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## **The Literariness Of A War Film And Student Attitudes Toward War Reflected And Shaped By “Hotel Rwanda”**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper utilized the qualitative-interpretive approach in examining the literariness of the war film “Hotel Rwanda” and in ascertaining public attitudes toward war reflected and shown in the movie. It was conducted to education students in four (4) World Literature classes through the discussion of a war-themed literary text reinforced by the viewing of the war film. The literariness of the film was examined using literary concepts while the transcribed responses and outputs of the students served as the primary textual data in drawing out student attitudes toward war. Findings revealed that literary concepts are reflected in the film, hence its literariness. Lastly, 25 attitudes toward war surfaced, 11 of which point out the causes of war while 14 tell about the effects of war.

**Keywords:** literariness, war film, public attitudes toward war, peace education

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recent scholarships do not confine the discourse of literariness within the study of literature. With the emergence of media arts particularly films, the concept of literariness has been extended to understand the aesthetic of language, narrative structure, symbols and images, among others, present and/or reflected in a film. As the twentieth century ended, it became evident that film, regarded as a semi-textual genre, played a crucial role in both being influenced by and influencing literature and literary criticism (Klarer, 2012). Film is inherently shaped by literary techniques, while at the same time, the impact of film has led to the development of distinctive features within literary practice. Film's unique methods of presentation, including camera angles, editing, montage, and the manipulation of speed, frequently mirror aspects found in literary texts or can be analyzed within the context of textual analysis.

Within this context, the concept of literariness has expanded beyond its traditional association with literature and has emerged as a significant concept within film studies. Jakobson (1973) highlighted that literariness represents a distinct quality within texts that distinguishes them as works of literature. Kessler (2010) further emphasized the broader applicability of this concept beyond literature, aiming to bridge the gap between specific issues in literary theory and broader concerns in film aesthetics. Benthien (2012) built upon this notion by explaining that literariness involves the interplay between the automatization and deautomatization of language, extending beyond the boundaries of language and literature and finding relevance within the study of films.

Zinnatullina et al. (2019) conducted a study that examined the intricate relationship between various art forms, particularly cinema and literature. This analysis revealed a complex dynamic between authors, filmmakers, literature, and cinema, which directly manifested in the resulting texts and influenced the audience (reader/viewer). The study highlighted that literature serves as the primary source and represents the oldest form of interaction between literature and cinema. However, there is no consensus regarding the classification of this genre. Kranz and Mellerski (2008) argue that adaptations occupy a unique space, straddling the boundaries of both novels and films, challenging the binary categorization while also defying the hierarchical notion that considers the novel inherently superior to the film.

War films, much like literature, have the ability to present and reflect the harsh realities of conflicts and the atrocities of war, ultimately impacting and influencing their viewers. The visual nature of cinema evokes emotions of shame and fear, providing spectators with initial reactions before the full image is revealed (Schultz, 2018). Kubrak's (2020) study examined the changes in the attitudes of young people, who are active viewers, towards contemporary social issues after watching carefully selected films. The research found that postgraduate students exhibited positive changes in their attitudes towards the elderly, while undergraduate students' negative assessments only intensified. These contrasting trends can be attributed to individual differences among respondents, including age, educational background as an indicator of psychological traits, prior experiences

with the elderly, and pre-existing attitudes before watching the film. However, most of the changes observed immediately after viewing the film did not persist over time. This suggests the need for further investigation into the mechanisms that sustain these changes. In a separate study, Lieberfeld (2007) explored the educational potential of using films and literature to teach both Political Science majors and non-majors about war. The research began by assessing the value of employing these mediums for teaching purposes, providing organizational themes and approaches to the material. The study concluded with a discussion on how to enhance students' analytical abilities in understanding the politics of war and analyzing cultural works related to war.

Films have become effective media in reinforcing literary lessons specifically the discussion of literary texts with heavy concepts like conflicts and war. If used in classroom instruction, the audio-visual sensory nature of films influence the students particularly on how they understand realities. It is within this context that this paper determined the literariness of the war film *Hotel Rwanda* presented in its selected scenarios and elicited student attitudes toward war shaped by the film.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative-interpretive research examined the literariness of the war film “Hotel Rwanda” and ascertained public attitudes toward war reflected and shown in the movie. The 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda* recounts the efforts of hotelier Paul Rusesabagina to save his family and others during the 1994 genocide in the central African nation of Rwanda. The film is a harrowing portrayal of a country losing itself in chaos as the international community looked away. Former US President Bill Clinton recalls the United States' inaction during the Rwandan genocide as one of the biggest regrets of his presidency. The gripping performance of Don Cheadle helped open viewers' eyes to the reality of this terrible tragedy (Bryan, 2019).

Four (4) World Literature classes comprised of education students were used in this study. Four sessions were allotted for the data gathering: the first session was for the discussion of the main lesson/ literary text, *Forest Brotherhood* of Boris Pasternak; the second session was set for the film viewing of the movie *Hotel Rwanda* as an enrichment activity; while the third session was for the discussion of the film wherein a comprehension written test was administered by the researcher. The outputs of the students were checked utilizing a holistic comprehension test rubric while their responses during classroom discussions and in the written test were transcribed for data analysis. To assess the literariness of the film, the researcher identified literary concepts evident in the film as presented in selected scenarios dominant in the responses of students. Public attitudes toward war reflected and shown in the film were lifted from students' oral and written responses.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Literariness of the Film**

Literature is primarily words. Amidst criticisms and arguments on literature and cinema, these remain humans' primary outlets for aesthetic expression. Both good literature and ideal film aim to make the mind see. The visual scenes in literature and the literariness of films present how an artist sees life. It enables the author to share his/her personal perceptions with others. It makes other people experience things which otherwise might not have come into their senses. It makes them see things in life from other people's viewpoint.

### **Literature is languages**

Language is the primary medium in literature. In *Hotel Rwanda*, dialogues told the story and expressed feelings and motivations of the characters. Spoken lines of the characters provided sensory impressions among viewers by making the characters act as real persons rather than as imaginary characters of the scriptwriter. The dialogues of Paul provided his characterization in the movie. When Tatiana's sister and brother-in-law visit Paul at the Milles Collines for they were planning to leave Rwanda and take Tatiana and the children with them because of danger, Paul said,

Today I talked to my friends, the American Ambassador and Colonel Oliver of the United Nations. They are preparing a banquet for the peace signing. The BBC are flying in their best reporters. The world is watching. There will be peace...

These lines introduced Paul as an influential person. His position in the hotel connected him with foreign nationals and local elites. Moreover, his words characterized him as trustful and hopeful. Amidst the dangers, he still trusted the peacekeepers and hoped for peace. Dialogues reflect social and political issues. Consider this exchange of words between Paul and the military captain when Paul gave more than a thousand francs in exchange of his family and neighbors

Paul jumps from the jeep. Waves to Tatiana in the van, then gives the money to the captain.

PAUL : Now, let them go. (No response. Money in hand, the Captain eyes Paul with malice.)

PAUL : Don't be foolish. There's more money to be made here.

CAPTAIN : You want to buy anymore cockroaches, ask for Captain Naramunju.

This conversation between Paul and the military captain showed bribery. The armed forces of Rwanda are supposed to defend its people, yet in the scene, as immortalized by the dialogues, the military men are bribed

with money in exchange for their citizens' protection and security.

The spoken lines of the characters with the use of paralinguistics and elements of music set the mood in most of the scenes of *Hotel Rwanda*. When the whites are about to leave the Rwandans after an order from the international community that they need to withdraw their forces, a group of French nuns, along with a hundred Tutsi women and children came running up the driveway. They were all terrified. A commander ordered the French armies to line up, blocking the refugees. The women were weeping. The children were frightened.

PAUL : They are not here to save us. Go to the hotel. (The song *Million Voices* is playing)

These were just a few words from Paul yet they were very powerful. The heavy rain with voices of children in the song established the sad and gloomy mood of the scene.

### **Literature is imitation**

Literary artists are viewed as imitators of life. Through their writings, they create representations of what is real. The movie *Hotel Rwanda* narrates the Rwanda genocide of 1994 through the experiences of Paul. It served as the realia of the researcher. The brutality and dehumanization in the Rwanda genocide presented in *Hotel Rwanda* was used in classroom instruction to reinforce the students' understanding of the rules of armed conflicts and their impact on human life. The first few scenes in the movie (00.00 to 23.25) depicted the political struggle between the Hutus and Tutsis. It established the desire of the Hutus to kill all Tutsis. The Hutus went to the streets of Kigali to protest and revolt against their president who signed a peace agreement with the Tutsis, giving the Tutsis the right to be in the government. When Paul met George Rutaganda, a Hutu businessman who runs a warehouse, he saw thousands of machetes which were used by the Hutu militia in killing the Tutsis whom they referred to as cockroaches.

There were also scenes in the movie (56.50 to 1.16.25) which visualized the genocide. Paul asked Gregoire to accompany him to the warehouse of George. When they reached the warehouse, they saw women captives turned into sex slaves. When Paul and George had a conversation, George insisted that he was already half way into killing all the Tutsis. On their way back to the hotel, the fog was so thick that they can barely see a yard ahead. The van bumped erratically. When Paul clambered out of the van and fell, he saw a dead child, a young Tutsi girl, her hands clasped on her ears as though to block the sound of her own death. Paul clambered on his feet and saw that the van was on a road littered with dead bodies - men, women, and children. The bumps were dead bodies. The van had driven over them. This occurrence in the movie showed the degree of brutality and mercilessness of the Hutu militia - of the Rwanda genocide - one of the most horrifying acts of genocide in human history.

### **Literature is organic unity**

Organic unity is based on the premise that all elements of a literature are interdependent upon each other to create an emotional or intellectual whole. All scenes in the film *Hotel Rwanda* aided to achieve the film's purpose of having an effective audio-visual representation of the Rwanda genocide and educating the people on the role of the international community in armed conflicts. Symbols played a significant part in concretizing greed, brutality, selfishness and horror reflected in the genocide. Hutu fashion, a patchwork of red, green and yellow stripes, set the Hutus apart from the rest of the Rwandans, chiefly the Tutsis. When George gave Paul a Hutu shirt, he said It's time for you to join your people. Hutus believe that Rwanda is Hutu land because they compose the majority of the country's population. The colors dominating the Hutu fashion are found in the old Rwandan flag. Hutus dressed themselves in patchwork prints to assert that they are the rightful inhabitants of Rwanda.

The RTML, a Hutu radio station, aired anti-Tutsi campaigns. It served as the primary and central medium in mobilizing Hutus to kill Tutsis. The lexicon used for the Tutsis, cockroaches, exposed Hutu dominion in Rwanda. The Tutsis were considered as pests while the Hutus occupied a high social status. The Belgian colonizers considered Tutsis fair, tall, thin, highbrow, thin nosed, and fine lipped, while the Hutu people were labeled dark-skinned, short, thick-set with big head, wide-nosed, and having enormous lips. Paul and Tatiana represented a Hutu man and a Tutsi woman. Both were cinematic icons of the film. Their physical features become distinct icons of the two ethnic groups. Tatiana was taller and fairer than Paul. Paul is dark-skinned, wide-nosed, and has enormous lips. Tatiana has sharp features. The Westerners represented by white actors iconized rich tourists and attachés. The lines spoken by actors clearly provided their characterization. They aided in communicating important values and human rights issues. The use of music in the film especially the song *Million Voices* by WyClef Jean intensified its emotional power.

### **Literature is value-laden**

Literature presents human experiences reflective of values. It has its moral function of teaching values. The film *Hotel Rwanda* eternalized values and disvalues communicated through its characters. For instance, Paul is described as selfless and brave. He did not leave his family and the refugees at the hotel. He left life's comforts; he chose to be with the blameless and helpless, and struggled for their safety and freedom. Paul instructed the

refugees to telephone friends in other countries (1.16.25 to 1.34.35). Many of them got exit visas to leave for another country. Paul and his family got an exit visa for Belgium. When Tatiana and the children are lifted into the truck, Paul decided not to go with them. He asserted that he could not leave the refugees and let them die. Paul, an influential and a successful Hutu, chose not to be with his family and live in peace in Belgium; instead, he preferred staying at the hotel to defend and save the refugees whom he does not personally know. This scene exhibited the selflessness of Paul and his love for the Rwandans. On the other hand, the front liners of the Hutu militia demonstrated brutality and cruelty. RTML, the Hutu radio station, broadcast the order of Hutu leaders to kill all Tutsis – fill the graves that are not yet full... cut the trees that are tall... the Hutus called the Tutsis cockroaches. The Tutsis were slaughtered. They were robbed, harassed, and tortured.

### **Literature is imagination**

Literary pieces posit the creative imagination of writers. Hotel Rwanda revealed the scriptwriters' and the director's auteur manifested through their artistic and ingenious imagination. All aspects of the film were artistically and holistically melded to accentuate the truthfulness and authenticity of the movie. It may be inferred that there is no substitute for the full historical truth about the Rwanda genocide, yet, the imaginative minds of people behind the making of Hotel Rwanda used all scenes in the film to narrate Paul's story concerning the horror of Rwanda genocide. Hutu and Tutsi (00.00 to 23.25) scenes in the film established the root causes of the tragedy. The President is Killed (23.25 to 37.30) visualized the killing of President Habyarimana and how it started the massive killing. The Evacuation (37.30 to 56.50) narrated how the refugees flocked to the hotel and how the whites left the Rwandans. The Genocide (56.50 to 1.16.25) recounted the massive killing and other forms of dehumanization experienced by the Rwandans. The Visas (1.16.25 to 1.34.35) pictured the selflessness and sacrifice of Paul by not leaving the refugees. The Escape (1.34.35 to end) bared the struggle of Paul with the refugees to escape from the genocide. These scenes relied on the story of Paul and how the imaginative minds of the film's creators transformed words into a documentary style audio-visual representation.

### **Literature is a product of social construct**

Social constructs are notions which are considered normal – what is real depends on what is socially established and accepted. In the film, power is socially constructed. It is the powerful who "calls the shots." Paul needed to convince General Bizimungu to control the Interhamwe until the Tutsi rebel army arrives. Along with bribes of money, jewelry and alcohol, Paul used threats. The first threat was that the Americans are watching everything happening in Rwanda with their satellites. The second time was when Paul said that General Bizimungu will be considered a war criminal and said:

You are a marked man, Sir. You are on a list. The Americans have you on their list as a war criminal. How do you think these people operate? You sit here with five stars on your chest. Who do you think they are coming after? You need me to tell them how you helped at the hotel. They say you led the massacres. Do you think they are going to believe you?

This scene proved that how a person defines everyday situation depends on his/her respective background and experiences. Paul considered General Bizimungu powerful. There were few instances that Bizimungu saved Paul and the refugees. For Paul, it is General Bizimungu who has the power to stop the Hutu militia. The powerful are the Hutus in the government. General Bizimungu was threatened when Paul said that Americans and other superpowers will consider him war criminal. For a Hutu general, power is not for the blacks. The powerful are the whites – the Americans and other superpowers.

### **Literature is culture and history**

Literature is reflective of a people's way of living. It is regarded as history for the artist gives peculiar permanence to the momentary and ephemeral experiences in human life. The documentary style adopted in the film Hotel Rwanda traced the origins of the horrifying genocide that led to the murder of nearly one million Rwandans. The first few scenes (00.00 to 23.25) were devoted to explaining the root causes of the tragedy. It dealt with the horrors left by imperialism and colonialism. Rwandan history mentions the role of Belgium in the genocide. In 1924, Belgian colonization began. Ethnic identity cards were issued. The Belgians used the Tutsis to run the country but when they left, they had given the power to the Hutus. The Hutus took revenge on the Tutsis for years of repression by starting the political dispute. Furthermore, the film pictured Rwanda as a third world country. This is manifested by the way the Rwandans dress, the establishments they have, and their methods of warfare – machetes. Rwandan citizens were considered cohesive – the Hutus' greed for power is from their belief that they are the rightful owners of Rwanda, they, being the majority group while the ordinary Tutsis were powerless.

### **Attitudes toward War among the Student Viewers**

The concepts below reflect the various attitudes toward war of the student viewers of the film *Hotel Rwanda*. As gleaned from their responses, 25 attitudes toward war surfaced, 11 of which point out the causes of war while 14 tell about the effects of war.

#### **Causes of War**

War is the result of extreme love for worldly pleasures. People's discontent leads them to desire for things beneficial to them. A person's pride and self-centeredness makes him/her live in life's comforts even if it is at other people's expense. This starts misunderstandings and conflicts which may result in hostilities.

War is perceived to be the absence of peace, freedom, and unity. It is rooted in misunderstandings or conflicts of interests. The power struggle between the Hutus and Tutsis began after Rwanda was granted independence from Belgium in 1962. In 1990, the civil war started in Rwanda. It is evident in the film how the Hutu extremists' greed for power led to revolting against the government. Rwandan President Habyarimana was shot after signing a peace agreement with the rebels, a Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). The Hutu militia took over the government and ordered the extermination of all Tutsis. The Hutus considered themselves superior, thus, they did not allow the Tutsis to be in the government. The ethnic cleansing of the Tutsi minority reflects selfishness and foolishness. George, the leader of the Hutu group Interahamwe, defends that Rwanda is only for the Hutus and not for the cockroaches. Rwandan history narrates the struggles of the Hutus to hold reign over Rwanda. For more than 100 years, the Tutsi ruled over the Hutus. The Hutus served as forced laborers while the Tutsis served as supervisors. It is pride and hatred brought by the sufferings from the past that made Hutu ethnic revolutionaries order the massive killing of Tutsis. The genocide manifested the human's propensity to be brutal, cruel, and violent.

#### **Effects of War**

War kills thousands of lives. It is bloodshed. Killing is a major characteristic of war. In the battlefield, a group aims to eradicate members of the opposing group by using destructive methods of warfare. The Rwanda genocide in 1994 left Africa with nearly one million deaths.

War brings misery to people. It is a source of suffering, oppression, and dehumanization. In the film, Tutsis and their supporters are referred to as cockroaches— insects that should be exterminated. They were killed. They were robbed and their houses burned. They were harassed and abused. The women became sex slaves. Children were left orphans. It ruined relationships. It broke brotherhood. It caused trauma and fear among the survivors.

War is a painful game. It is filled with trials. Before a group or a party is declared victorious, lives are sacrificed and millions of properties are destroyed. The civil war and the genocide in Rwanda was rooted in the drive of the Hutus to revenge against the Tutsis. This is a clear violation of the Lord's commandment. Killing is an act of evil. Justice is never in our hands. War is a waste. War remains to be the root cause of destruction. Lives and relationships are ruined. Houses and other private properties are destroyed. However, war does not end after the actual fight. It causes unimaginable rate of poverty. It steals the future. It ruins the future of children. And War brings global crisis – be it economic, political, social, and moral. War is the biggest problem of the world today. The bottomline for every conflict is the resolution of the problem. The Hutus revolted to preserve their power and superiority after the president signed the peace agreement. For the Hutus, the century-year-old Hutu-Tutsi dispute can be ended by killing all the Tutsis. War is a destructive way of defending oneself and is not to be glorified. It can be prevented only by love and respect. If only the Hutus and the Tutsis learned how to share their land, Rwanda would still be the tropical Switzerland of Africa.

### **CONCLUSION**

Literary concepts are evident in the film *Hotel Rwanda*. This confirms the literariness of the film used, thus, the film's value as an instructional material in the literature class is recognized and encouraged. Aristotle, in his mimetic theory, suggested that literature is a representation of life. This is strengthened by the correspondence theory of knowledge about what exists which claims that "true" knowledge of reality represents accurate correspondence of statement about images of reality with the actual reality that the statements or images are attempting to represent. The literariness of the film *Hotel Rwanda* is proved in this study. Thus, the discussion of *Forest Brotherhood* reinforced by the viewing of *Hotel Rwanda* aided the students' recognition that wars and armed conflicts are realities. These media helped in instilling an awareness of human life and dignity among the student viewers.

This study further denotes that film, like literature, is a compendium of the aesthetic expression of a people's ideologies, sentiments, and experiences. The attitudes toward war were mainly based on the students' reflections as regards war and its impact based on the selection *Forest Brotherhood* enriched and reinforced through the viewing of the film *Hotel Rwanda*. Moreover, these attitudes among student viewers demonstrated that the use of media particularly film in pedagogy helps learners to connect with events that are culturally relevant.

Through viewing Hotel Rwanda, the students revealed their opinions and reflections about armed conflicts and their impact even if they did not personally experience war.

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