Fried Green Tomatoes: Why Good Feminist Films Matter

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Abstract: Film, as a powerful cultural communication tool, significantly impacts viewers' values, attitudes, and behaviors. Feminist films, by presenting complex, three-dimensional female characters and their stories, can promote societal understanding of women's issues and advance gender equality. They also provide a platform for female creators to voice their perspectives, challenging gender inequality in the male-dominated film industry. This study examines the 1991 classic American film "Fried Green Tomatoes." It found that the film's costumes convey symbolic meanings related to gender, class, and occupation, reflecting societal expectations and stereotypes. A comparative analysis of Idgie's and Ruth's costumes reveals their character traits: Idgie's free-spirited, nature-bound lifestyle contrasts with Ruth's gentle, kind demeanor. "Fried Green Tomatoes" effectively uses parallel perspectives to challenge traditional gender roles and redefine them. By analyzing this feminist film, the study deepens the understanding of the positive role of feminist cinema, enriching feminist perspectives in film studies and highlighting women's self-awakening and resistance through the narrative of friendship and growth.

Keywords: Feminism, Film Analysis, Fried Green Tomatoes.

1. Introduction

The film *Fried Green Tomatoes* is based on the novel of the same name and was released in 1991. It is a classic female friendship film, through the method of flashback to link the stories and growth of four women in two generations, to tell the story of women's self-awakening and bravery to fight back, the film is highly evaluated. Taking the film Fried Green Tomatoes as a case study, this study explores this classic feminist film, analyses the Gender Expectations, *androcentric theory* and Misunderstandings of the characters in it, and reflects on the importance of good feminist works. On the one hand, by analyzing this typical feminist film, the study can gain a deeper understanding of the positive power of feminist cinema. On the other hand, by examining multiple common terms in the context of a particular film, this kind of study can also contribute to enhancing the feminist perspective in film studies by drawing attention to important details and raising awareness.

2. Literature Review

A good feminist film is important for many insightful reasons. First, historically and socially aspect, females have long been in an unequal position in the film industry, and their portrayal has often been idealized or simplified by males into gender stereotypes. In "Writing in Female Drag: Gendered Literature and a Woman's Voice," Saito discusses this phenomenon, writing about the question, "I

would argue that a woman's everyday lived behavior, mannerisms, and speech, when performed unconsciously, often do not conform to ideals of 'femininity'. Accordingly, the kind of behavior that has been categorized as 'feminine' is largely a product of an imagination and aesthetic ideal fueled by masculinist discourse. fueled by masculinist discourse [1]". This stereotype is in fact oppressive, and this precept and expectation of "femininity" is a mechanism of social oppression. It is unnatural and anti-human. In addition, Dai also pointed out, "The concept of 'women' in culture is still a false one, and the historical paradoxes that women face still exist [2]". Dai thinks that females should be considered naturally diverse and autonomous. She disagrees that society always try to restrict females and force them into a limited gender framework, idealized concepts of "femininity" shouldn't restrict them. Females should be allowed to live their lives in their own way. Therefore, a good feminist film can break this tradition and provide a platform for women to show themselves, express their independence and challenge gender bias. Just as Wang's study said: In traditional cinema, the female figure is often in the position of the "other", under the supervision of male vision, and "de-othering" may become an important way of constructing the image of the female subject in attempting to analyze feminist cinema [3].

Moreover, film, as a powerful cultural communication tool, has a significant impact on the values, attitudes and behaviors of viewers. By presenting complex, three-dimensional female characters and their life stories, feminist films can promote society's understanding of and concern for women's issues, and advance social progress towards gender equality. And in the absence of such a positive, holistic perspective consideration, people's perceptions can be affected. An example that demonstrates this contrast is Bruce's study of gender portrayals portrayed in Disney films, in which Bruce discusses whether or not these portrayals have had an impact on gender expectations and characterization, and ultimately finds that this impact is real. In the study, Bruce ran an interview in which participants were asked to reflect on the most ideal qualities of a princess, and to list the good qualities of princesses. In the responses, the male participants consistently emphasised the physical characteristics of the princesses, with 16 comments focusing on appearance. 5 comments described the princesses' character traits, mostly in general terms, such as modesty, quiet, caring, and selflessness. Only one participant described more detailed, specific responses that demonstrated his understanding of Disney's efforts to recreate the characters of the different princesses. This participant focused on the princesses' natural imperial qualities and leadership potential, and he also agreed that the princesses in the films showed a greater or lesser degree of dependence on the male characters, especially Sleeping Beauty and Snow White. This participant also noted that the characters of the princesses have developed somewhat as the film era has progressed, in the early Disney films they were highly dependent on their environment and help from others, whereas later princesses like Princess Jasmine and the Little Mermaid showed a greater sense of adventure and often pursued their own adventures. Yet in terms of depth and overall positive perceptions of the princesses, this particular reaction of one participant was the exception, not the norm. Even those respondents who were already focused on the positive qualities of princesses associated these positive qualities with physical appearance, with some responses even treating female fertility as a commendable quality [4]. This is a good example of the need for more female perspectives in cinema, where the absence of female producers or female leaders in the film industry can lead to the transmission of false values, the habit of objectifying women, and the over-idealization of women instead of presenting true character traits. This needs to change, and more feminist work is an excellent way for doing so. Rosanna Maule believes that multimedia tools may expand the scope of contemporary film culture, thereby providing new opportunities to increase the presence of female filmmakers in the global network of film distribution and reception [5].

In addition, feminist cinema can provide opportunities for female creators to express their voices. While it is true that popular culture has been paying more attention to women's voices, the narration

of women has not been broadened, and the other side of the issue of women's consciousness is that women's discourse is in a crisis of labelling [6]. Patil points out the indubitable fact that the categories of "female" and "male" are not only descriptive but shaped by various ideas that have changed over time. Although gender inequality is now widespread, women can still work to change the dominant dynamics [7]. This may inspire us that unequal gender positions are a product of the human condition and can be changed. Further, in the male-dominated film industry, female directors and writers face more challenges and limitations, but they can challenge and change gender inequality in the industry by exploring and presenting women's diverse perspectives through their work, which also promotes advanced thinking among audiences about the complex topics of gender, power and identity.

3. Methodology

3.1. Object of Study

This study chooses the classic American film "Fried Green Tomatoes" of 1991 as the object of study. This film was not only widely acclaimed at the time and is still believed to be a very representative feminist film, but also reflects the cultural characteristics of southern American society in the 1990s. The film not only has many interrelated clues in the plot, but also has wonderful twists and turns, very delicate emotions, and reasonable character relationships. By analysing this representative case, the study can deeply explore the embodiment of feminism in film art and its influence on real society. This study adopts the research method of case study to analyse the plot and the reasonableness of the plot arrangement in the film, mainly through reading the literature study related to feminism or the film Fried Green Tomatoes. The film's plot development, characterisation and camera language are carefully observed and recorded to lay the foundation for subsequent in-depth analysis. This diversified source of data helps to improve the reliability and comprehensiveness of the study.

3.2. Research Method

Firstly, the study identifies the feminist elements in the films by observing and interpreting the dialogues, camera movements, plot arrangements and so on. Secondly, compare the images and values of female characters in the film with the gender norms of mainstream society at that time and analyze how the film subverts and criticizes the traditional gender bias. Finally, the study compares the expression of feminism in the film with related theories to explore the deeper meaning of the film.

3.3. Quality Control

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of our findings, the study will adopt the following quality control measures:
    1) data triangulation
    2) referring to the views of contributing experts in the same field by reading the literature
    3) cautious inference, which seeks to establish a clear and logical connection between the findings and theoretical concepts.
    Through these steps, the study will endeavour to ensure the internal and external validity of this study.

4. Result & Discussion

4.1. Gender Expectations

The costumes in the film not only serve the function of dressing up, but also convey symbolic meanings such as gender, class, and job. These meanings often reflect social expectations and

stereotypes of different genders. Some films will consciously explore gender issues through the design of the characters' costumes, to stimulate the audience's thinking. Idgie and Ruth's experience is the center of the whole film, and the main story revolves around them, which deserves to be explored in more depth, and the costumes are a good entry point to reflect their uniqueness. Here, the two female main characters are styled in chronological order of their time in the film and the study analyses characterization by clearly seeing the differences in their appearance and styling, analyzing the character traits conveyed by the costumes and how the film uses the costumes to portray the different women.

Table 1: Idgie's styling changes

Time	Costume
00:08:22	wearing a white dress with light blue lace trim, bruised knees and short shaggy hair (Originally hiding in the closet did not want to come out, out after the little boy laughed at her and said she was very strange.)
00:11:46	In a canary yellow suit (Thought the wedding was boring, fooled the priest in the church with the light reflected from the glass)
00:22:57	Short blond hair, knee injury, longer braid, wearing denim overalls, belt, black coat, khaki hat, no shoes (Giving her brother honey at the gravestone, the narrator Ninny says she rarely comes home)
00:24:47	Wearing a white suit jacket, ponytail
00:25:49	wearing a black suit coat, a khaki hat, and what looked like a small cowboy bag, with no shoes
00:27:40	Wear a white top and khaki pants with beige socks and khaki shoes
00:39:26	Long blond hair, blue blouse, grey-green pants, belt
00:44:47	She had short hair and wore a white striped shirt and a black waistcoat
00:49:02	Wear a white headband with yellow and purple flowers on it, and a white dress
01:00:37	White top, red pants
01:15:25	Red and white checked headband, gold necklace, blue polka dot collar
01:16:22	Wear a white headband with green and blue stripes, a grey-purple plaid sleeveless top, and army green pants
01:18:47	Wear a red headband, gold necklace around your neck, and white sleeveless knit pajamas
01:29:00	Wear lavender sleeveless, gray pants with a thin belt and flat shoes
01:32:30	Wearing a straw hat, a cream-colored loose shirt hollowed out on the chest, and a green pleated skirt

According to Table 1, a summary of Idgie's look. Idgie's overall colour palette is khaki and black and white, and she prefers a natural and casual style, with a mix of tops, trousers, belts and jackets, and very few skirts. The overall look is relatively busy, with more accessories, such as hair bands, necklaces and pouches. The texture of the clothes is also more diverse.

Table 2: Ruth's styling changes

Time	Costume
00:12:44	Champagne-colored dress, wearing a hat with flowers, golden brown curly hair
00:24:20	White long dress, loose and draped, simple and clean design, wide butterfly sleeves
00:24:59	Pink dress, diamond pattern design, wide butterfly sleeves, light and flowing
00:27:40	Light green dress, ruffle trim, sleeveless

Table 2: (continued)

00:33:00	White ruffle trim skirt, brown-black hair net
00:33:35	Blue floral print white dress, blue net sleeves, brown striped sun hat
-	Blue-purple dress, yellow floral and small flower patterns, bun hairstyle
-	Warm orange or pink mid-sleeve shirt-style dress, fitted silhouette, cinched waist
1:03:09	Wearing a green dress with leaf pattern
1:16:22	White and purple striped sheer dress, pale yellow cardigan
1:31:42	Black patterned short-sleeve shirt
1:34:22	Black patterned sheer skirt with white polka dots, V-neck, beige hat
1:45:08	White nightgown

According to Table 2, Ruth's costumes are very feminine, she prefers dresses and prefer sleeveless, ruffles and other elegant designs, more colorful, preferring draped fabrics and more styling variety.

A comparative analysis of Idgie's and Ruth's costumed images reveals the character traits of the two main characters. Idgie displays a free-spirited and unrestricted personality; her lifestyle is close to nature and free. She does not return home very often, she is very close to black people, spends her leisure time close to nature keeping bees, fishing and other activities, and enjoys drinking and gambling. At first resists Ruth's close approach until Ruth accompanies her as she throws grain off the train to share with the poor and jumps off the train with Ruth. When she discovers that Ruth is injured by her marriage, she shows a tough side and threatens to teach those who hurt Ruth some lessons. In court, she is widely considered as a known liar and drunkard. These comments and descriptions show that Idgie is not respected or liked. Her unpopularity may stem from the fact that she's rebellious, which means she doesn't conform to gender expectations, one of Chizuko Ueno's ideas gives a deeper answer to the reason: because of "feminisation". Man's greatest fear is "feminisation", which means the loss of sexual agency [8]. So when a woman displays masculine traits, these traits trigger the male's self-defence mechanism.

In contrast, Ruth is portrayed in the film as a gentle and kind person who is widely recognised. She spends the summer with Idgie to comfort her and is also in charge of the youth activities at the church. When she is subjected to violence, she chooses to tolerate it first and eventually turns to Idgie for support, quoting from the Bible, "Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live; your people are my people." Which is extremely gentle. During the court, she was described as a reputable Christian and it was believed that she must have been seduced by Idgie when she left her husband. These clues suggest that Ruth was respected and loved by the outside world, but also faced contempt, threats and violence from her husband.

A character not mentioned in table, but important in the story and also relevant to this theme is Evelyn, with the general look of a housewife, like Beth in Deadly Women, an affable, tolerant, caring family figure. She takes care of her husband's health, cooks, does housework and maintains the image of the perfect wife. Before Evelyn's change, Evelyn's husband did not show respect for her input into the experience or for the contributions she made, Evelyn even went to classes to mediate the couple's relationship. Evelyn did this to a great extent due to being influenced by gender expectations and societal role expectations.

These plot and character descriptions further demonstrate the impact of gender expectations on the protagonists, which limit their behavioral choices. This demonstrates how gender expectations exclude heresy forcing individuals to follow the rules and also reflects the phenomenon of differential treatment in society because of such standards. Fried Green Tomatoes is a good representation of such a phenomenon and promotes public concern and reflection on gender equality issues by reflecting the situation and challenges of women in modern society.

4.2. Androcentric Theory

Feminist films influence public perceptions and attitudes towards gender equality in a number of ways. Firstly, feminist films directly express women's consciousness by presenting unique stories of real female, dissolving the male gaze and showing women's desires, which helps to raise the audience's awareness of and sympathy for women's issues. There is a term called "androcentric", which refers to the prevalence of male-centered values and ideologies in society. patriarchy and androcentric are fairly closely related: having one gender given preference over other genders and organizing all cultural behaviors and meanings according to gender gives men dominance over female sexuality, reproduction, and labor. This is known as patriarchy. Those idea believe that men are dominant and that women should obey and serve men, among individuals and in society [9].

The concept of " androcentric theory " often appears in film and television, especially in modern romantic dramas, in the arrangement of roles and visual presentation. where the male lead is often handsome and capable of running the business, and in order to match the male lead and show his status, the scriptwriters often portray the female characters as being beautiful and having outstanding abilities. Another recurring idea of "male-orientation" occurs in the language of the camera, which is full of the male gaze. Most films are made for male, so there is a tendency to portray women and reality from the perspective of male heterosexuals, objectifying female sexuality in order to please heterosexual male viewers. Chizuko Ueno explains this phenomenon in her work Misogyny, namely, "A woman's worth is determined by a man's choices (or so it is said), but a man's worth is not determined by a woman's choices. [8]"

Fried Green Tomatoes, as a good feminist film, demonstrates the advantage of removing these "male-oriented" shots and using parallel perspectives to challenge traditional gender role stereotypes and promote the redefinition of gender roles. In the film, there are a few obvious examples: 1. Idgie rejects the man's confession of love and tells him forcefully that it is not possible; and 2. the scene where Idgie and Ruth prepare fried green tomatoes for Ruth to try at the Whistle Stop Café, and Ruth responds by saying that they are awful, and the two of them fight over the food. Both shots are presented in a gentle, non-judgmental or hyperbolic treatment style, without idealising female behavior. Approaches such as these not only change people's traditional conceptions of gender, but also provide new perspectives and paths of thinking about gender equality.

4.3. Patriarch Behind Character Relationship

A topic for debate is the relationship between Idgie and Ruth as rescuer and rescued, and the connection to the personalities of the protagonists is very interesting. Typically, characters with more manly personalities that fit the traditional image of a boy tend to be portrayed as the active dominant person in the relationship, and these characters tend to have a lot of positive desirable qualities and have some sort of outstanding ability. The relatively passive other, on the other hand, will become relatively characterised by female gender expectations. For example, these characters are pure and gentle, very tolerant and respectful of their acquaintances, and may face some oppression from other people or things, but they don't resist easily, waiting for a hero to solve the problem. Such arrangements are very common, and a flirtation with such a character arrangement appears in the Disney film Wreck-It Ralph, where the princesses have the qualities of being beautiful and kind, being able to communicate with animals (a tangible sign of being kind and different), having bad families (being oppressed), and everyone believes that their problems are solved because of the presence of a male character. The portrayal of Idgie and Ruth in the novel and the film completely encompasses these elements, and the reasons behind this have huge potential to be discussed.

Lillian Rubin described US women's friendships as "the best parts of ourselves" and provided the possibility of having "many selves" that varied with one's "many friends." Which is just like Idgie

and Ruth's friendship [10]. In the film Idgie's rescue and protection of Ruth is explicit; Idgie sustains Ruth's marriage, stands up for Ruth when she is subjected to violence, takes the pregnant Ruth, settles down and maintains a career, etc.

Idgie's behavior is also evident in the film, where Ruth's ex-husband sneaks up on her and takes her to her new home, where Ruth's ex-husband is a woman. When Ruth's ex-husband sneaks out the baby and threatens Idgie, she solves the trouble and deals with the aftermath. Raising her son after Idgie's illness and death. Ruth's rescue of Idgie is implicit; Ruth reassures Idgie to come to terms with the death of her brother Buddy, positively influences Idgie to change her bad habits for the better, and she supports Idgie's career. This relationship reveals the social construction of gender roles and the individual's self-identity within them. The relationship between Idgie and Ruth challenges traditional gender role expectations and demonstrates that women can demonstrate strength and resilience in different social roles. Just like Lisa Tillman assumes in the preface at *In Solidarity: Friendship, Family, and Activism Beyond Gay and Straight*: "deep, committed, and loving relationships across lines such as class, nation, sex, race, religion, ideology, ability, age, gender, and sexual orientation can help light the way toward a more equitable and just society" [11]. Despite this, there is still an implicit reinforcement of male dominance in the film, because the dominant person in the relationship is the one with more masculine qualities.

5. Conclusion

By analysing this classic feminist film, the study gains a deeper understanding of the positive role of feminist films and enriches the feminist perspective of film studies. Through the story of women's friendship and growth, the film shows the journey of women's self-awakening and courageous resistance. The film challenges the traditional gender box of women's image in cinema and presents complex and three-dimensional women's roles and lives, although there are still some implicit biases. The results of this study can provide useful references for the analysis of similar films and promote the development of feminist film studies. Of course, this study only takes one film as an example and fails to fully cover the diversity of feminist films. In the future, after enriching the disciplinary background, we can explore the creation and acceptance mechanism of feminist films in the context of social and cultural contexts.

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