

Pleasantville and hero essay



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In this essay, two films' opening ten minutes, " Pleasantville" and " Hero" will be compared. Pleasantville, directed by Gary Ross, had taken the idea of a stressed teenage child, who can't seem to fit in with the crowd, and made his dreams come true. He and his sister " escape" in to the world of Pleasantville, therefore this film being a hybrid between teen romance and fantasy. While, on the other hand, Hero, directed by Zhang Yimou, is a narrative of what it means to be a hero. Set in ancient china, the story possesses love, duty and honour. While Hero is an historic epic Pleasantville covers two distinctive periods in time.

Due to these features the genre of both films are completely different; Hero being a Legend myth type of film whereas Pleasantville a teenage fantasy. Both films introduce their story lines in different ways. In Hero the story line is perplexing yet the basic foundation of it was clear, to convince the King and obtain the reward. This was done by the use of dialogue and flashbacks. In Pleasantville the story was exposed by the TV repair man. Due to him was the story able. The genre of Pleasantville is Teen Fantasy; this is obvious as the story is about two teens as by going into a sitcom makes it a Fantasy.

Hero, on the other hand is an Epic Ledge/Martial Arts. This is known by the cinematography used by the director. The fighting and setting, the sounds and lighting, all add up to the genre. In the opening of Hero, Nameless is shown as a well trained swordsman therefore at some point of the film there would be a battle. In Pleasantville, David has trouble getting dates; this may lead to love problems in the duration of the narrative. The audience of each movie are both the same, both are over twelve. This is due the fact that in

Hero there is lots of action which may be bad for a young child and in Pleasantville some words.

The themes behind Hero are: love, fighting, honour, ritual, respect, pride and loyalty where as the themes in Pleasantville are: love, friendship, freedom, humour and the belief that destiny can be changed. Most but not all of the themes are established in the first ten minutes. Honour and ritual are expressed when the people wearing robe are in formation with a huge path in the middle for Nameless to walk through. There is evidence of special visual effects via the use of CGI to create the mass group of people. Humour is shown when funny things happen for example the teacher and what the pupils are being taught.

Pleasantville has a much more intellectual moral whereas Hero is a movie with much more traditional values. Each movie introduces the main characters in different ways. They use media tools such as lighting, sound and shot types and angles. In Pleasantville, David and Jen are both introduced by either of them being in the each shot and in Hero; Nameless is communicated as the main by his speech. All the main and secondary characters are introduced in the first 10 minutes. In Pleasantville there really aren't any secondary characters whereas in Hero the king is defiantly a secondary character.

This is indicated in the storyline and how important it is to Nameless. In Pleasantville, Jen is a stereotypical teenager with her love of fashion, ignorance and sex as in Hero the king is stereotypical and his arrogance is made manifest via his material possessions: his gold plated armour, gigantic

mosaic picture of war,” 100 paces away or will be killed”, size of palace. The angle and shot he has been captured in also adds to this. He has been screened in a low angle wide shot. Hero’s main characters introduction also conforms to the historic epic genre as the director has chosen to express Nameless’ muscular body.

This usually happens in all films which conform to the historic epic genre. In Pleasantville the montage of clips introduces the characters and sets them up for the storyline quickly. This is a convention of teen-flicks as they usually focus on the situation of the characters rather than the actual characters themselves as they are usually stereotypes. They are easily identifiable and don’t need long introductions like Hero and other historic epics. The opening graphics of the movies, i. e. the iconography we expect to see from each genre, are both different. In Pleasantville, the beginning shot is someone flicking channels on a television.

There is a close up on the television screen with a lot of fill lighting to add a realistic atmosphere, while Hero’s opening shot is a low angle mid shot of “Nameless” delivering a speech about his past. In this scene there is backlighting to add to a spooky atmosphere. Hero’s logo’s denotation is an orangey red colour therefore the most obvious connotation would be: bloodshed, battle, strife, conflict and love. It also conveys connotation of martial arts as another denotation is Chinese writing. Oriental script or ancient text is a convention of historic epics. They help to set the scene.

Pleasantville’s graphic’s denotation is a nice soft and smooth pink and white writing; this is in association with romance, women and dreams as well as

youth. In Pleasantville everything is very high on key lighting and everything thing conveys a nice and pleasant mood, even though there is tension created between characters. In Hero on the other hand the most used colour is black and white. There is very low key lighting and a lot of backlighting used to build up tension and suspense. Black and white transmits the feeling of yin and yang, good versus evil. Dark navy colour schemes are also conventions of historic epics.

In both movies colour is used to create exceeding effects. In Pleasantville colour is used to portray the idea behind a character, as soon as the character changes their whole colour changes. In Hero colour is used to emphasize the feeling behind the thought or belief. An example of this would be that the colour was red when the two women were fighting; they were fighting for love and red is a connotation for love and blood, whereas in the King's theory the colour was blue. Blue is the connotation for cold, callousness and heartlessness. This technique is very effective to help the audience of the film understand its narrative.

In spoken words many people believe that Hero is more effective in its use of colour. This is true as the colours values and the actor's actions both match. This happens in Pleasantville also, yet for a complex narrative like Hero, colour used in this way was an effective tool. Sound, in both movies, is used to build tension and set scene. In Pleasantville, in the first scene, a huge clue is given about the setting of the narrative. This clue is a saxophone, it was played for a split second while the channels were flicking. This is a major hint to the story of the film.

The saxophone was famous in the period of Pleasantville. As well as this the general music and sound in the opening and in fact all the scenes are friendly. Although there is one exception, which is the scene when the television mechanic arrives, a sleazy, modern and creepy track is played as part of the non-diagetic sound. A diagetic sound in this scene would be the doorbell ringing when the TV guy arrives. Sound in Hero is much more different, the diagetic sound: wagon, horses, men fighting and swords along with non-diagetic: drums of war, violin, flute and eastern music; help to move the movie along.

They add atmosphere and aid to define the genre of the film. Both sound tracks of each film suit its genre. Diagetic and Non-diagetic sounds are both different. Diagetic sounds are sounds which are part of the scene; example; doorbell, fighting. And Non-diagetic sounds are sounds which are added to create tension and atmosphere; example: sleazy and/or eastern music tracks. Sound also give hints and clues on the character, like in Pleasantville the creepy music allowed the audience to deem that the TV repair man was a suspicious character and in Hero, the eastern music conveyed that Nameless was from an oriental background.

In Pleasantville the diagetic sound clearly conforms to its genres. Firstly near the start of the film the female protagonist is chewing gum while talking on the phone. This chewing conforms to the teen-flick genre as most teenage girls in movies highlight their social status in this way. They think they are “cool”. Sound in Hero also defines its genre. Drums build tension; the target audiences could automatically acknowledge the films genre via this.

Furthermore, as the montage of clips enters the story of Pleasantville there is 1950's swing music playing.

This non-diegetic feature adds the sense of speed as well as conforming to the fantasy genre. Fantasies usually suggest where the protagonist will travel to. This and the idea of the Pleasantville marathon leaves open interpretations of the story. There is oriental music in Hero. This means it also conforms to its genre. Historic epics always have non-diegetic music of the time from which they are set. Tension builds furthermore in hero by the use of voice over. This denotes the protagonist's thoughts.

It also places emphasis on him and conforms to the convention of historic epics as they are usually based on one main character. Similarly, another clue of the genre of Pleasantville is when the music stops playing and the camera stops at the television, in the mise-en-scene, could suggest that that is the place where they are going to travel to. This builds tension, just as the diegetic sound of thunder and lightning. They signify something is going to happen. In films there are three types of angles: high, low and medium as well as eight different types of shots.

But two are mainly used to present importance of characters: high angle and low angle. High angle makes the character look small, weak and vulnerable whereas low angle make the character look tall, strong and defensive. The eight types of shots are: extreme long shot, to show a wide picture, vulnerability; long shot; medium shot, to show interplay between characters; close-up, used to show detail as well as facial expressions; extreme close-up,

mostly used for emotional shots; over the shoulder shot; point of view shot and finally a two shot.

In Pleasantville, when a character changes his or her colour changes as well. This is evidence for a change in behaviour or thoughts. In Pleasantville around the first ten minutes of the film there is a part where the editing cuts from David and Jen in montage. It expressed the parallels between their actions. In Hero, flash backs are used to move the story along in an effective way. There are also many reaction shots using close ups to nearly explain the characters emotions in Pleasantville. This is a convention of Teen-flicks as they are usually based upon emotions and predicaments.

Whereas in Hero there are many wide and low angle shots. Wide mid shots emphasise greatness and exemplify size and space. They also give a sense of freedom, which in this film is ironic as “ Before China was one great nation it was divided into seven warring states”. If there is war there is a limitation in freedom. The low angle shots symbolise power. In a nation of war and a historic epic; power and honour are essentials needed to met the codes of the film genre. Power is basically the foundation of historic epics. To conclude both films conform to their genres particularly well.

Personally, it is believed that Pleasantville was a much more explained opening however more suspense and mystery was created by Hero. The weakness of Hero was that it was too complicated. The movie which is preferred however is Hero as it is been finely directed as well as the fact that the use of colour was more effective in this movie over the other. They both have different impacts on their target audiences. While Pleasantville’s calm

story about two teenagers may not affect the adorers of Hero, views who don't mind the fantasy genre can curl up and enjoy two hours of black and white " fun".

Likewise the target audience for Hero may find Pleasantville interesting but too simplistic and surreal for their Sunday nights. Jet Lee in hero is used as part of " the star system". Certain film stars can be an important part of the film's iconography. Jet Lee is used to highlight the films genre and martial aspects. Many people say Jackie Chan would have been a better choice however he is now mainly associated with comedies. The casting team made a great choice choosing Lee.