes as the second half unravels. The main revelations and complications of the deceptive marriage occur at the sumptuous banquet after which Wei-Wei seduces the intoxicated Winston and gets herself pregnant. On discovering the pregnancy, Simon gets upset and fights with Winston, and eventually their relationship starts to deteriorate. In a moment of tension and rage, Winston reveals his homosexual identity and lifestyle to his mother who begs him to keep the secret from his father. Later in the movie, Winston's father finds out about his son's relationship with Simon and decides to at least attempt to begin to have an amicable relationship with Simon. In the end, Winston's parents depart for their homeland leaving

Winston, Wei-Wei and Simon to sort out things by themselves. Background and theme of the story The movie “ The Wedding Banquet” is written by three writers: Ang Lee, Neil Peng and James Schamus. Ang Lee, the main writer and director of the movie, is a Taiwanese-American movie director with versatility and dynamic talent. He has directed this movie and other movies focusing on varied themes and aspects of human nature—even winning an Academy Award along with worldwide acclaim. Co-writer Neil Peng contributed effectively to the effort. And, James Schamus, the third screenwriter, also has numerous acclamations and awards and serves as a producer and CEO of a motion picture company called Focus Features that usually favors substance over style and highlights important, brave, quirky films. He also acts as a member of the Jury for New York City Film festival that screens children movies. The theme behind “ The Wedding Banquet” is pure gayism, where a same sex relationship is shared between the key characters of the movie, Winston and Simon. The movie explains the way in which the young generation has molded their sexual orientation that their parents find difficulty in accepting. The key characters being gay, experience restrictions from their parents and find ways to deceive them in order to live their lives on their own terms. In this film, a gay son tries to play the part of the good Chinese boy by agreeing to marry a woman to please his parents and to be able to continue to live his homosexual life in secrecy without the stress of coming out to his parents. The film displays an ambitious technique, and the director has given enough justice to the movie to project an emotional pitch. As per, (Cannon, 2011) “ The script is designed to work from a single vantage point, that of a Taiwanese director. Only by comprehending the people, the culture and the way in which they behave can Lee modulate

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each scene such that his cast approaches the brink of parody without tumbling over". Movies in Parallel with the Wedding Banquet Issues of younger generations altering the boundaries of their lives and conflicting with older generations is a time-honored, cross-cultural theme within Literature and Cinema. Two other films " My Big Fat Greek Wedding" and " Dirty Dancing" both offer interesting parallels with " The Wedding Banquet". The movie " My Big Fat Greek Wedding" centers on the love affair of a Greek woman Toula with an Anglo-Saxon American man named Ian Miller. Toula lives in a very orthodox Greek family and having crossed her 30s, her parents are pressuring her to marry a Greek man to lead on their family lineage. Gradually in the movie, Toula's family find out the relationship of their daughter with the non-Greek Ian. And, Toula's father Gus demands Ian convert to the Greek Orthodox Church among other things. In the end, the couple gets married in the Greek style and Toula later gives birth to a daughter who is bestowed the rights to marry a person of her choice. " Dirty Dancing" is a romantic movie released in 1987, where a rich girl nicknamed Baby, played by Jennifer Gray, falls in love with a dance instructor named Johnny Castle who works for the upper-class resort her family visits every summer. Although Jennifer is extremely attracted to the sexy dancing she experiences in a brief lesson from Johnny, she remains a young, intellectual woman who keeps herself in the shadows. As the movie progresses, Johnny's dancer partner Penny gets pregnant by her deceptive boyfriend and Jennifer to gets her an abortion with money she has gotten from her physician father. Due to Penny's health problem, Jennifer goes forward to take her place as the dancing partner of Johnny and take lessons from him. Later Jennifer's father incorrectly thinks that Johnny is the reason for Penny's pregnancy and

this leads to complication in love story. However, in the end the wrong conceptions are uncovered and all come in amicable terms. Comparison of “The Wedding Banquet” with the Two Other Movies When one compares all three movies, it can be observed that main theme underlying both these movies is romance as the vehicle for characters to reveal their true identities to other while simultaneously learning about themselves. The plot of the movie revolves around couples who share romances with each other and desperately seek unions to overcoming all their sufferings. Moreover these movies show the authoritative attitude of the traditional parents and their adamant attitude in accepting the love of their children. These movies also depict the struggling undergone by the parents of the respective couples to accept their childrens’ love-interests who go against their culture and heritage. Also it can be observed in the movies the differences in the mental attitude of young generation, when it comes to important issues like marriage and love affairs. The movie “The Wedding Banquet” is about a gay couple attempting to save their relationship against the will of one of the couple’s parents. And, in the movie “Dirty Dancing” the rich girl Jennifer is fighting with her Dad to save her relationship with Johnny, the dance instructor. In “The Wedding Banquet” Winston is rich and in the movie “Dirty Dancing” the girl Jennifer is wealthy. In both movies, one of the couple takes drastic measures to save their love affair and also be rebel against their parents in order to be honest to with their love interest. “Twenty years ago in the movie Dirty Dancing, a sexy, sweaty, gyrating Patrick Swayze danced into the hearts of a generation of teenage girls. The movie “The Wedding Banquet” also captured the hearts of many when it was released in 1993” (Snider, 2007). Contrast of movie The Wedding Banquet with the other

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two movies When contrasting these three films, it is interesting to consider how different the steps in the process of reconciliation seem to be, yet upon close investigation they lead to the same conclusion of acceptance. In “ My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” “ Dirty Dancing,” and “ The Wedding Banquet,” younger generation people must struggle to adapt to their new surroundings while maintaining their respect and love for and from their older, parental generations. In “ My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” Toula’s entire Chicago life is absorbed by her Greek family, their Greek restaurant, their Greek travel company, and their Greek, well, their Greek everything. Toula and all her friends have attended Greek school since childhood and their father instructs them in the excellence of Greek culture during their morning car pool to school. And while Toula’s family does not exhibit a dark xenophobia or anything of that nature, they are simply a collective culture living within mainstream America. Yet, as Toula comes out of her shell and becomes more of the woman she wants to be by taking computer classes at the local community college and shifting from her restaurant work to the travel agency, she inevitably comes into contact with different opportunities that she is poised to take on with her new-found confidence. At first Toula keeps her relationship with the non-Greek Ian a secret, like Winston, covering up her transgression with a lie acceptable to her family, especially her Greek-loving father—that she is taking a pottery class. Yet, when Toula’s relationship is revealed, her mother attempts to persuade Toula to abandon the relationship, but concedes when she realizes Toula is in love with Ian. Of course, the Toula’s fiery mother, who was integral in getting Toula’s father to agree to Toula taking computer classes in the first place, convinces Toula’s father to at least give Ian a chance. And, just like “ The Wedding Banquet,” “

My Big Fat Greek Wedding” operates as a comedy with subtle undertones of the important struggles and changes happening within these people’s lives. When explaining why she supports and is willing to fight for Toula’s relationship with Ian, her mother describes her feelings of coming to America for freedom, real freedom, not just the freedom to have food, shelter, and safety, but the freedom to live as one likes. Of course, the comedy deepens another layer once Toula’s family agrees to the marriage for now Toula must embrace her Greek heritage in front of an outsider, her husband-to-be Ian. Toula has long suffered from low self-esteem and she worries that her strong Greek family lifestyle will annoy and push Ian away. Ian must pass several tests such as a huge barbecue reminiscent of elements of “ The Wedding Banquet,” and be anointed with oil in the Greek Orthodox Church so that he and Toula may be married the way her parents have always dreamed. Yet, Ian himself has longed for a more robust cultural life than his parents’ dry, Anglo-Saxon life perspective. He willingly accepts all Toula’s family’s requirements showing his deepening love for Toula who in turn comes to love and embrace her family and herself on a deeper scale than ever before. Ironically, Toula marries an outsider and only comes to be closer to her family—she lives with Ian and their daughter on the same street as her parents and walks her daughter to Greek school in the evenings. The other film “ Dirty Dancing” also features a woman who struggles to come into her own through connecting with an outsider, his group of friends and their lifestyle, only to find that she grows into a woman and becomes closer to her father, too. Baby has lived in the shadow of her older sister, who is considered prettier and more outgoing and popular with the boys, as well as under the wing of her physician father. She caters to his every whim and

idea of herself through his eyes. Yet, once she is introduced to Johnny's sexualized world of free expression through dance, movement, and body contact, Baby's life is turned upside down. Something has turned on within her and she can no longer be the girl living an extended adolescence for her father. As Baby becomes deeply involved within the Johnny's world she learns to trust herself and to express herself through her body. She steps far out of her comfort zone to help Penny secure an abortion—a contentious issue in any era of American history—and agrees to step in as her dancer with Johnny. Baby learns to come “out of the corner” by practicing the seductive dance moves with Johnny and demonstrate her skills, beauty, and confidence. Ultimately, she must also come to stand up for Johnny's goodness beyond her father and the other elite tourists' who look upon him as just another bad-boy greaser and not an intelligent, sensitive, trained dancer who is passionate about his trained skills. Baby must evolve out of her father's concept of her first as a little girl, then as a disappointment, into being her own woman who openly expresses her opinion and expresses her sexuality and beauty in front of her stodgy social group. Of course, she accomplishes all this with great fanfare in the iconic final dancing scene where she boldly goes for her big lift scene allowing Johnny to hold her high in the air for all to see exactly who she is and her choices as a modern young woman of her era. The movie “The Wedding Banquet” focuses on a gay relationship whereas the other two movies focus on heterosexual relationships. In the movie “The Wedding Banquet” there exists a triangle relationship between two gay men and one woman, whereas in the other two movies there is only one couple involved in the love affair. The movie “The Wedding Banquet” has a Chinese family involved, while Greek family is

depicted in the movie “ My Big Fat Greek Wedding.” In the movie “ The Dirty Dancing” there is a presence of American family and all the key characters involved are Americans. In “ The Wedding Banquet,” the gay man Winston is deceiving the parents and giving the wrong idea about his sexuality, while in the movies “ My Big Fat Greek Wedding” and “ Dirty Dancing” there is a similar type of deception, revelation, and reconciliation involved. The director of the movie “ The Wedding Banquet” is a Chinese man, whereas other two movies have American directors. In the movie “ The Wedding Banquet” Chinese culture and heritage is projected and in movie “ My Big Fat Greek Wedding” Greek culture is the central focus. In the movie “ The Wedding Banquet” the ending is skeptical and the audience is left to imagine the climax the long-term results, whereas in “ My Big Fat Greek Wedding” and “ Dirt Dancing” the end is shown as positive and joyful. The Director’s Message through the Movie “ The Wedding Banquet” The director Ang Lee, had made this movie with a complete orientation on gay relationship which was gaining importance in 1990s. In this movie the key character Winston, the Taiwanese immigrant and the American man Simon, is sharing a gay relationship with each other. Here the hindrance is emerging from the Winston’s family who are orthodox, and to cover up things from his family Winston unwillingly marries Chinese women. It is very obvious here that society plays a big hand in intimidating people do thing they are otherwise reluctant in doing. The director wants to show the audience that freedom is a rare thing in orthodox society and parents are very conservative when it comes to the future of their children. Normally, it may be difficult for the parents of older generations to accept such sexual orientation and social norms practiced by new generations. However, the parents make exceptions

at times to impart happiness and comfort to their children by understanding their choices and values. The author is portraying that future generations have their own concepts and ideas about their life partners and they can get caught between parents and lovers at many times. These kinds of conservative thoughts of parents can only affect the children in a negative way and relationships by coercion results in utter failure. The adults of future generation are educated and they definitely want to practice freedom and liberty when it comes to their lives. The director is displaying through the movie that a very adamant attitude from parents can only result in chaos and revenge in children rather than trust and confidence.

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