

In the cut critical film analysis

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Critically explore the themes of fairytale, memory and narrative in Jane Campion's film *In the Cut* in relation to dominant ideology and gender. The essay proposed shall examine the way in which ideology and gender help portray the themes of fairytale, memory and narrative. By focusing on ideology through gender in the film, it shall firstly analyse ideology and then gender and combine the two. Important to note here, is that throughout the film gender and ideology is closely linked and throughout the film, narrative is linked to gender and ideology and together they build upon a dominance in the gender ideology.

Therefore the essay presented will look at ideology, gender, and narrative separately and then show how they form to complement each other using fairytale and memory as a catalyst to their dominance. Gender - Throughout the film, *In the Cut* gender roles and femininity is explored. In the movie the female plays the main protagonist, which is a recent idea as it has normally been the man who takes on such a role. I am going to explore how this is carried out and what this means for the way in which gender is portrayed in the film.

Laura Mulvey talks in detail about women and media in her chapter *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, in this paper Mulvey looks at the way in which a psychoanalytical approach to look at film shows the constant patriarchy found within the history of film and how this notion is constantly reproduced within the structure of cinema and fascination today. The gaze used in cinema according to Mulvey is a male gaze and the women are "to-be-looked-at." In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for

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strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. “ (Mulvey in Penley: 1988: 62). The detective is intrigued by Franny this alpha male figure holds power while the woman is always the passive object to the man. Women that are displayed as the sexual object are the ongoing, reoccurring musical theme of the male’s desire.

From strip teasing to seducing they constantly represent male’s desire.

Mulveys ideas takes a rather Freudian notion of the woman. The woman is someone who is subjected almost flawed by her own biological functions. Her lack of a penis is symbolized through the procreation of children. This idea deriving from Derrida whereby a woman is a man who is not fully developed therefore being significantly lower than the man in a Darwinian hierarchy. “

A true man has no sex (... for he must be his sex. ” (Derrida: 1978: 181)

Femininity in the film is commonly associated with romance, sex and blood.

In the film In the Cut, we can see that the colour red is used significantly with the women characters; this colour shows how femininity is used in accordance to love, romance and sex. Franny demands attention when she is embarking on sexual activity. Franny is intrigued by it and drawn into it; she gains pleasure from it and plays a dominant role.

The idea of this being different is that normally a female protagonist would not play this role, and the way in which it is carried out marks independence for her character, the film here shows an emphasis towards the red dress that her sister wears and then she wears in the ending scene, there is also associations with red in desire, in the bar when she watches sexual activity the whole room is red. Romance is embedded amongst each main character.

These characters are Franny her sister Pauline, Detective Malloy and his partner Detective Rodriguez.

These character have a link toward opposition, the two females can be compared by the audience, as can be the two males. Here we seek to find what their stories hold. Each character is infatuated with romance and lust, Franny sees beauty of romance in her memory of her father and also in poetry, her sister finds romance in conventional social formalities, such as marriage lust to love which she desires with a doctor and having children. The two males are almost troubled males, the detective has a troubled past being molested as a child, and wants a romance where he can provide not just sex for his partner.

This is shown when he is troubled by the murders, and when he takes Franny to a park and does not wish to have sexual relations. Rodriguez is troubled of the idea of being “ a house husband” in the ending scene he wants to be able to control women and not let himself be controlled. Here the ideas of femininity and masculinity are embedded through the film, each character has a fixation with marriage, the image of the woman in a wedding suit and a cut arm portrays the violence associated with marriage and failed/troubled masculine and feminine identities.

Feminine power seems to cause disruption throughout the film. In Campion's film, it's as if the roles are reversed and then turned back again. The male seems to be a disruption and plays with Franny's mind, however it's Franny's femininity which causes her to be led into her own trap. The ending of the film sees Franny as still almost to her death wanting to be in control but this

city setting in which she wants to be in charge almost has to kill her before she can hold power. According to Thornham masculinity is played almost exclusively throughout the film.

If we look at the way in which the two detectives talk amongst each other and whilst Franny is there than we can see that they use her as an object and as an audience to show off their male desires. (Thornham: 2007). “

Women walk arm in arm in pairs; when we glimpse them alone they are running. (...)Public spaces are unsafe meeting places for women. ”

(Thornham: 2007: 37). This idea of New York is portrayed as a never ending danger zone for women. Franny is unsafe even in her own home she is penetrated by male intruders, from the beginning we see her ex in the garden which thus amplifies this.

From Sue Thornhams article she associates the film with a feminine inadequacy, the female wanting to hold power but not quite getting there. This in and out feeling is associated with the film through the female protagonist. By depicting this picture we can see straight away that it is taken from a busy Town in America, from the busy road the dress code of the two women and the infamous yellow taxi. These images are what the mass audience know, and in a Marxist light, the metropolis working class proletariat are being subjected.

Hence, in the film we can see that these familiarities accompany the dominant ideology of gender. From this image taken from the film we can see how gender is incorporated within the film, the brunette is obviously a woman dedicated to her job, and there is a sense of freedom with the blonde

in the red. Straight away we pick up on connoted messages from the denoted. Saussure's structuralist work on the signifier proves adequate on this note, our familiarity of the scene, setting, and ideology is portrayed from what is being signified.

This image that is constantly displayed plays on the dominance of the gender ideology and the recognition of realism to an extent that we passively pertain to the "real" and see it as an adequate replica. Thus noting on the build up of gender and how it should be played across within society. This idea of space signifies the female protagonist's form of being the only character to move through all of these spaces. Although Malloy does, embark on this freedom to an extent, we do not see him in the strip club, or at the main ending scene, in this scene his is tied up in her apartment.

This idea of space enables the story to be told through a narrative looked at in the eyes of the female. Ideology- From here we can see that the dominant portrayal of gender and ideology is clearly marked throughout the film. "According to the principles of the ruling ideology (...) the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification." (Mulvey in Penley: 1988: 63). Dominant ideology of gender is represented through the way in which the male and the female are represented. In the movie what marks as odd is when the Frannys ex John Graham says: "my mom use to dress me in girls clothes. (In the Cut: 2003). This already draws as strange to the audience. His character also portrays Frannys failed relationships and plays upon our desire to see her in a stable relationship. If the male is sexually objectified, in any case for example in the new James Bond movies, we always need a <https://assignbuster.com/in-the-cut-critical-film-analysis/>

female character to create the desire. However in reversal the woman by herself creates desire. “ Cinematic codes present a gaze, a world, and an object thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. ” (Mulvey in Reynolds: 1988: 67).

Mulvey explains here that the way in which the male is portrayed is as if a mirrored image of the ruling ideology in society. Everything about the male character, suggests how they should be in reality. For example, if we look at film the male character who is the superstar he holds characteristics that are not around sex and glamour but a more perfect ideology so it can thus signify the main motive of the protagonist and societal ideologies. Ideology in film is a concept cited and drawn on by many media theorists.

When the Frankfurt started it, it was the first set of theorists to look at culture and the media to be a marker of capitalism and yet another way of the bourgeoisie to dupe us. Jameson talks of film to be a suppressed set of images injected with hidden meaning and ways to exploit its audience. (Jameson, 1991). Where do these theorists then get their views? By watching a film it is us the audience who are meant to gain an emotion or draw up a conclusion on what we have seen. If we take cinema to be an art then one can argue that cinema is meant to be read in the eyes of the conglomerate elite. A work of art understood dynamically (...) is images in the feelings and mind of the spectator. ”(Eisenstein in Andrews: 1984: 49). This idea of representation presented by Andrews is that ideology and representation go hand in hand the only way in which ideology can be formulated within a movie is through these representations to that which is familiar to the audience. “ No matter what appears on the screen, audiences will

instinctively shape it into a representation of something familiar to them. ” (Andrew: 1984: 47). Andrews talks of realism and how it is portrayed within cinema.

In the film *In the Cut* it starts off with camera techniques using shots that are mostly pan shots at the beginning of the film and finally resulting into close ups, we are shown the way in which we as an audience are made to recognise the settings. For example, at the beginning of the film *In the Cut*, we can see images of Franny, if we take one of the introducing scenes where we are introduced to her student Cornelius, we are shown the scene from a road away, however as the film progresses so does the cameras closeness. This movement of the camera subconsciously inflects a message onto the audience to know when to be drawn in and out.

In this way ideology is formulated from the very start of the movie. (Andrew: 1984). In the film, when Franny remembers her dad, it can be looked at as very Freudian; she is almost fantasizing about him and wanting to be with a man just like him. This shows the way that the representation of gender used in cinema portrays patriarchy as an ideology. Noting here on at Jacques Lacan`s idea, which states that when a child recognizes his own image in a mirror; it marks the central part of ego formation. Meaning by looking in the mirror and observing oneself forms an image and constructs an identity. (Mulvey : 1988).

This idea of a familiar setting is observed throughout the film. We relate to Franny`s, work ethic and her curiosity resembles the audience`s investigatory role. Narrative- Narratives is closely linked to cinema as film is

an ongoing documentary; which is much more explicit in telling a story than say a magazine advert. In the film *In the Cut* I will look at how narrative is represented and why it uses fairytale and memory as significant in relation to dominant ideology and gender. Before watching a film, Bordwell and Thompson argue that we already know to an extent what to expect, and we know to an extent how the narrative will pan out.

The idea of narrative is not just about the story but can be about the desire of wanting to know more, the idea that we want to follow the protagonist, this idea of narrative is popular with many structuralists. Mulvey claims that this active/passive opposition controls the narrative structure. These binary oppositions that are used in film are looked at closely by structuralist Claude Levi Strauss. He looked at themes within a film and how they motivated deeper meanings from capturing these binary oppositions.

Bordwell and Thompson argue in *Film Art* that a narrative is recognised from early distinguished stories in life. For example we associate a film's narrative from birth, when we are children we look at fairytales and are infatuated by these stories, these fairytales stay with us and from film we form an attachment. We can also see this in religion and how these stories can be captured in our inner conscious by film. (Bordwell and Thompson: 1997). Sergei Eisenstein believed that it was more effective if film's narrative was not shot in a linear direction, thus making the narrative obvious.

Instead the film should be shot in different chronicle arrangements in order for the mind to jump and build on its own conclusions. " In a more light-hearted way it is used today in pop videos and advertising to encourage us

to make associations and link ideas. ” (Bordwell and Thompson: 1977: 4). In the film *In the Cut*, we can see that the idea of fairytale is carefully portrayed and used in different chronological arrangements to maintain its emphasis. “ In childhood we learn fairytales and myths (...), the prevalence of stories in our lives is one reason we need to take a close look at how films may embody narrative form. (Bordwell and Thompson: 1997: 59). There are numerous scenes where we see how ideas of fairytale (not just for Franny) are perpetuated, throughout the narrative of the film. Her memory is linked with typical fairytales, what I mean by typical fairytale, is that what we associate with old folk tales. The story that has a beginning a middle where an issue is dealt with and an ending which seeks exaggerated happiness and a moral issue that is learnt. In ‘ *In The cut*’ we can see when Franny is remembering her past she sees it as if a fairytale.

The light becomes lighter and colour is drawn out, this provides us with a fairytale like image as it far from the reality signified in the film. Here I mean that in the films everyday cinematic language, colours are normal, setting and light have a reoccurrence however when Franny uses memory to envisage her fairytale fantasy. The image we are shown is completely different to the one that marks reality. The idea that love conquers all that her father fell in love and it didn’t matter about the other woman holds the fairytale ideal. We also know it is fairytale like as it holds certain characteristics that we hold as fairytale like. Andrew: 1984). Another account in which we fairytale and childhood can be interpereted, is the way in which Franny holds a childlike state, she is dazzled by the world around her and is excited by danger. This analysis is seen throughout the film, she is watching

through a Childs eyes. By the end of the film Franny adapts a child like romance. She runs out the house and behaves erratically, she follows a man into the car with no hesitation and her child like behaviour is drawn closer when she wakes up in the car as if a child, and is excited by where she is and where she is going.

Her amazement reels the child behaviour to an end when she finally shoots the murderer and its as if she has grown up or been born again as a new person who loses her ability to fight, when she is covered in blood and is ignored by society shows her rejection she walks in solitude and engages in no conversation her emotionless character that then returns to her home and to the detective without even conversing with him shows her lack of defeat.

Vladimir Propp, analysed fairytales and found 31 different functions that a fairytale holds, he also describes 8 different characters. This vary from the hero leaving the home, the hero having tension between the opposition, the man claiming to be a hero and then finally the issues are resolved. (Propp: 1968). Every story whether it be in media should be looked act in this structuralist light. By structurally analysing In the Cut in accordance to fairytale, we need to ask who the hero is. If the hero is solely Franny then who do Malloy, Pauline and Rodriguez play.

The film starts of with Franny being in a normal state then encountering with Malloy becomes the start of the equilibrium being disrupted, if she is the hero then she needs to resolve the issue of the murder, however the murderer becomes unclear to her, and in the conclusion of the film, the

fairytale does not have its sufficient ending Malloy is left in handcuffs and although Franny lays next to him she merely rest next to him as a pose to kissing him, realising him or even getting back to a normal state.

Therefore this film defies the structuralist outline proposed by both Propp and to an extent Todorov, as the equilibrium is not resolved or even in a calm state. Is the murderer dead? Was Malloy involved or is he a hidden hero? These unresolved issues come to the conclusion that we as an audience have not had the satisfaction, of a hero narrative nor a fairytale narrative. Memory is also used in the film; we can see this throughout the film.

Franny is always remembering her past and her past effects her future, everything that means anything happens on her fixation towards memory. From the very beginning the detective becomes consistent on knowing if she remembers anything from the night of a murder. Her relationship with the other main characters for example the detective Malloy, he always asks her to remember if anything happened and she ask him about his memory of the same night too, this is in order for her to find if he was involved in her murder.

Their sex life is looked at immensely and part of this is based on memory, memory of his sexual past about when an older woman either raped him or abused him and how he knows how to perform in the present. The whole scene mentioned above when she remember her parents love life is entwined in fairytale and memory. Her memory is childlike and her approach to situations is almost childlike until the final ending scene where she shoots

the murderer. She is almost vulnerable all the time and has a naive character which links to her memory.

In conclusion, this essay has critically assessed Jane Campion's film *In the Cut*, by focusing on ideology, gender and narrative. By looking at ideology we can see how gender is perpetuated throughout the film, through different notions of analysing femininity we have seen how a woman is presented in society portraying a patriarchal society, where film is obsessed with the female gaze, leaving the male as a perfect form of power. (Mulvey: 1988). We have then noted that through narrative fantasy/fairytale and memory portray this ideal of a patriarchal society.

From structuralists such as Propp and Strauss we have analysed the way in which narrative is portrayed however discovered the inadequacy of looking at this film through narrative solely and by viewing gender and psychoanalysis we can draw a conclusion of femininity representation.

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