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Fantasy Theme Analysis of Lyrical Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the rhetorical visions created by popular love songs through the lens of Fantasy Theme Analysis. By examining the interplay of setting, character, and action themes, the study identifies several recurring narratives that offer insights into the cultural, social, and emotional significance of love in contemporary society. The analysis reveals a multifaceted exploration of love, encompassing both its joys and sorrows. Songs explore the ambivalent nature of love, its transformative power, and the challenges and complexities of relationships. Using rhetorical devices and poetic techniques, the songs convey powerful messages and evoke emotional responses in listeners. The findings of this study have implications for language and literature education and broader cultural and social analysis. By examining the rhetorical visions in popular love songs, teachers can develop engaging and relevant teaching strategies that foster critical thinking, cultural awareness, and a deeper understanding of the human experience.

INTRODUCTION

Language and literature have long been integral components of tertiary curricula. While songs are often considered a form of entertainment, they also serve as rich repositories of cultural, social, and historical information. This study delves into the textual content of popular songs, exploring their potential as pedagogical tools for language and literature instruction.

As Mart (2018) argues, learners can benefit significantly from exposure to literature, and songs, as a form of lyrical poetry, offer a particularly accessible and engaging medium. Beyond mere storytelling, songs often convey powerful discourses and ideologies. Maulana (2019) suggests, songwriting is a form of poetic expression, characterized by careful attention to word choice, stylistic devices, rhythm, and meaning.

To fully comprehend the messages embedded within songs, it is essential to consider the underlying linguistic structures. As Birch (1985) notes, the study of linguistics can provide valuable insights into literary texts, including songs. By examining the stylistic elements and language choices employed by songwriters, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the intended meanings and messages.

This study employed Fantasy Theme Analysis, a rhetorical criticism method developed by Ernest Bormann, to investigate the lyrical content of popular songs. By identifying recurring fantasy themes (characters, settings, and actions) and analyzing their patterns, researcher could construct rhetorical visions that represent the underlying worldview or ideology conveyed by the songs.

Through this analysis, the study aimed to uncover the symbolic meanings and messages embedded within the lyrical content of popular songs. By examining the interplay of fantasy themes, researcher could gain a nuanced understanding of how these songs contribute to cultural narratives and shape audience perceptions. This

research has implications for both language and literature education, as it highlights the potential of songs to serve as meaningful and engaging learning materials.

The findings of this study have implications for language and literature education. Popular songs could serve as valuable pedagogical tools for teaching students about various aspects of language, literature, and cultural studies. By analyzing the lyrical content of these songs, students could develop critical thinking skills, improve their understanding of literary devices, and gain insights into the cultural and historical contexts in which the songs were created.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical Criticism is not just an analysis used by linguists and literary critics but it is rather an everyday activity of humans on how they create symbols and interpret symbols to surroundings that influences their responses (Foss, 2018).

Fantasy theme is a method of rhetorical criticism postulated by Ernest Bormann. This analysis is designed in interpreting messages and allows researchers to pay attention on the artifact to interpret meaningful symbolism. As eloquently argued by Littlejohn & Foss, “the starting point for the theory is that individuals’ images of reality are guided by stories reflecting how things are believed to be. These stories, or fantasy themes, are created in symbolic interaction within small groups, and they chain out from person to person and group to group to create a shared worldview” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2016). This idea is suggesting that fantasy themes create shared worldview of groups of people.

The fantasy themes consist of three components: setting themes, character themes, and action themes.

Foss (2018) describes character theme as “agents or actors in the drama and ascribe characteristics and

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motives to them". The characters are the ones involve in the scene. Shields & Preston argued that characters refer to individuals with qualities and depicted as taking certain actions. By the characters' actions, they may be classified as heroic or villainous, some characters are labelled as major characters and others as supporting players.

While setting themes are statement in the communication or in the artifact where the action is taking place. It may also refer to the description of the scenes. Identifying the setting themes in the artifact for the analysis is essential because they describe the places where the events take place and connect to other fantasy theme elements (Ramirez, 2018).

The last element is the action themes defined as the action of the drama or vision. Shields & Preston wrote "action simply means who is doing what, to whom and how". The action themes are fundamental as the other elements because it helps describe what occurs or what happens with the personae and in the scenes.

If in the artifact where the three fantasy themes (character, setting, and action) are present then it can generate rhetorical vision. Sonja K. Foss wrote "a swirling together of fantasy themes to provide a particular interpretation of reality. It contains fantasy themes relating to settings, characters, and actions that together form a symbolic drama or coherent interpretation of reality". All three themes when combined form a successful rhetorical vision.

Previous Studies Using Fantasy Theme Analysis

A study titled 'Fight the Dead, Fear the Reality: Fantasy theme Analysis of the Walking Dead' steered by (Ramirez, 2018). Her research interests the messages and meanings derived from the television show *The Walking Dead*. It aimed at understanding the potential impact and the interpretation of zombies in entertainment. However, it found a connection between fantasy/fictional worlds and the real world. The study generated metaphorical and fantasy theme analysis to find the social and political connections from *The Walking Dead* to the real world.

In the study of Liu (2017) titled 'Trauma Nationalism and Pop Culture; A Fantasy Analysis' which analyzed Korean films in early post-cold war period. The study used Bormann's fantasy analysis method in order to explore how the films handle symbols and assign meanings to express Korea people's nationalism in narrations.

Another study piloted by Hillyer (2008) titled 'Help, Is there a Doctor in the Forum: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of the Student Doctor Network Forums' which utilized the Bormann's fantasy theme criticism to study the internet communication in the Student Doctor Forums (SDN). Further, communication in the internet community can be of good subject to apply fantasy theme analysis as a method for criticism. The researcher was able to read conversations from the same community members of the forum on a variety of topics. As a result, the study found out that members of the forum community shared understandings of reality and major life decisions.

Fantasy theme criticism can be applied in a diverse context. Zhaoxun (2015) in his study titled 'Rhetorical Vision of a Chinese Corporate Hero: A Fantasy Theme Analysis' concentrated on the heroic stories about Mr. Ni Rinfeng, a considered national corporate hero in their country. Based upon her research analysis, the fantasy types found in the stories as subject for the study, form the rhetorical visions of corporate heroes that are shared by organizational members. The research involved three steps; coding for fantasy themes from the stories, clustering similar fantasy themes into fantasy types and constructing the rhetorical visions from the fantasy types. Puspita (2017) also conducted a study which analysis is driven by extracting the fantasy themes from the verbal and non-verbal symbols of marine retiree group members. Her study titled 'Fantasy Themes of Marine Retiree Group' delved on finding and identifying the fantasy themes through elements of setting, character and action. Also, the study of Francisco Christ (2010) examined how fantasy football communities represent larger culture. Bormann's fantasy theme analysis was employed to know how the sharing of group fantasies creates symbolic convergence. The participants of the study were 12 managers of the club who all share the same rhetorical vision.

Moreover, doing rhetorical criticism to which fantasy theme is used as a method of analysis "is designed to provide insights into the shared worldview of groups" (Foss, 2018). The artifact or subject for the analysis could be any popular context such as a song, a book, a blog etc. (Foss, 2018) as long as that there is an evidence of symbolic convergence to which the rhetor believes resonate to audience.

A study that has used music video as an artifact was the study steered by Martinez (2018) titled 'Think Outside the Music Video: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of Music Video that Break the Genre Generation'. Two music video were examined to determine how the rhetor utilizes music video to illustrate the societal issues through personal experiences as crafted in the music video.

Whereas, the present study shall be dealing with songs. Songs that portray love in any form and are available in youtube and spotify that certainly reached an immense number of audience will be the subject to be discussed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the thematic content of love songs. This methodology, which involves the analysis of textual data in narrative form, was chosen to provide a nuanced understanding of the lyrical content.

The primary corpus of this research consisted of love songs, interpreted as lyrical poems. These songs were analyzed through the lens of fantasy theme analysis. To narrow the scope of the study, respondents were asked to select ten love songs from a provided list.

The selected songs were then subjected to a thematic analysis. Specifically, the researcher identified the primary

characters, settings, and recurring themes present within the lyrics. These elements were subsequently integrated to construct a comprehensive interpretation of the songs' worldview.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rhetorical Visions created by the fantasy themes in Select Popular Love Songs

The select popular love songs have created a successful rhetorical visions through the swirling of three themes --- the setting, character, and the action. 'A rhetorical vision is a blend of discursive material, here and now events, and fantasy themes which are woven together to form a drama that is credible and compelling' (Cragan, 1975; Rosenberg, 2014). As the result of the coding of fantasy themes and as the themes were weaved together it formed successful rhetorical visions that deals with numerous love perspectives.

Below is the presentation of the rhetorical visions created by the fantasies in the select popular love songs.

S1 Someone You Loved

A fantasy theme analysis suggests a rhetorical vision that anyone can be sentimental and will be immersed into melancholic feeling once love is lost. The dramatic words of the singer unequivocally make the addressee of the song think deeply and make them even realize that when they have already found someone who could make their lives blissful, it should not be taken for granted. However, the song does not only resonate for intimate relationship between lovers, but it also tackles bereavement. The listeners of the song could possibly relate it to whatever situations they are into, be it a lost love of two people, break up, or a lost love because of death.

The song ponders on missing someone and wanting that it would come back. The thought of losing someone who is dear to you is seemingly irrepressible; however, it imparts a lesson. A message could be, to not miss the benefits of being loved with our significant other, one should take seriously the relationship fostered in love.

S2 You are the Reason

This song creates an echoing message to the addressee that regret always comes at last, hence; it is essential to constantly be reminded that when a couple is in the threshold of love already, they should find a way to revitalize the spirit. Additionally, it is fundamental to be self-aware and to put effort and demonstrate affection in full for that regret will not contain them.

S3 A Thousand Years

The formation of the vision based on the emerging fantasy themes in the song, the persona would want to resonate in the audience the thought of waiting for someone that is destined with you could be exasperating in a way that you might lose interest and be perturbed through waiting for someone who will make you believe in love. However, waiting can also be rewarding. It draws you closer to your destined partner and when someone comes in your life

everything will turn out perfectly. Doubts can vanish and the thought of loving someone will contain you.

S4 Perfect

Weaving together the setting, character, and their actions in the song, the rhetor formed a rhetorical vision. The setting in the song 'night' implies impeccable love of man and woman. Nights can sometimes mean lonely and sad but this time it is a celebration of young love that grew perfectly. It can be gleaned from the formation of fantasy themes that rhetor would like to resonate to audience that the end goal of love between a man and a woman is to see him or her as someone you know can build a family with you. It is the binding together of man and woman through marriage that explicitly justifies genuine affection towards a man. It illustrates a lifelong commitment.

S5 Photograph

Fantasy themes strengthens rhetorical vision in the song. All in all, the persona wants to tell the addressee that while love is one true key to a happy and fulfilling life, it may not always end up beautifully. Therefore, loving can hurt a person's feeling and will bring melancholic sentiment when love is gone and painfully when loved one is lost and will not come back anymore. Love therefore is not always distinguished as roses and sunshine but rather being in love means being in pain not all the time but at least certainly some of the time.

S6 True Colors

The persona is trying to create a rhetorical vision that every human being is unique. We are all a combination of strengths and waterloos. People will never achieve contentment in life if he will continuously be comparing his life to others. The persona also wants to tell that self-love is fundamental because from that alone is already an assurance that we can be happy and that our happiness is not dependent to how people see us. Likewise, the reality created by the fantasies is that our world is cruel only if we allow the darkness to consume us. Knowing that someone appreciates the way we are without prejudice is already a guarantee that we are loved in this world and this can be fully realized only if from the start we have accepted our flaws. We embrace our true colors and that shows our courageous self.

S7 When I Look at You

The persona of the song tries to create a rhetorical vision that love when it's gone would mean inadequacy and dishonesty for claiming to love you by the person you're in a relationship with. Love is not just an emotion to be felt but action for both parties should be visibly seen to fix what could have been broken. Love has died out and they never got a reason to hold on anymore hence allowing themselves to break up.

S8 Can't Help Falling in Love

The persona would like to resonate to addressee the love of young people could be challenging especially

when it is disliked by the parents. Loving too early can cause disagreements from parents and it will lead you to contravening your parents. But lovers in the song confirms that their love, despite of the brewing obstacles, at last they win. This is a manifestation that love triumphantly emerged in the last when you insist that your love is right, and you are both ready to take risks. It is also sufficient to say that parents are just worried that you are getting serious into a relationship at a very young age, nevertheless when you really can prove both have genuine love for each other could justify your eagerness to fall in love with the person you sincerely would want to share life in the future. The formation of the vision often resonates to young lovers who have in the same situation where Romeo and Juliet went through.

S9 Love is Gone

Rhetorical vision emerges from the fantasies created when setting, character and its actions are entwined together. The persona would want to tell the addressee that when he feels down and seemingly his world is falling apart, someone is there to provide light in times of darkest hour. This scenario would mean that people seek for inspiration from someone.

S10 Love Story

The persona created an impression to the listeners that when you meet someone destined for you in life, it is like there is no other way but to embrace it. It is an intense emotion that ostensibly will contain you.

Synthesis

The analysis of select popular love songs through the lens of Fantasy Theme Analysis revealed a multifaceted exploration of love and human relationships. By examining the interplay of setting, character, and action themes, the study identified several overarching narratives that resonated with audiences.

One prominent theme explored in these songs was the ambivalence of love. While love can bring immense joy and fulfilment, it can also lead to pain, loss, and heartbreak. Songs like “Someone You Loved” and “Photograph” captured the bittersweet nature of love, highlighting the potential for both ecstasy and sorrow.

Another recurring theme was the transformative power of love. Songs such as “You Are the Reason” and “True Colors” emphasized the transformative potential of love, suggesting that it can help individuals overcome challenges, discover their true selves, and find meaning in life.

Furthermore, the songs explored the challenges and complexities of relationships. Songs like “A Thousand Years” and “Love Story” romanticized the idea of finding one’s soulmate and enduring hardships for the sake of love. However, other songs, such as “When I Look at You” and “Love is Gone,” depicted the difficulties of maintaining relationships and the pain of losing a loved one.

The rhetorical visions created by the fantasy themes in these popular love songs offer valuable insights into the diverse and complex nature of human relationships. By examining these visions, one can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural, social, and emotional significance of love in contemporary society. These songs serve as powerful reflections of our shared experiences and aspirations, reminding us of the enduring allure and complexity of love.

CONCLUSIONS

Salient themes emerging from the analyzed love songs include breakups, deep emotional attachments, regrets, self-love, and the complexities of human love. These themes are encoded within the characters, settings, and actions depicted in the lyrics.

The popular love songs invite the rhetorical community to consider love from multiple perspectives. Love, as a fundamental element in relationships, fosters unity and understanding between individuals. The interplay of settings, characters, and actions within the song lyrics creates rhetorical visions that the personae aim to resonate with the addressees.

It can be concluded that many of the songs explore the aftermath of love, while simultaneously conveying a message that love can be interpreted in various ways. Despite these diverse perspectives, a common objective of love remains: to inspire individuals to recognize their potential for meaningful connections with others.

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