Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

REVEALING CHARACTER PERSONALITY TRAITS IN SHORT FILMS

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Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
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REVEALING CHARACTER PERSONALITY TRAITS IN SHORT FILMS

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2016

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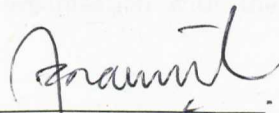
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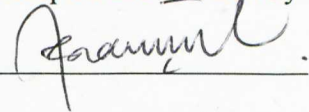
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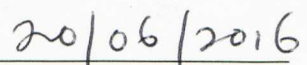
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ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses on the research of personality traits in characters portrayed in short films. The characters and their very own vibrant personalities are the backbone of each story thus their personalities play a huge role in shaping the plot of the story. The problem statement given is the limitation in terms of function (form) in short films, limits the tools given to shape character personality traits. Duration in short films are a limiting factor when creating in depth characters compared to feature length films. The objective of this research is to research about the techniques readily available to reveal personality traits of characters in short films. Thus several data collection techniques are used in this thesis in forms of interviews, script analysis, literature analysis and film analysis in terms of structure and character development. The interviewees are Mr. Hassan Abd. Muthalib and Mr. Bernard Chauly respectively. The type of analysis used is from qualitative methods and carried out using case study and content analysis. For the findings of this research, a diagram using the data available has been constructed using the act structure to display the end results of this research. The findings reveal the two key elements (turning points, core morality values) which are the main essentials to creating in depth characters within a short duration of time.

ABSTRAK

Tesis ini memberi tumpuan kepada penyelidikan terhadap ciri-ciri personaliti sesebuah watak dalam filem pendek. Watak-watak serta personaliti mereka yang menarik memainkan peranan sebagai "tulang belakang" dalam sebuah cerita. Oleh itu, perwatakan yang mempunyai ciri-ciri personaliti yang terperinci adalah penting untuk menghasilkan sebuah filem pendek yang menarik. Kenyataan masalah kajian ini tertumpu kepada batasan yang wujud dari segi fungsi (bentuk) sesebuah filem pendek yang mengehadkan pembentukan personaliti watak. Had masa dalam filem pendek merupakan salah factor yang menpengaruhi pembentukan watak yang mempunyai ciri-ciri personaliti rumit berbanding filem berdurasi panjang. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji cara-cara yang sesuai untuk menghasilkan sifat personaliti karakter dalam filem pendek. Teknik-teknik pengumpulan data merangkumi temu bual, analisis skrip, sorotan kajian lepas dan analisis filem dari segi struktur dan pengembangan karakter. Peserta-perserta yang ditemu bual adalah En. Hassan Abd Munthalib dan En. Bernard Chauly. Kaedah kualitatif merupakan kaeadah utama yang digunakan utnuk pengumpulan data dan teknik penyelidikan yang digunakan adalah seperti kajian kes dan analisis kandungan. Untuk dapatan kajian ini, sebuah diagram telah digunakan berdasarkan struktur penceritaan untuk memaparkan keputusan kajian. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan kedua-dua elemen utama ("turning points", nilai-nilai moral teras) yang merupakan dua factor yang paling utama untuk mewujudkan watak yang kompleks dalam jangkamasa yang terhad dalam sesebuah filem pendek.

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FFM	Five Factor Model
MORE	Mover, Observer, Relater, Energizer
ESFP	Extroverted, Sensing, Feeling Perceiving
ISTJ	Introverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judging
DVD	Digital Video Disc
VHS	Video Home System

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Characters are the soul of the story. The research is aimed to investigate on how different factors in screenwriting may help to uncover the secrets of personality traits. In screenwriting, characters are often portrayals of human imagination which encompasses humanlike characteristics. Therefore, the typeset of these characters have to base on humanlike behaviour whether to the extreme or the mildest. Personality traits are the aspects of a person's behaviour and attitude that make up a person's personality. In psychology, trait theory also known as dispositional theory is an approach to study human personality. It can also be defined as habitual patterns of behaviour, thought and emotion. The researchers will connect personality traits to character and structure

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development to find out a solution which will be able to adapt the techniques used in feature length films to reveal personality traits into short films.

1.2 Research Aims

In the case of revealing personality traits, the researcher aims to connect feature length films in terms of personality trait development and short films. To further clarify, this research will serve on ways to compact economically, personality traits into characters in shorts films with reference to feature length films. As a comparison, the researcher acknowledges that in short films, time is a constraint versus feature length films as the all rounded dimensions of a character can be easily doable. Forster (1956) claims that rounded characters are more complex and unlike flat characters are capable of surprising audiences. The research will focus on mainly on techniques used for feature length films to make a good character based on the revealing of personality traits and convert it to the characterization in short films. The outcome of the study will determine the usage of personality traits to develop a character in short film acquired in feature length films. The researcher will study several, feature length films to acquire on how personality traits help to make a character more interesting and then convert it into the usage of characterization in short films.

As seen by the researcher, scriptwriting is the most important process in pre-production. After the development of the idea it is imperative to sort out the script in which will shape the whole film. Characterization is one of the earlier steps of creating

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the script and it is imperative that it is done with proper steps. The researcher firmly stands by the statement that each character has motivation whether it may be of any form or structure.

A brief insight into what this research will cover is aimed at characterization in the scriptwriting process in a short film. Throughout the process of characterization, the researcher will use personality traits as a tool to shape the character making them easy to digest and connect with the audience. With that being said, the researcher aims to be able to use the tools for creating meaningful characters used in long format films (feature films) to bring the character to life. As with limited writing space in short films compared to feature films, the amount of personality traits that can or will be revealed in short films is limited.

Being that of so, this research will highlight on the limitations of character development based on personality traits in short films and try to find the solutions to overcome it. Due to the fact that the scriptwriting in short film format differs slightly than that of feature length film in terms of character screen time and development, this research will uncover the secrets to revealing personality traits efficiently in short films.

1.3 Problem Statement

Limitation in terms of function (form) in short films restricts the tools given to shape character personality traits. In revealing personality traits in feature length films, it is known that characters have sufficient screen time to be able to properly convey the

personalities which can help to move the character forward in the story. Most importantly in feature length films, the screenwriter is able to develop most points to further enhance a character's personality traits such as backstory, motivations and fully develop act structures. According to D'Vari (2005), a screenwriter who is often writing for the screen (feature length) has sufficient time to fully develop characters through dialogue and behavior. However, this is not so for short films as the amount of screen time is considerably less than off feature length films. Cooper (2005) connects the introduction of a character with the brief moment the audience is given to relate with him/her. The discussion allows more room for thought that in short films the amount of time allowed for creating characters that can attract audiences is limited. The researcher aims to find the means for short film scriptwriters to be able to capture the essence of personality traits in characters in way that make them more interesting given the limited screen time.

In realizing time is very much limited in terms to characterization in a short film, it is often regarded that personality traits in characters are not able to shine. As quoted from Dancyger (2005), "The first impulse of writers of short films is not to spend much time on the characters. The thinking goes that because you have less time, you therefore need less characterization. That is totally wrong." Regarding the issue that was brought up by Dancyger, it is notable that complex characters is needed is regards to making a short film that can connect with the audience.

1.4 Objective

1. To identify the importance of personality traits in characters and to incorporate the features at specific points of the script

2. To investigate the correlation between the revelation of a character's personality traits and its role in enriching the conflicts in the story.

3. To determine the effective way of using personality traits to enhance characters in short films as used in feature length films.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the importance of revealing the personality traits of a character during a specific moment or a point in a film?

2. What is the correlation between personality traits of a character and maximizing conflict in the script?

3. How do screenwriters create complex character development using personality traits given the short amount of screen time available in short films?

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The scope of the research will cover on the films made during the 90's era as most of the films produced during the era are well renowned and also critically acclaimed as the best films of the century. Films such as Goodfellas (1990), Fight Club (1999), Pulp Fiction (1994), and Shawshank Redemption (1994) are several of the many good films that are very character driven. It is known that during the 90's era, cinema attendance/viewers were up in the charts. In correlation with the problem statement, these films will be studied and analyzed to acquire in the techniques for characterization using personality traits.

To further narrow down the scope, the researcher will study on how the psychological makeup of each character and how the character relates to the story in doing so gather the information and apply it to the characterization of a short film. The researcher will focus directly on drama films which are chosen due to the structure of the genre and the development of characters. The scope of the research will also cover only the screenwriting process and not the directorial process on screen.

The limitations of the study are that due to the constraints only to screenwriting, the process the script to screen will not be discussed. The research will be conducted purely on the screenwriting process aimed to improve the skills and techniques of future screenwriters. Other limitations include actor and his/her character bonding which is studied in this research. However, the importance of that factor does not go unnoticed and is mentioned as a minor point of reference in this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Limitations on Writing Short Film Characters

The first impulse of writers in short films is not to spend much time on the characters as less time calls for less characterization (Dancyger, 2005, p. 127). He further explains that the thinking itself is wrong as short films relies principally on character. Presenting the issue stated, characterization is a difficult phase when it comes to scriptwriting for the short film. As screen time is often limited and of course the shorter it is, the harder it gets for the character to be developed. The problem statement provides a study in which, there is a possibility to maximize the development of the character in short films by adapting the tools used to shape personalities in feature length films. According to Rush (2006, p. 109) viewers relate to characters for different reasons. He explains that

characters often show qualities that allow us to empathize with them. With most humanlike personalities and vulnerability, viewers tend to empathize more towards the characters.

Presently analysis from the Meyers-Briggs system and Enneagrams are often used to discover the centers of motivations in film (Smith, 2005, p. 11). In films, those two systems help to shape the psychological makeup of the character in terms of his/her personality. In this research, the problem persists with the question of how can it be done and why it should be done. The question of how is connected to how the personality traits can be driven from feature length films to short films where else the question why it should be done are correlated deeply. First of all is the style in which characters are often characterized. The researcher chose personality traits as a means to create more meaningful characters because it is of basic human makeup. Without personality there is no character. The basic three act structure can be derived into three explanations that are attraction, anticipation and satisfaction. Screenwriters often attract audiences in the beginning of the story as they establish the main character. Hicks (1999, p. 11) claims that the attraction is often due to the character's personality and as the story develops more personalities tend to surface as problems occurs. As for in short length film where characterization is extremely important and compact, several techniques can be derived from feature length films in terms on revealing personality traits in characters.

2.2 Presentation of the Problem Area in General

Psychological creations of characters come with various angles and points in which can be deciphered. With personality traits, the researcher plans to create identities among characters. The identity of a character brings about significant connections between certain points in the story such as between characters. Berman (1988, p. 23) in his book, *The Screenwriting Process*, states that knowing the character intimately will allow a screenwriter to accurately and naturally determine how they will react to the situation created in the story. Stressing on the word "intimately", personality traits will play a big role in connecting to the story Berman determined 2 out of 6 important aspects to a good character which are connected to personality traits which is the attitude and the negative traits (weaknesses) of a character. Traits such as stubbornness or positivity often play a big role in determining the next move of a character within the film.

Jung (1921), a Swiss psychiatrist defined 8 personality types which defined human psychology which were Extraverted, Introverted, Intuition, Sensing, Thinking, Feeling, Perceiving, and Judging. These were later combined to form 16 types of four letter combinations which are used as personality type tests all over the world, for example, ESFP and ISTJ. The categorization of these types were based on basic human traits that were possessed and in which will be useful in conducting the research on how the characters react to a certain problem or situation. In further developing the characters based on their traits, D'Vari (2005) worked on a system called the MORE system to be used by writers. The four types are the mover, observer, relater and energizer. Each of these types contains personality traits such as the mover being brash, the observer being

diligent, the relater being encouraging and the energizer being confident. D'Vari then proceeded to match the difference types with characters and linking the outcomes of the actions. For example, two Energizers in a relationship will cause conflict as the confidence and sheer competitiveness of both sides will clash and cause a chain reaction to the bystander. With that being said, studies of personality traits have been done and furthermore categorized in which characters can be defined in several ways using their created personality traits.

2.3 Importance of Revealing Personality Traits

In short films, characterization is often the key to creating memorable characters, those in which the audience can relate to. As previously mentioned, short films have limited amount of screen time in regards to be able to deliver a certain story or structure. According to Forster (1927), flat characters are more easily recognized when they appear because they are made of a singularity, which can be interpreted as with basic personality traits. Cooper (2005, p. 128) states that due to the fact that flat characters are easily recognized, they are often used as the starting point for a writer. Examples of flat characters are southern English gentlemen and urban boys which are recognizable due to one or two stereotypical personality traits. This gives the writer the ability to be able to add several more personality points later at suitable points of the story such as the climax to further enhance the characters drawing attention from the audience. The style