

CAPTURING THE HER/OINE:

A Comparative Study of the Female as Director, Writer & Performer
to Define Same-Agent Narratives

UC Doctoral Programs in Dramatic & Literary Research

Prepared for consideration Fall 2022

A.R. GIUSTI

Researching a collection of cinema additionally involves the study of its dramatic narrative as literary analysis or dramaturgy. Since, in general, plays and screenplays are written with the intention of being performed – as implied by their specified compositions of dialogue and direction – further critical evaluation of their literary components of the story doesn't entirely eliminate how visual results of their performance may have informed the audience's interpretation of text. With this in mind, wherever observations of same-agent directors and opposing-agent directors are explored, so too can research be extended to include a deeper review of the story/screenplay structurally and textually; especially in those films adapted from existing plays or novels.

Questions guiding analysis of selected cinematic literature shall be shaped via different schools of literary and dramaturgical theory, in order to provide a fair range of insight into reasons why same-agent grouping present their narratives for cinema similarly or differently. Founding literary criticism methods intended to be used for this study are: practical (or direct) criticism, where the text is examined without regard to any particular outside context. Contextual criticism, where the author, dates, place of writing, known audience responses, adaptations, or any other outside information, may inform our observations. Cultural literary theory may be used when examining the text within its socio-cultural environment. Psychoanalytic criticism will explore neuroses and psychological states of characters in the text, and also inform interpretations of a characters' symbolism. Other noted psychoanalytic critics whose theories have also been applied to cinema and dramaturgy include, Jacques Lacan and feminist Julia Kristeva.

Modernist literary criticism can be utilised to reflect narratives dealing with experience of twentieth-century life. And post-structuralist literary theory will be considered when narratives break formal and structural cohesion; the resulting action for this interpretation would be to take a deeper look at where narrative is reliant upon social structures/experiences that may have influenced the author and/or director. Specifically in reference to post-structural theorist Roland Barthes who laid the groundwork for semiotics – the study of signs and symbols in art. Deconstruction theory will be used according to methods proposed by Jacques Derrida, where analysis is focused on the text's apparent ideas or arguments. This approach may also inform the study on how to resolve contradictions that render any singular reading of a text impossible.

Additional approaches to make final conclusions of text, story structure, and meaning, may include postcolonial theory where Western thought (or impact of colonialism) may be critical -- similar to Edward Said's book, *Orientalism* (1978). Feminist criticism and gender theory will be assessed in the vein of Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and feminist critics Elaine Showalter and Hélène Cixous. Queer theory, particularly through the lens of sexual orientation and gender identity which is rapidly evolving, will also include perspectives according to playwrights, novelists, and screenwriters who have been interviewed about their process. Critical race theory, primarily concerning law, criminal justice, and cultural texts through the lens of race, will be informed by leading critics such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Derrick Bell.

Finally, disability theory and humanistic theory (both growing in a number of intersectional fields of critical study) are discussed in stories where ableist views are presented within the story, or seek to examine ableist societal structures, such as *CODA* (2021), *Babel* (2006), and *Country of the Deaf* (1998). Where these theories are discussed within the framework of narrative literature as screenplay/stage play, this study aims to highlight trend-types in critical theory itself. For, as stated above, narrative structures existing between same-agents and opposing agents serve to shed light on micro-narratives that may be overlooked if analysis were too general. Moreover, the script as dramaturgical literature also allows for an evaluation of a broad range of texts over a short period of time since the screenplay/stage play typically adheres to a concise number of pages -- being shorter than a novel, yet longer than poetic verse.

To explore scripted narrative literature alongside its performative (cinematic) counterpart, permits modern literary critics to “re-examine” and “re-think” what literary criticism means for the variety of literature representing the visual story. In *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory* (2002), Linda Hutcheon and Mario Valdes explain what it means “to re-think” literary criticism, in that, “it is not only to think again; it is to think anew.. and does not involve revisionism or revising. It is not a question of correcting, altering, amending or improving. To rethink is to reconsider, with all the associations of care and attentiveness and serious reflection that go with the notion of consideration.”

Literary theory, along with dramaturgy, shape a trail of critical approaches grounded in the interpretations of new challenges arising in eras where their respective observations were created. The advent of more recent developments on identity in the 21st century have created exciting and diverse expressions. As a result, while literary theory has evolved over poetry, the novel and staged drama for decades and centuries, post-millennium books allude to a revival that seems to have occurred in order to adapt to the demands and inspirations of a rapidly growing landscape of literature; including text created for stage and cinema. Hence, it is promising and pertinent for literary theories to reflect, more than ever before, the works representing important topics by micro-groups as they are being discussed by the populations making them (and the audiences who watch them).

For example, cultural theory, humanistic theory, and feminist theory, were born through traditional literary formats later adapted into performative formats -- like the novel, essay, or staged reading. Early formative texts from these schools of theory still serve as a marker representing historical, sociological, and psychoanalytical relevance lending a new interpretation of its original text. While these topics *as conversation* may appear overly complex, they are not entirely brand-new in the area of academic critical study. For this research, cinema can be a tool providing a timeline forming a pathway/scope to look back with, and guide observations on narrative methodology in texts written for performance.

Ultimately, this study asks if cinema can serve as a performative aide to the interpretive process of textual study. And if so, when analysing selected films on a timeline of eras, can a change of concepts presented by text of a screenplay demand a need for more defined theories or, perhaps, a change of its interpretation? Where literary theorists of the 20th century like Michel Foucault, Hillis Miller and Terry Eagleton founded elements of critical literary discipline, many theorists declare a change has taken place in new interpretive methods. Namely, writings regarding 21st century observations such as Terry Eagleton's *After Theory* (2002) and Valentine Cunningham's *Reading After Theory* (2003).

Literary criticism continues to find ways to dissect and comprehend issues related to authors, texts, language, and its readers. Thus, where ideals are developed, performed, seen, and discussed as quickly as cinema, this study provides an opportunity for modern dramatic criticism to be explored over several thriving theories' and their application toward dramatic narrative. The result may extend our awareness of dynamic social ideas falling under the categories of 'post-modernism', 'post-colonialism', 'deconstruction theory', and others. Even professor Phil Hansen and choreographer Darcy Callison consider ten prominent dramaturg-scholars from three continents to discuss complex dramaturgical approaches that reset notions of performance and agency in *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement* (2015). Similarly, Zachariah Rush proposes that screenwriters are cornerstones to the art of narrative cinema and aims to inform readers about the "universality of dramaturgy" in *Beyond the Screenplay: A Dialectical Approach to Dramaturgy* (2012).

And so, where classical dramaturgy has dissected Shakespeare's plays between Juliet and Portia, what would be learned from the female characters of Lucrecia Martel, Ava Duvernay, Greta Gerwig, and Claire Denis? And what of Lorraine Hansburry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961) (2008) twice adapted to film, or Julie Taymor's artistic interpretation of the 1999 film *Titus Andronicus*? How have these filmed performances informed the text? Which critical theory applies, has been applied, or 'should be' applied? With this study, we have the initial framework of the cinematic text (screenplay as stage play) and we have performance itself, to be the starting line in a race to define renewed literary criticism; a way to "re-think" the theories which have lead up to today's platform of vital creative conversations at *this particular* "here, and now."

WORKS CITED

Cunningham, Valentine. Reading After Theory. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Eagleton, Terry. After Theory. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Hansen, Phil (Editor), . Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Hutcheon, Linda (Editor). Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Rush, Zachariah. Beyond the Screenplay: A Dialectical Approach to Dramaturgy. McFarland Books, 2012.