

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

16 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 16 ISSUE-2, APRIL 2025

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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Silent Heroes: Subverting Traditional Heroism in Cinema

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15317465>

Article History: Submitted-30/03/2025, Revised-12/04/2025, Accepted-18/04/2025, Published-30/04/2025.

Abstract:

This paper explores silence as a narrative technique in the selected films. Primary resources for the study are chosen from the Hollywood films “The Revenant” (2015), “Drive” (2011), and “A Quiet Place” (2018). “The Revenant” is a Western action drama directed by Alejandro G. Iñárritu that portrays the life of the legendary frontiersman Hugh Glass, who was injured in a bear attack, betrayed, and left for dead by his hunting crew. Glass uses his skills to seek revenge on the hunting team. Another chosen film is “Drive”, a Western action thriller directed by Nicolas Winding Refn that delves deeply into the lives of a getaway driver and stuntman who develops feelings for Irene, the wife of a crooked man. The driver bids security to both Irene and her son Benicio. To protect Irene and her son from her husband and gangsters, he moves away to the other side of the law. The additional film chosen for the study is “A Quiet Place,” an American horror sci-fi film directed by John Krasinski that depicts the survival story of a

family in a dystopian world. This family uses American Sign Language to communicate and protect themselves from being haunted by blind aliens. These three films highlight how silence creates tension, conveys themes, and unveils character depth. It explores how silence challenges audience expectations and overturns conventional narrative forms. By investigating the role of silence, the viewers can fully appreciate the remarkable cinematic experience. This paper guides us to a more profound understanding of the significance of silence in film.

Keywords: Silence, Semiotics, Conventional heroism, Symbol, Sign, Film.

Introduction

Silence is often regarded as a powerful instrument in filmmaking. It's also recognized as the opposite of cinematic narrative. Filmmakers have employed silence to reveal characters, convey emotions, and create tension. They harness the expressive potential of silence to craft thought-provoking narratives. The strategic use of silence is a radical act in an age where sound design often dominates the cinematic landscape. Silence acts as a metaphor for repression, social marginalization, and trauma-sensitive subjects. Filmmakers use silence in their works for various purposes, all of which contribute to emotional depth, narrative enhancement, and deeper viewer engagement. The effect of scenes with music or speech can be strengthened by using silence to create a striking contrast with those containing sound. This juxtaposition draws attention to important plot points. Absence of sound forces viewers to focus on a film's visual components, as movies are predominantly visual media.

This approach works exceptionally well when the image conveys the narrative or emotional significance of the occasion. Silence is also used to build tension and suspense in thriller and horror genres. As the audience waits to see what will break the quiet, the lack of sound creates a feeling of unease and anticipation. Filmmakers frequently utilize silence to strengthen cinematic impact, which can serve as a stylistic choice for conveying the director's perspective,

establishing the film's tone, or distinguishing their work from more traditional dialogue-heavy films.

Literature review

1.Oppenheimer- Vera Yulianti

A semiotic analysis of the Oppenheimer film using Barthes's theory explores the complex use of symbols and signs within the film. A qualitative approach is employed systematically to decode symbols and signs within the film to uncover more profound meanings. "Oppenheimer" was selected as the analysis's subject because of its in-depth examination of important historical occurrences and difficult moral quandaries. Additionally, the film provides a thorough examination of the life of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist who created the atomic bomb. This study examines the interpretation of signs, primarily focusing on connotation, denotation, and mythology. Barthes's perspective on semiology provides a method for enhancing the understanding of language, literature, and society. Specifically, films like Oppenheimer carry messages to the audience about responsibility, moral challenges, and the impact of technological progress.

2. The Giver- Doni Anggoro Ari et al.

The study mainly aims to explore the values of humanity in the film "The Giver" using Roland Barthes's theory. The primary purpose is to offer education and new perspectives about films that carry messages and basic concepts of life. The paper explores the hidden signs that describe the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. Exploring the storyline and the sketches of life depicted in this film, they are anti-mainstream from the other. This film examines the semiotic interpretation of human values, and it discusses the lives of the various communities. The result illustrates how human values in the film are applied or violated according to the fundamental human norms. The researcher concludes based on his findings that human values

depicted in the film “The Giver” are not implemented, and it opposes the inherent nature of human beings.

2. Avatar -Mugil Karthick. S

By understanding the importance of mise-en-scene for a gripping story, the researcher takes a semiotic approach to the film "Avatar" using Saussure's semiotic theory. Filmmakers used mise-en-scène to symbolically convey themes like corporate greed, imperialism, and environmental importance. The use of mise-en-scene has helped to create realistic images of the paradisaical fantasy world, and the study also looked at the aspects, including lighting, props, costumes, scene design, and colours, that played a significant part in conveying the audience's concealed signals to the depths of the storyline.

4. A Nigerian Film-Mary Nkechi Okadigwe

Okadigwe has conducted a semiotic analysis on the costumes of African brides from Nigerian films, expressing their role in socio-cultural attributes. The study focuses on a Descriptive analysis, which concludes on the importance of the costumes in the films, where they were gathered and categorized according to the film themes. Costumes are used as a non-verbal tool to communicate with the audience about socio-cultural aspects.

5. A Quiet Place -Izzah Shafwati Absharina

Qualitative descriptive technique is used in this study, which collects scene components and explains the meaning of indices, icons, and symbols in the movie "A Quiet Place." The researcher gathered data by using screenshots of the signs that form the icons, symbols, and indices. Each sign has its significance, which may be discovered through books, gestures, expressions, and alphabets. Situations and plot points inside each scene serve as indices. All the characters in the film are important to locate icons, symbols, indices, and hidden meanings in the movie. This movie is widely recognized for its rich use of symbols, beginning with icons

found in realistic paintings and everyday objects. Alphabets, hand signals, gestures, facial expressions, and literature can all be used as symbols to observe indices from the tales, present circumstances in the scenes that were captured. All the characteristic plays a significant role in identifying icons, symbols, and indices, as well as in determining the deeper meanings of the movie.

Methodology

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols that convey meaning, often hidden or indirect, where a sign does not inherently represent the object it refers to. The meaning conveyed to the receiver depends on the specific social and cultural context attached to the sign. When applied to film, this theory helps uncover the hidden meanings being conveyed. It offers tools to analyse the visual, auditory, and narrative elements of cinema and how they work together to produce specific effects. Examining a film's visual language reveals insights into its cultural context and the director's intentions. We may learn more about the cultural setting and the director's aims through the use of visual images, colours, music, specific items, and actions, the audiences are also given access to the complicated thoughts and emotions. All these elements are collectively known as sign, code, or symbol. Filmmakers use these elements in a film's narrative to convey complex ideas simply. Every film consists of certain narrative elements, and the application of semiotic theory will dissect those narrative elements, such as character archetypes and plot devices. These signs contribute to the overall meaning of a film. Filmmakers can use semiotics to explore the subconscious or challenge societal norms.

Silent heroism describes a form of heroism that embraces quiet, understated, and often unassuming acts of selflessness and bravery instead of dramatic, loud, and attention-seeking deeds. Silent heroism subverts the conventional ideas of heroism, emphasizing bold, daring, dramatic, and attention-grabbing deeds. Silent heroes turn away from the typical traits

associated with conventional heroes, such as boldness, aggression, and a desire for control, rather than embodying virtues such as selflessness, empathy, and humility, which are frequently overlooked or undervalued in conventional heroic narratives.

Silence is essential in subverting conventional notions of heroism by creating an atmosphere of intrigue, nuance, and uncertainty. These silent heroes frequently convey their messages through non-verbal clues like gestures, body language, and subtle actions, which puts a strain on the conventional notion of heroes that they must be loud, vocal, and attention-seeking. A Quintessential representation of a silent hero is the character of Hugh Glass from Alejandro Innaritu's film "The Revenant". Glass Character represented as a quiet, stoic, and determined hero who explores the wilderness with minimal dialogue, choosing instead to depend on his actions and body language to convey his intentions and emotions.

Silent heroism questions our traditional notions of heroism and courage by highlighting the importance of quiet, modest gestures of courage and altruism. Silent heroes encourage the audience to rethink their assumptions about heroism and recognize that courage can take many forms, not just bold or attention-seeking actions. Some possible critiques of silent heroism are that it may come across as passive or unproductive, or it could serve to perpetuate harmful stereotypes or imbalanced power structures. These criticisms can be countered by highlighting how silent heroism can serve as a significant form of resistance, advocacy, and societal transformation, through emphasizing the importance of context, nuance, and critical examination in assessing silent heroic actions.

Silence Subverting the Traditional Notion of Heroism

Charlie Chaplin, a truly iconic figure of early cinema, was famed for his acting, writing, and directing during the silent film period. Unlike many of his peers, he was hesitant to adopt sound in his films, as he believed silent cinema was a universal language that crossed all boundaries.

Chaplin's reluctance to embrace sound was both an artistic and ideological stance, where he felt that spoken dialogue would restrict the universal appeal of his characters. His legacy remained firmly rooted in the silent era, where his mastery of visual storytelling defined a generation of filmmaking. The character "Little Tramp" was Charlie Chaplin's most famous on-screen persona and a global cinematic icon from the silent period. Tramp is a living example of ingenuity and resiliency; he frequently comes up with original answers to problems. The Tramp is characterized by his bowler hat, bamboo cane, toothbrush mustache, and humorous gait, all of which resonate with ordinary people. Chaplin's silent films conveyed emotions through pantomime and slapstick comedy, where facial gestures and body movements expressed a broad spectrum of emotions ranging from humour to pathos. His character possessed flawed and vulnerable traits that question the traditional heroic stereotypes. Chaplin does not portray heroism through dramatic acts or monumental achievements. His heroism uses wit, cunning, and resourcefulness to overcome challenges. Instead of aggression, kindness, compassion, and empathy. Depicts character traits associated with everyday individuals in extraordinary circumstances, making their bravery more accessible and inspiring. His films had left an incredible mark on cinema and popular culture, inspiring countless imitators, tributes, and parodies. Conventional films portray the protagonists as brave, daring, and strong enough to battle countless adversaries. The real intention behind these heroic figures might be to protect societies or communities where these typical heroes are energetic, deeply romantic, clever, and humorous. However, Charlie Chaplin exemplifies a different type of heroism by being very simple, practical, straightforward, and naive in his attitudes and looks, a type of personality which is quite prevalent in our society.

A Quiet Place hero

The film “A Quiet Place” realistically depicts the protagonist. He is a loving father and husband who is determined to keep his family safe. He makes the ultimate sacrifice to protect his children. He places the needs of his family above his own.

Silence depicts the vulnerable state of the Abbott family. The only way to survive this apocalypse is to remain silent. The hero's personality in this film is connected with a real-life individual. His silence stems from their fragility and weakness in the face of the monsters. This vulnerability makes him more human and not much of a classic, invincible protagonist. The family cannot depend on Lee Abbott. Each one of them has to fend for themselves. They work together by utilising sign language and non-verbal cues to tackle issues, challenging the conventional notion of a single, heroic main character. The silence of the hero focuses on survival over showmanship. He does not seek to showcase their achievements or boast about their accomplishments, like traditional heroes. His vulnerability subsequently fosters empathy in the viewers. This sense of empathy breaks down the conventional heroic archetype, making the protagonist more nuanced and complex. The mundaneness of the hero is visible through silence. He is not a conventional hero but rather an ordinary man thrust into extraordinary situations, making him more accessible and relatable. They must attentively listen to their surroundings to understand what is happening around them. It emphasises a more collaborative and nuanced form of heroism.

Revenant hero

Leonardo DiCaprio plays the role of Hugh Glass in the movie “The Revenant”. In this movie, the hero is depicted as a father who cares greatly about his only son. Hugh Glass is a hunter who lived during the fur trade era. The narrative techniques of silence are brought in the movie to portray his physical vulnerability and limitations. After the bear attack, Hugh Glass is

betrayed and left all alone by his companions. He survived by dragging himself on the ground as he could not walk due to his injuries. Later, he tries to stroll with the help of a stick; the survival scene holds a significant value, and it unfolds at a deliberate pace. His severe wounds and his subsequent silence make him more relatable and set him apart from the traditional 'invincible hero'. This movie focuses on the character's inner struggles. In a dialogue-driven film, we may focus solely on the dialogue while the scenes progress quickly. Glass's silence compels the audience to infer his feelings and thoughts instead of being explicitly told through conversation. The Internalisation of emotions fosters a sense of intimacy, different from the conventional heroic notions. In contrast to the traditional heroes, Glass does not deliver grand, motivational monologues. Instead, his quietude speaks greatly about his determination, emotional depth, and resilience. Depicting a real-life incident engages the audience, making them serious, intrigued and focused. Silence allows us to concentrate on the subtle movements, like the way he walks, his gaze, gestures, expressions, and attire. The audience focuses solely on the actor, rather than on the background settings.

Hero in the drive

The silence of the driver adds to his mysterious and erratic persona. He is a man of few words, and his lack of words enhances his enigmatic presence and distances him from conventional heroic archetypes. He seldom shows emotions, and when he does, he relies on subtle non-verbal cues. This restraint questions traditional heroic ideas of emotional expression and vulnerability. His silence conveys much about who he is, making him a more thoughtful and multi-dimensional character. He uses his keen observational skills to manoeuvre through complex scenarios. This subtle, observational approach reshapes the heroic actions, highlighting tactics and stealth over bold gestures. The driver gives importance to actions and not words. He utilises body language, facial expressions, and movements to convey meanings, developing a more nuanced and insightful communication. His silence underscores the

importance of deeds over words and a profound emotional depth. His quiet nature hints at a complex inner world, with thoughts and feelings that are not immediately obvious. It is nearly impossible for someone to figure out what is happening inside his mind. The emotional depth adds a human dimension to his character, making him a more complex and layered hero. His silence evokes a sense of vulnerability and self-reflection. His quiet nature renders him more relatable as the audience can impose their thoughts and emotions onto him. He is not a classic hero but an everyday individual thrust into extraordinary situations. His silence enhances his relatability and accessibility, as audiences can imagine themselves in his situation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the representation of silent heroism in films offers a compelling challenge to the conventional heroic notions. By rejecting the traditional traits associated with heroism, such as boldness and assertiveness, silent heroes exemplify qualities like selflessness, humility, and compassion. People can express this heroism through quiet generosity and everyday acts of kindness. Ultimately, the depiction of silent heroism in films is a potent reminder that heroism is not solely about grand, dramatic actions but also about the subtle, everyday actions of individuals who positively influence the world around them. The concept of silent heroism poses a fascinating challenge to the idea of what it means to be a hero, offering a detailed and multifaceted understanding of heroism. By recognizing the diverse forms of heroic experiences and actions, the statement highlights the need for a broader and more nuanced definition of heroism.

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