Quar-Horror!: A Textual Analysis of the Presentation of Philippine Pandemic in Erik Matti's Film Rabid

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Abstract

Life is a drama that is, in several cases, depicted and represented through films. Films are powerful storytelling tools to give voice to human experiences and points of view, and to mirror social realities at a given time such as the pandemic. Thus, the emergence of quar-horror, a horror subgenre, which anchors upon the social realities of the pandemic and presents human fears and anxieties. An example of this is Erik Matti's horror film anthology entitled Rabid, consisting of four episodes that highlight the terrors of many Filipinos amid nationwide lockdown, economic downturn, and restrained physical interactions. This study employs Kenneth Burke's dramatism and Roland Barthes' semiotics as theoretical frameworks to determine the pandemic social realities present in the four episodes and their associated meanings. The textual analysis of the film revealed economic, cultural, political, and moral realities shown through scenes of income inequality, changes in social norms, militaristic approach to a health crisis, and ethical decision-making. These various realities are represented through choice of ordinary people who usually stay at home to not contract coronavirus, while fighting for their survival through belief in folklore and use of digital tools. The episodes use wide shots, interior settings, low-key lighting, casual costumes, set props, and diegetic sounds. While the dialogues uttered by the characters give rise to the narratives of justice, compassion, familial bonds amid government inaction, and threats to safety and security.

Keywords: dramatism, film studies, media presentation, semiotics, social critique