CHILD ABUSE REPRESENTED IN MATILDA BY DANNY DEVITO

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ABSTRAK

Child Abuse Represented in Matilda by Danny DeVito adalah sebuah artikel yang di tulis oleh Maria Stevani Wongui Maria Stevani Wongui1, Yohanes Kurniawan Winardi, S.S., M.Pd.2, dan Dr. Eka Fadilah, S.S., M.Pd.3, dari 1,2,3Universitas Widya Kartika. Artikel ini dibuat dengan tujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana cara kekerasan terhadap anak di representasikan di film Matilda (1996). Dengan menerapkan metode Qualitativ-Interpretive, artikel ini mengumpulkan data melalui analisa elemen-elemen yang di pakai di dalam film dan memusatkan perhatian kepada kekerasan yang di alami oleh karakter anak anak di dalam film Matilda (1996). Penelitian ini menggunakan teori representasi dari Stuart Hall (1997), klasifikasi kekerasan terhadap anak dari Clark (2007), dan teori Film Style dari Kuhn and Westwell (2020). Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukan bahwa mise-en-scene, shots, dan angles di pakai sebagai komponen-komponen dari elemen film Matilda (1996). Penelitian ini juga berhasil mengungkap jenis-jenis kerasan yang di alami oleh karakter anak-anak di dalam film Matilda (1996). Penelitian ini juga berhasil mengungkap jenis-jenis kerasan yang di alami oleh karakter anak-anak di dalam film Matilda (1996). Penelitian ini juga berhasil mengungkap jenis-jenis kerasan yang di alami oleh karakter anak-anak di dalam film Matilda (1996). Penelitian ini juga berhasil mengungkap jenis-jenis kerasan yang di alami oleh karakter anak-anak di dalam film Matilda (1996). Penelitian ini juga berhasil mengungkap jenis-jenis kerasan yang di alami oleh karakter anak-anak berupa: Penelantaran (Neglect), Kekerasan Fisik (Physical Abuse), dan Kekerasan Emosional (Emotional Abuse).

Kata kunci: Kekerasan Terhadap Anak; Film Anak-anak; Elemen-elemen film.

ABSTRACT

Child Abuse Represented in Matilda (1996) is an article written by Maria Stevani Wongui Maria Stevani Wongui I, Yohanes Kurniawan Winardi, S.S., M.Pd.2 Dr. Eka Fadilah, S.S., M.Pd.3, Dr. Nopita Trihastutie S.S., M.Pd.4, from 1,2,3Widya Kartika University. This article aims to reveal the way abuse experienced by children characters in Matilda (1996) is represented. Using Qualitative-Interpretive method, this research analyzed the cinematic elements that helps accentuate details or information related to child abuse represented in the film and focuses only on the abuse experienced by the children characters. This research used Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of Representation, Clark's (2007) classification of Child Abuse, and Kuhn & Westwell's (2020) theory of Film Style. The result of this research shows that mise-en-scene, shot, and angle, are the elements used in the film to represent child abuse. This research also reveals that the children characters in Matilda (1996) experienced neglect, physical abuse, and emotional abuse.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Children's Film, Film Elements.

1. INTRODUCTION

Film is one of entertainment source famous amongst all age including children (Moss, 2008). Children's film is a film genre made specifically for children audiences (Buffam, 2011). It consists of visual and audio elements that attracts young eyes attention through the use of fun images, colors and songs. Films in this genre also tends to send out moral messages and life lessons supposedly appropriate as an educational instrument for children other than to just entertain (Hermanson and Zepernick 2019).

Fun, exciting, and entertaining, are words closely attached to children's films. However, despite of all the optimistic tags, films in this genre are found to display violence tools and behaviors of characters. Aggressive language is used to threat, mock, or insult; weapons such as firearms and woodworking tools are intensely utilized to hostile animals or even a person (Wheeler and Brikland, 2010).

Violence is the acts involving physical force that can cause physical harm or even death, and falls into the category of abuse (Kurg, Dhalberg & Mercy, 2002). Acts of abuse happens to anyone including the people who are most vulnerable in the society, children. Anyhow, when it comes to abuse, acts can range from the smallest matter such as not paying

attention to a child, to forcefully giving physical impingement such as kicking or hitting. Ultimately, abuse includes acts that can negatively impact a person physically or emotionally (Kelly & Bird, 2014). Although as mentioned above that acts of abuse do not always presented in a physically violent way, it is quite questionable and concerning that any acts abuse is displayed in a medium considered as an entertainment or educational tool for children.

In this research, the writers are interested to raise the topic of child abuse represented in a film targeted to children. Thus, Matilda (1996) is chosen as the subject of investigation. It is a film directed by Danny DeVito that covers the story of a young girl named Matilda who is gifted with a brilliant mind and even a super power. This film was nominated for multiple awards in children's film festivals and academies. Although clearly Matilda (1996) targets the young audiences, children characters are showed to experienced frequent acts of abuse inflicted by the adult characters in the film. A previous research conducted by Mahmuda (2018) analyzed the main character's identities and found that Matilda as a nondependent, smart, and sympathetic character. However, it also revealed that the construction of these identities is also influenced by acts, that according to Clark (2007), can be considered as abuse. This research aims to analyze the occurrences of abuse experienced by the children characters in Matila (1996). At last, this research can serve as a preliminary study and provides data useful for similar research related to the topic of child abuse and children's film genre.

2. METHOD

This research is written in the University of Widya Kartika, in 2023. This research analyses scenes that indicate abuse experienced by the children characters in the film "Matilda" by Danny DeVito as the primary data. Through the elements of film, the writers focused on the mise-en-scene, including properties and figure behaviors, lightings, shots, and camera angles that together support this article's argument of abuse experienced by the children characters in the film Matilda by Danny DeVito.

Matilda (1996) is a film based on a children's novel written by Roald Dahl in 1988 titled Matilda. In 2022, the story was also remade into a musical film and is titled Matilda the Musical. However, this research specifically used the film Matilda (1996) directed by Danny DeVito as the primary source of data. The writer also downloaded the film from www.netflix.com, which is an official online streaming platform. This research also used previous research findings related to this research's topic of investigation as the secondary data.

The writers employ Stuart Hall's theory of representation (1997), Kuhn and Westwell's theory of Film Style (2020), and Clark's classification of Child Abuse (2007). This research also used Interpretive-Qualitative method to present the data's findings based on the writers' interpretation. First the writer watched the film multiple times and highlighted or pinned the scenes and timeline of scenes that shows mise-en-scene, including properties and figure behaviors, lightings, shots, and camera angles that the writer thought emphasize or add details to the abuse experienced by the children characters. The second step is the writer classified and sorted all the highlighted points based on Kuhn and Westwell's theory of film style as well as Clark's classification of child abuse. Eventually the writer then eliminated all the points or data that are not related to this research's topic of discussion, as well as scope and limitation. After all the data are collected, the writer started to analyze the data based on Kuhn and Westwell's theory of film style (2020), and Clark's classification of child abuse (2007). For the film elements, the writer approached the techniques in the film are used to suggest meanings, ideas, or even details of information relating to the abuse experienced by the children characters. Therefore, following Stuart Hall's theory of

Representation, the writer sees the cinematic aspects used in Matilda (1996) is the film trying to represent child abuse. Analyzing the elements limited by the scope and limitation mentioned on the previous chapter, the writer also started to describe and explain the data findings following the theory used in this research. To make the writer's claim in the discussion stronger, secondary data taken from online articles and previous research are also included.

Representation Theory

In this research, the writers employ Stuart Hall's (1997) Representation theory to infer meanings from the scenes that are pertinent to the assessment of how the film represent child abuse. Using this theory, the writers concluded that Matilda (1996)'s usage of film elements are intended to highlight and demonstrate aspects of the abuse that the film's children characters endured. In other words, this research reveals how the cinematic aspects in the film portray child abuse. This research also used two approaches of representation which are reflective approach and constructionist approach.

Using reflective approach, the writer perceives the correlation of the acts of abuse experienced by the children characters in the film are equal or comparable to real life experience of ideas of child abuse based on Clark's classification due to the concept of reflective approach. On the other hand, constructionist approach is used to help analyze film elements included in the film perceived as the film's way of suggesting an idea or creating meanings related to child abuse represented in the film.

Film Elements

In addition to the narratives, each scene's audio and visual elements also serve as a means of communication in film (Yulfani and Rohmah, 2021). Film style, as defined by Kuhn and Westwell (236:2020), is a general term for the methods that filmmakers employ when using the film medium, including mise-en-scene, shots, angles, iconography, color, editing, and sound. These components show the filmmaker's strategy for evoking particular reactions from the audience or putting forth specific interpretations for the audience to grasp (Photinos & Tateishi, 2021). The writers' analysis in this research is limited to four elements: mise-en-scene, shots, angles, and sound.

The visual elements of a scene are referred to as the mise-en-scene, according to Brodwell and Thompson (2008). Figure behavior, costumes, setting, and props are parts of mise-en-scene (Kuhn & Westwell, 344:2020). Figure behavior and props will be the sole elements of mise-en-scene analyzed in this research. Props refer to the objects that are included as parts of film sets or objects that the actor used (Deubel, 2022). It makes the film sets more realistic and carries information and symbolic meanings that help the audience get an in-depth understanding of the characters or whatever message the film conveys (Cinepunked, 2022). According to Kuhn and Westwell (9:2022), figure behaviour plays to show the emotions and reactions of the characters as well as to deliver meanings when there is no dialogue spoken.

Hind (2012) further explained how lighting affects the audience by stirring their attention to a subject and manipulating the atmosphere of a scene. In this research, the writers focused on backlighting, low-key-lighting, and high-key lighting. Backlighting is when the illumination direction hits above and behind the subject (Kuhn & Westwell). It is used to create a dramatic and mysterious effect. Low-key lighting is when the illumination creates more shadows that show a strong contrast between the parts that are hit by the light and dark shadow (Kuhn and Westwell, 321:2022). It suggests a sense of mysteriousness and drama. High-key lighting is when the illumination fills in most of the shadow and creates low contrast within the frame (Kuhn & Westwell, 321:2022). Dang (2018) added that this lighting suggests a sense of clarity, peace, and optimism.

Shot size is an element that emphasizes what the filmmakers want the audience to see on the screen (Kuhn & Westwell, 473-474:2022). It is utilized by how the camera shows the distance to the subject. However, this research only analyses long shot, medium shot, and closeup shot. Kuhn and Westwell (473:2022) illustrate that a long shot is when the camera is positioned in a far distance showing a subject's whole body and surroundings. Medium shot is illustrated as when the camera is positioned to capture only half of the subject from the waist up to the subject's head (Kuhn and Westwell, 473:2022). Close-up shot is illustrated when the camera is positioned close to the subject's head that it takes up most of the frame (Kuhn & Westwell, 473:2022).

According to Kuhn and Westwell (75:2022), camera angle refers to how the camera is placed from the subject's level views. The use of different camera angles creates different approaches of the audience to the subject (Photinos & Tateishi, 2021). Types of camera angles include straight-on angle, high-angle, low angle, and canted angle (Kuhn & Westwell, 75:2022). Straight-on angle refers to when the camera is positioned at the same height as the subject's eye level (Kuhn & Westwell, 75:2022) to show a subject's perspective (Shkurny, 2021). High angle refers to when the camera is positioned above the subject (Kuhn & Westwell, 75:2022) to suggest the subject's vulnerability or so that the subject appears weaker or smaller (Photinos & Tateishi, 2021). Low angle refers to when the camera is positioned lower to the height of the subject's eye level (below the subject's eye level) (Kuhn & Westwell, 75:2022) to make the subject within the frame appear bigger or more significant and powerful (Photinos & Tateishi, 2021). Canted angle refers to when the camera is position tilted with its x-axis not parallel with the bottom of the frame (Kuhn & Westwell, 75:2022) to suggest to the audience a sense of disorientation in a scene, to show the character's psychological state, such as being in a fantasy or a memory, or even to suggest the narrative of a sinister doing in a scene (Photinos & Tateishi, 2021).

Child Abuse

According to Clark (2007), child abuse is defined as acts towards children or failure to act as a child's parents or caregivers that put a child in danger, causing physical or emotional harm to a child or even death. The World Health Organization further explained that child abuse causes actual or potential harm to a child's physical and emotional development (WHO, 2022). Child abuse is classified into four types: Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Neglect (Clark, 2007:13).

Physical abuse refers to acts involving physical contact that can cause physical harm or injury to a child, such as pain, scar, bruises, or even death. Hansen and Sedlar (1999) also add that child physical abuse happens due to frustrations or anger that the caregiver or the abuser has. Physical abuse includes hitting a child's hand, slapping a child's head, or kicking a child's feet.

Emotional abuse refers to verbal or nonverbal acts that cause harm to a child's psychology, such as anxiety, insecurity, eating disorder, or depression. It includes acts of emotional control that will result in hurting or damaging someone's emotional state (Gordon, 2022). It does not necessarily include physical contact, or in other words injure someone physically. Emotional abuse includes making threats, throwing insults, mocking, or even showing abusive behaviors to other people.

Sexual abuse refers to pressuring or forcing a child to be exposed or participate in any sexual interaction with an adult or another child against or without the child's consent. Sexual abuse includes kissing a child, touching a child's private parts, showing or exposing private parts or sexual videos or photos to a child, or taking photos or videos of children's sexual activity.

Child Neglect refers to not taking responsibility for meeting a child's needs as a parent or caregiver. Child neglect is divided into three which are Physical Neglect, Emotional Neglect, and Educational Neglect. Physical Neglect refers to failure acts of meeting a child's physical needs such as not giving a child food, not giving s child proper clothing, medical attention when needed, or even proper safety gear that can result in a child's physical harm, such as malnutrition, illness or injuries, or even death. Emotional Neglect refers to failure to meet a child's emotional needs, such as not giving children love and attention, not validating children's feelings, and not giving the feeling of safety and security. Educational Neglect refers to failure to meet a child's special education training. For example, not enrolling a six years-old kid to elementary school, or not providing inclusive education training for deaf children.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Matilda (1996) is a film about a life story of young girl with a brilliantly-gifted mind and her journey of finding her own path to happiness and a family. Although the film might wonder the eyes of young audiences with bright colours, and magnetizing super power with hilarious act on top, Matilda (1996) in fact showcases abuse experienced by children characters. Based on Kuhn and Westwell's (2020) theory of film style, the writer noticed that the film even uses its cinematic elements to highlight factors that supported the writer's argument of child abuse represented in the film, and help highlight and add details to how the children characters is abuse.

The writers found that elements of mise-en-scene, in this research which are props and figure behaviors are used in the film to represent abuse experienced by the children characters. For instance, Matilda is placed within an improper cat seats for babies, she is also placed within the car's trunk. Considering the fact that a car's trunk is not at all a place where people place their babies, this draw the writer's conclusion that Matilda is not properly cared for and is even considered not more than just an item by her parents. When she grows a little bit older, film also shows her sitting on the counter with a kitchen knife set placed right behind her. It is also mentioned that cooking or making her own food has become Matilda's daily routine since she is often left alone at the house. Matilda is also displayed in the film to be attached to books, and is even mentioned that the books give her hope to someday have the same happy ending of having the same happy life as well as a loving and caring parents or caregiver such as the ones she sees at the playground. To conclude, Matilda's attachment to books suggest her parent's lack of emotional care and her desperation of having a caring family. Figure behaviors of the characters also helped express the abuse that the children characters experienced in the film. When seeing Matilda for the first time, Mr. Wormwood shows his emotion, which is based on Ekman and Friesen's theory of Body Gesture (1969), is the emotion of disgust. He frows his eyebrows, wrinkles his nose, sides of his mouth lose, and his upper lip goes up. It is also shown in the film other two couples who are also walking outside the hospital expressed such a huge difference of behavior towards their child. Both couples have the same facial expression of having their lips raised, both their eyes wrinkled, and corners of their lips raised, which suggest the emotion of happiness (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). Their following conversation also voices whatever process they went through for Matilda's birth is just a waste of time, and even further suggest that they do not even want Matilda to begin with.

Different types of lighting used in Matilda (1996) also is found used to suggest more details supporting the abuse experienced by the children characters. Using back-lighting, through the silhouette, Mr. Wormwood appears to be looking way up and Miss Trunchbull to be looking way down. Even to the adult size of Mr. Wormwood, he still appeared way smaller compared to Miss Trunchbull. It further adds to the idea of how intimidating Miss Trunchbull is to the students at school. Low-key lighting is used to highlight the Chokey as a really horrifying place of punishment and is basically a form torture for the student. Due

to the high contrast between the shadow and the light, which in this case is dominated by the shadow, the lighting actually highlights the huge nails that are sticking through the doors. It also puts a shine on the child that is forced in there and how she fit in the chokey. High-key lighting on the other hand is used to create dreamy and shine the light to the narrative of Matilda's hope of someday to have a loving family for so long that she does not receive any love or attention from her own mother and father, Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood.

The writers also found that shot size is used to emphasize the details relating to the abuse experienced by the children characters. Long shot is used to underline Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood's lack of attention to Matilda and how little care they have for her by showing Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood, the long shot helps underline their body movements that show huge distinction compared to the previous couples. Medium shot is used to show facial expressions and figure behaviors. For instance, a medium shot shows how unhinged Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood is behaving while talking about an importance matter of their child's education. Within this shot, Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood are seen to be making no significant facial expression that would suggest any emotion at all and are casually doing their hair in front of the mirror. At last, close up shot is used to add details of how the antagonists are twisted and malicious people. For example, a close-up shot showed Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood's facial expression that indicate the emotion of happiness while Matilda is currently forced to throw away her books and do what she does not actually enjoy. The shot underlines the Wormwood's lack care concerning Matilda, it also emphasizes Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood's character as vicious people for being happy over Matilda's distress.

The writers also found how the film tries to suggest certain details concerning the abuse that children characters are experiencing in the film through the use of different camera angles. Straight-on angle shows Matilda on her way to the library. It shows Matilda's point of view only seeing other people's bottoms. This further adds to Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood's lack of attention towards Matilda that she is currently doing what people her age is not supposed to be doing. High angle also shows the student's reaction over seeing Miss Trunchbull is shown through their movements. The shot shows their avoidance to Miss Trunchbull by making space away from her, further emphasizing Miss Trunchbull's as a scary character that is feared by students in the film. Low angle is used to highlight characters' significant and further show how powerful the abusers are and emphasize the children characters vulnerability. It shows how the children characters see the bigger and more powerful characters in front of them and how small they actually are compared to them. Canted angle is used to suggest bad things are bound to happen such as Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood refusing to let Matilda join school, or Miss Trunchbull doing the hammer-throw to Amanda. Thus, the use of canted angle shot rises the anticipation for horrible things that is going to happen, and suggests the adult characters' or the abusers' sinister doing.

Using Clark's classification of child abuse (2007) the writers also are able to reveal that the children characters in Matilda (1996) experienced different types of abuse. First is physical abuse, where students in school are shown in the film thrown and put into the chokey by Miss Trunchbull. Acts of emotional abuse are shown when other students are witnessing their friends abused right in-front of them. Acts of neglect are also showed in the film and are mostly experienced by the main character, Matilda. She was neglected physically, emotionally, and educationally. Matilda is often put in a dangerous situation by her parents or is doing activities that can cause a really big danger to her, such as being placed on top of the kitchen counter full of hazardous kitchen items, being told to cook or hit her own food, or being let loose crossing streets to go to the library. Matilda's interest, or attachment, over reading books only further emphasize her parents lack of emotional care for her, that she has to look for it in books. Her education is also considered not important by Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood. It is said in the film that Matilda should rather pick-up

packages for Mr. Wormwood than going to school, indicating that he views Matilda's education as less important than his illegal business, which Mrs. Wormwood also agreed on. Mr. Wormwood's underestimation of education is also shown when he throws Matilda's book on the floor.

4. CONCLUSION

After the writer finished with analyzing the data and was able to provide the answer to draw conclusion on the findings. Through the film elements, the writer finds details presented in scenes that support the argument of abuse experienced by the children characters in the film. This argument is supported through the use of properties, characters' body behaviors, lightings, shots, as well as camera angles. This research's analysis also reveals the type of abuse that the children characters experienced, which are neglect, physical abuse, and emotional abuse. At the end, despite the fact that Matilda (1996) is a film that targets children audiences, it displays acts of not only violence, but also multiple types of abuse toward the children characters. The abuse was also inflicted by adults that essentially played as the authoritative figures in the children's life, particularly in this film, from Matilda's parents, the school's principle, and even to the FBI agents.

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