

Rewatching the Film “Soul Mate”: Exploring the Transformation of Female Roles

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Abstract. Movies with a rich literary style are often filled with dreams of youthful emotions. The film *Soul Mate* redefines the role of women, depicting the transition from girls to women as a chrysalis-like transformation. Through the analysis of the plot of the film, this paper discusses the positioning of the role of the film, and compares the films describing the theme of feminism. The final aim is to seek to explore the inner dynamics among women, unveiling the fragile and genuine aspects of human nature while emphasizing the value of friendship.

Keywords: women, feminism, role's introduction

1. Introduction

Female-themed films have become mainstream films, and some unforgettable film stories have reappeared in real life and are worth recalling. July and Ansheng, two initially unfamiliar souls, cross paths because of the arrangement of God. Their distinct life journeys forge an unspoken connection of the heart. Through various trials and tribulations, these two naive girls come to understand the true essence of life and embark on a quest to discover their authentic selves. How do they overcome the obstacles on the road to growth? It becomes evident that July is, in fact, Ansheng, and Ansheng is July.

2. The Story of July and Ansheng

July and Ansheng first crossed paths at the tender age of 13, two girls with different personalities who unintentionally became friends. They shared moments of play and companionship. As they are about to become adults, at the age of 18, they both fell in love with the same boy, Su Jiaming. This romantic entanglement intensified the existing tensions, making their relationship increasingly delicate. This story explores their journey to adulthood, highlighting their efforts to overcome obstacles. It beckons them to rediscover their innocent selves, rekindle their youthful passion, and approach life's complexities with a simple mind. This is a subject that inspires admiration.

3. Divergent Role Definitions

3.1. Definitions of Different Roles

A notable quote from the film suggests, “Everyone has Ansheng’s personality in his own heart, but many end up living like July.” Ansheng, a spirited girl, does not conform to societal norms or adhere to any particular pattern. While she projects outward strength, her inner self harbours self-doubt. She seeks validation and affection through her endeavours to win the love and attention of others. Her journey takes her into the arms of a musician, prompting her to embark on a nomadic lifestyle. Despite enduring numerous hardships, this formerly naive girl matures gradually. In turning 25, the age is often regarded as the golden age of womanhood, she has grown into a self-assured and confident individual.

In contrast, July personifies obedience, with exemplary grades and a dutiful demeanor. However, excessive adherence to societal expectations can lead to rebellion. Eventually, she opts for solitary travel as a means of healing her wounded soul. It is a

small gesture of self-compassion. Her early life was spent conforming to her parents' wishes, but in the latter half, she learns to embrace her true self. Love, like a double-edged sword, can bring happiness and, simultaneously, force introspection amid pain.

3.2. Definition of a Girl

A girl is a young woman between the ages of 13 and 18. Ladies in this age group exhibit a degree of immaturity, remaining hopeful dreamers, and yearning for the future. July and Ansheng crossed paths at the age of 13, they become best friends who can talk about anything without limitations, even if those unimportant things in their lives can still be remembered and discussed. July's relatively stable life contrasted with Ansheng's tumultuous family situation, and July's care provided Ansheng with a sense of home. Their friendship continued to evolve. By the time girls reach the age of 25, they begin the transition to womanhood, viewing the world from a more comprehensive and distinct perspective. The characters of July and Ansheng are so realistic and down-to-earth that the audience immediately identifies with the characters, reminding them of their own weaknesses and flaws. They would admit "You are July and I am Ansheng".

4. A Rekindling of Feminist Ideals

Beyond its commercial aspects, this literary film evokes nostalgia and celebrates the lost youth. Beneath its surface, the film champions feminist ideals. Feminism celebrates femininity while challenging the dominance of a male-centric culture. Early cultural feminism sought to elevate the value of women above men, striving to redefine women's worth. It emphasizes that female traits constitute the most valuable forms of human behaviour. Gender inequality, according to cultural feminists, is rooted in patriarchal culture. Psychologist Carol Gilligan once asserted, "Women's ethics of care, maternal thinking, peace, and love are the most valuable ethics." In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, cultural feminism's feminist ideals inspired women to engage in social reform and anti-war movements. This influence is evident in the film's thematic elements. Regardless of one's perspective, women's issues remain worthy of exploration.

Notably, cultural feminism seeks to highlight women's most intrinsic quality—their maternal instinct. Cultural feminists argue that this instinct imbues women with altruism. For instance, in the film's plot, when Ansheng and July find themselves entangled in an emotional dilemma involving Su Jiaming, the man they both love, they choose to avoid hurting each other. The film concludes unexpectedly yet logically. Ansheng raises July's child alone, reinforcing the idea of maternal tolerance and selfless dedication in women. The preservation of life is emblematic of these qualities.

4.1. The Temptation of Role Reversal: July and Ansheng

The film exudes a strong feminine essence, masterfully portraying the transformation of a young girl into a mature woman. As girls approach womanhood, their perception of their partner tends to be idealized. As the story unfolds, the girl gradually radiates a distinct feminine quality. The film subtly weaves elements of feminism into the characters of July and Ansheng.

Many viewers may come to appreciate the significance of feminism as portrayed in the film. It provides women with a voice in a world traditionally dominated by men. Since the feminist resurgence of the 1970s, there has been a growing promotion of independent female culture, spanning music, literature, drama, and religion. This cultural shift underscores the intrinsic value of women's existence. Gender discrimination has long influenced societal gender dynamics, perpetuating an imbalance between men and women. In the realm of film, male characters have often been assigned dominant roles, while female characters have occupied supporting positions. However, as society has progressed, there has been a growing aversion to the concept of male supremacy. This has given rise to the cultural feminist movement, emphasizing women's inherent qualities, such as nurturing, maternal instincts, love, and moral sensibilities. These ideals resonate with the femininity espoused in the film.

Reflecting on the plot, when July returns to a more traditional family life in contrast to Ansheng's unconventional nomadic lifestyle, she boldly chooses a path of solo travel. As she asserts, "July, I want to live freely, like you." Ansheng responds, "You can go wherever you want, as long as you want." This action serves as a practical testament to the preservation of their pure friendship. In essence, we have become akin to Ansheng who carries audiences toward a sense of peace though most individuals live like July. Therefore, the film ingeniously shifts the roles of its characters. Ansheng embarks on a journey to discover the true essence of life through her nomadic experiences—embracing everything and leaving behind what no longer serves her. This choice epitomizes the theme of the film. It beautifully encapsulates maternal instincts and selfless dedication and unveils the core attributes of women. In this film, Anson's character demonstrates the greatest essence of women: tolerance and devotion.

The introduction of the third character, Su Jiaming, provides a unique perspective into the fate of these two girls. Having weathered life's storms, they approach life's challenges with increased pragmatism: July becomes pregnant, and Ansheng takes on the responsibility of raising July's daughter. Consequently, the film transcends the storyline of a conventional love story. Jiaming, as a supporting role, highlights the individual charms of the two women. Life is filled with unfulfilled promises, and as the three characters forge their respective paths, Ansheng pens a memoir under July's pseudonym—a poignant recollection of

their everlasting friendship. In an era where friendship often yields to the pressures of shared interests, the film evokes nostalgia for long-lost friendships, a yearning for youth's simplicity and sincerity. Through July and Ansheng, viewers are presented with reflections of themselves. This film, steeped in literary ambiance, departs from convention, painting a canvas of fresh and vibrant hues while retaining an air of mystery. It refuses to conform to predictable endings, much like the lingering fragrance of jasmine tea—sweet and enduring, with layers of meaning. The story of these two girls parallels a condensed life history, representing two distinct life trajectories. July embraces the status quo, conforming to societal norms, while Ansheng challenges the norms, striving to carve her own path. As the saying goes, “character shapes destiny.” Yet, the tale of July and Ansheng reminds us that “the most beautiful encounter in the world is meeting another self.” The characters try to maintain their pure friendship by contributing more for the other side. Also, We should all try to remain peaceful in our hearts and mind, just like the role “July”. When your character no longer dictates your destiny, how can you authentically live, irrespective of others' opinions? The film perfectly embodies the maternal instinct and altruistic spirit Ansheng possesses. As we all know, this is a profound question that many people ask themselves, and this movie provides them with a clear answer.

4.2. The Influence of Female-Themed Movies

In recent years, female-themed films are becoming popular all over the world, focusing on women's growth. These topics are about life and work. In particular, women have the opportunity to study, work hard in the workplace and effectively balance family and work. Therefore, "Soul Mate" was released on Valentine's Day. One week after its release, it received a box office of 140 million in 2016, which is the highest-rated film among the drama films released in China film market and the winner of several awards. After 7 years, Korean remade it, the title of this film is “Goodbye, My Soul Mate” tells the story of 14 years of encounter, separation, friendship and love, longing and jealousy between two friends who met at the age of 13. The plot retains the elements of the original work, and also demonstrate some of the classic lines, for instance, the following line "The reason why the sun shines with confidence is because there are shadows.", which reveals the truth that friendship trumps love.

5. Conclusion

In the end, the film "Soul Mate" compels us to reflect on the profound significance of self-discovery. It encourages us to live authentically, unburdened by external judgments. The film serves as a reminder that the most profound encounters in life often lead to self-realization—a realization that frees us to live life on our terms, true to our inner selves. The transformation from a girl to a woman is not about the change of appearance and body, instead it is the cyclic change of the inner world from simple to complex and then to simple again. After experiencing many things, the two protagonists found the true meaning of life, not who is attached to who, not a life of rules or struggling in love and being loved, but a yearning for inner freedom, which is what they came to this world searching for.

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