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Biographical Films between Deification and Demonisation

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Biographical Films between Deification and **Demonisation**

Dr. Musaed A. Al-Mutairi

Abstract- Biographical films are a significant part of cinema, providing viewers with a glimpse into the lives of real people. However, their depiction often varies, with some portraying their characters as moral heroes and others as villains. This study explores the thematic exploration of deification versus demonisation in biographical films, focusing on their historical context, evolution, and impact on audience perception. Deification emphasises the positive qualities of individuals while minimising their imperfections, while demonisation highlights unfavourable characteristics and behaviours. The ethical and moral implications of depicting real-life individuals and the sociocultural and political factors influencing these portrayals are explored. The study also explores the audience's perception and the influence of media and criticism public discourse. This research enhances understanding of the complex nature of portraying real-life individuals, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between deification and demonisation in biographical cinema.

I Introduction

iographical films, also referred to as biopics, are cinematic portrayals of actual individuals and their lived experiences, frequently cantering on noteworthy occurrences or epochs in their lives. These documentaries' primary objective is to give viewers a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of historical figures, celebrities, or prominent individuals. affording them a window into their individual challenges, accomplishments, and societal influence. Biographical films commonly combine aspects of reality and imagination to construct a captivating storyline that profoundly connects with audiences. Historical figures are significantly impacted by their role in forming public opinions and influencing cultural memory.

examination The of deification versus demonisation in biographical films delves into the intricate depiction of actual individuals as either protagonists reviled esteemed antagonists. Biographical films often idealise their characters, depicting them as moral and heroic individuals deserving of admiration and self-emulation. The process of deification entails emphasising their favourable qualities while minimising or excluding imperfections and deficiencies. On the other hand, several biographical films employ a more critical perspective, unfavourably portraying their protagonists and accentuating their shortcomings, errors, or contentious behaviours. This contrast prompts inquiries into the moral obligations of filmmakers and the influence of cinematic depictions on public opinion.

The subject of deification vs demonisation in biographical films holds significant value and relevance that transcends the boundaries of entertainment and analysis. These have films profound ramifications for the recollection and understanding of history, influencing shared recollection and shaping society's perspectives on historical individuals. By examining how individuals are depicted in biographical films, we understand more comprehensive cultural, political, and ideological frameworks. Gaining insight into the intricacies of deification and demonisation within the realm of biographical filmmaking is vital for developing media literacy, cultivating critical thinking skills, and promoting a nuanced comprehension of the multifaceted aspects of human nature and historical occurrences.

COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF П. BIOGRAPHICAL FILMS

a) Historical Background and Evolution

Biographical films have a substantial historical lineage that can be traced back to the nascent stages of the cinematic medium. The genre of narrative cinema originated as one of the oldest styles, as filmmakers were attracted to the captivating narratives of real-life people. Two notable early examples of theatrical works that portray religious and historical personalities are "The Passion Play of Oberammergau" (1898) and "The Life of Moses" (1909). The popularity of biographical films surged throughout the silent cinema era and the emergence of Hollywood, as renowned actors like Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford portrayed real-life individuals on screen. The genre has seen substantial changes throughout time, integrating technological breakthroughs and storytelling methods to portrav historical personalities vividly.

b) Purpose and Impact of Biographical Films

The purpose of biographical films extends beyond mere entertainment; they serve as a means preserving history, commemorating personalities, and providing valuable insights into the complexities of the human condition. Biographical films allow audiences to learn about many cultures, historical events, and cultural movements by portraying the lives and accomplishments of real-life individuals.

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Furthermore, these films can motivate, instruct, and stimulate contemplation, initiating conversations on the intricacies of human behaviour and the influences that mould individuals and communities. Moreover, biographical films can significantly influence the public's view, moulding the remembrance of historical figures and exerting an impact on cultural memory.

c) Examples of Notable Biographical Films

A multitude of prominent biographical films have made a lasting impact on the realm of cinema and popular culture. An exemplary instance is "Schindler's List" (1993), helmed by Steven Spielberg, which documents the existence of Oskar Schindler, a German entrepreneur who rescued more than a thousand Polish-Jewish refugees from the Holocaust. The film garnered widespread praise for its compelling depiction of Schindler's ethical metamorphosis and the atrocities of the Holocaust. An additional noteworthy illustration is the film "The King's Speech" (2010), helmed by Tom Hooper, which chronicles the authentic narrative of King George VI of the United Kingdom as he grapples with his speech impediment under the guidance of a speech therapist. The film garnered numerous accolades, notably the Academy Award for Best Picture, and underscored the significance of tenacity companionship.

III. Deification in Biographical Films

a) Definition and Characteristics

The concept of deification in biographical films pertains to depicting actual humans as idealised and nearly deity-like entities, frequently accentuating their virtues, accomplishments, and favourable qualities while diminishing or excluding their imperfections and limitations. This phenomenon is evident in diverse genres and historical epochs as filmmakers endeavour to bestow a heroic status upon their subjects. A focus on heroic actions, virtuous attributes, and exaggerated personas characterises deification in biographical films. The objective is to construct a mythical representation of the individual, situating them as emblematic figures of exceptional achievement and motivation. Deification frequently entails idealising the subject's life story, offering a narrative that strengthens notions of valour, courage, and ethical rectitude.

b) Analysis of Biographical Films that Tend to Deify Their Subjects

i. Common Techniques and Strategies

Filmmakers utilise diverse approaches and strategies in biographical films to elevate and glorify their characters. A frequently employed strategy deliberately emphasises favourable attributes of an individual's character while simultaneously downplaying or excluding unfavourable qualities. This may entail developing a narrative trajectory that centres on the

subject's achievements, triumphs, and societal contributions while downplaying instances vulnerability or controversy. Furthermore, directors can employ many cinematic techniques, including sweeping cinematography, stirring music, and dramatic dialogue, to augment portraying the protagonist as heroic. Symbolic imagery and allegorical narrative can elevate the subject to mythic proportions.

ii. Impact on Audience Perception

Elevating subjects in biographical films can significantly influence the audience's perception, moulding their recollection and understanding of historical individuals. These films evoke adoration, reverence, and a sense of awe among audiences by portraying characters as heroic figures of extraordinary stature. The portrayal of the subject's trials and successes can evoke emotional responses from viewers, who may find inspiration in their fortitude and determination. Nevertheless, the romanticised portrayal of characters in biographical films can also result in a mistaken comprehension of history, as it might disregard intricacies, inconsistencies, and ethical uncertainties. This phenomenon has the potential to foster the development of myths and tales about the subject matter, so disguising its authentic identity and historical import.

c) Case Studies and Examples

The phenomena of deification are exemplified by many biographical films, which depict their protagonists as exemplars of virtue and courage. An exemplary instance is the film "Gandhi" (1982), helmed by Richard Attenborough, whereby Mahatma Gandhi is portrayed as a virtuous individual and advocate of peaceful opposition. The film highlights Gandhi's ethical rectitude, selflessness, and steadfast dedication to fairness, solidifying his position as a venerated symbol of harmony and emancipation. In the film "The King's Speech" (2010), helmed by Tom Hooper, the character of King George VI is depicted as a valiant figure who triumphs over his speech impediment to motivate a nation against the backdrop of World War II. The film idealises the king's endeavour, depicting him as an emblem of fortitude and will when confronted with challenges. The earlier instances demonstrate how biographical films can propagate myths and idealised narratives, influencing the public's perspective of historical figures.

IV. Demonisation in Biographical Films

a) Definition and Characteristics

Demonisation in biographical films depicts reallife personalities as antagonistic or ethically objectionable figures, frequently accentuating their unfavourable characteristics, contentious deeds, or personal shortcomings while diminishina disregarding their favourable qualities. This procedure aims to demonise the individual, portraying them as emblematic of malevolence, corruption, or ethical deterioration. Demonisation in biographical films is characterised by an emphasis on the subject's imperfections, errors, and dubious conduct and the utilisation of negative stereotypes and exaggerated narrative tactics to evoke a feeling of moral indignation or censure.

b) Analysis of Biographical Films that Tend to Demonise Their Subjects

i. Common Techniques and Strategies

In biographical films, filmmakers utilise a range of techniques and strategies to portray their characters in a demonising manner. A prevalent strategy involves emphasising contentious or scandalous facets of an individual's life, such as engagement in criminal activities, breaches of ethical standards, or personal scandals. This may entail exaggerating events or sensationalising the subject's behaviour to elicit a powerful emotional reaction from the audience. Furthermore, filmmakers can employ negative characterisations, such as depicting the subject as manipulative, fraudulent, or morally bankrupt, to strengthen the sense of their antagonistic disposition. Biographical films that portray their protagonists in a demonising manner frequently utilise a narrative framework that accentuates conflict, tension, and moral ambiguity, evoking a profound sense of moral outrage or indignation within the audience.

ii. Impact on Audience Perception

The vilification of individuals in biographical films can exert a substantial influence on the audience's vision, so moulding their perceptions and evaluations of historical characters. These films elicit feelings of disdain, disgust, or moral judgment among spectators by depicting individuals as villains or moral pariahs. The activities or behaviour of the subject may elicit a negative response from viewers, resulting in a diminished assessment of their character and enduring impact. Nevertheless, the portrayal of subjects in biographical films might give rise to ethical concerns regarding the veracity and impartiality of the depiction. These films may oversimplify complex historical events or overlook mitigating variables that could provide a more nuanced perspective of the individual's conduct by exclusively emphasising the negative aspects of their existence.

c) Case Studies and Examples

The concept of demonisation is exemplified by numerous biographical films, which depict their protagonists as morally corrupt or irredeemable individuals. An illustrative instance is the film "Nixon" (1995), helmed by Oliver Stone. President Richard Nixon is shown as a leader driven by a desire for power and a sense of paranoia, resorting to unethical and unlawful

means to preserve his hold on authority. The movie depicts Nixon as a profoundly damaged and ethically compromised individual, accountable for perpetuating falsehoods and deceit on a large magnitude. Similarly, the film "The Social Network" (2010), helmed by David Fincher, presents Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, as a merciless and ethically dubious entrepreneur who manipulates his acquaintances and co-workers to pursue individual prosperity. The instances demonstrate how biographical films can sustain unfavourable stereotypes and moral evaluations. influencing the public's opinion of historical individuals.

V. ETHICAL AND MORAL CONSIDERATIONS

a) Responsibility of Filmmakers

The portrayal of real-life characters in biographical films carries a substantial duty for filmmakers. Interpreters and storytellers are crucial in crafting the narrative and influencing audience perception. Therefore, filmmakers must demonstrate integrity, honesty, and empathy while depicting persons, acknowledging their work's potential influence on the subjects, their families, and society. This obligation encompasses undertaking a comprehensive study, validating factual information, and providing an impartial portrayal of the topic while acknowledging its merits and limitations. Furthermore, filmmakers must carefully contemplate the ethical ramifications of their artistic decisions, making a concerted effort to maintain values of impartiality, reverence, and precision in their depiction of actual occurrences and individuals.

b) Ethical Dilemmas in Portraying Real-Life Figures

The depiction of actual individuals biographical films frequently poses ethical quandaries and moral intricacies for filmmakers. One notable quandary pertains to the inherent conflict between artistic liberty and adherence to historical precision. Filmmakers can employ artistic choices to augment dramatic impact or simplify intricate storylines; nonetheless, they must exercise caution and refrain from distorting or misrepresenting factual information. In addition, filmmakers must effectively address matters about privacy and consent, ensuring that the rights and dignity of the individuals and their families shown in the film are duly respected. This entails obtaining consent for delicate depictions and refraining from sensationalism or exploitation solely for amusement. Moreover, filmmakers must consider the potential influence of their depiction on public opinion, acknowledging their responsibility as stewards of history and protectors of recollection.

c) Balancing Accuracy with Dramatization

The primary issue filmmakers face in creating biographical films is the delicate balance between authenticity and dramatisation. Although the objective

is to communicate a captivating and emotionally impactful storyline, filmmakers must be conscious of their obligation to depict the truth authentically. This necessitates meticulous investigation, specialist engagement, and adherence to established verifiable information and historical documentation. Simultaneously, filmmakers need to traverse the inherent constraints of the medium, acknowledging that cinematic narrative frequently requires the compression of events, the amalgamation of characters, or the fabrication of dialogue to achieve dramatic impact. The crux of the matter lies in achieving a nuanced eauilibrium between genuineness and manifestation, guaranteeing the preservation of the fundamental narrative of the individual's life while simultaneously captivating and involving viewers.

Sociocultural and Political **INFLUENCES**

a) Influence of Societal Values and Norms

Societal ideals and standards heavily influence the depiction of individuals in biographical films. Film narratives and characterisations frequently incorporate current cultural attitudes and ideas, reflecting broader societal conceptions of heroism, virtue, and morality. For instance, in societies that emphasise personal accomplishment and perseverance, biographical films may highlight themes of overcoming challenges and striving for excellence. In contrast, within societies characterised by collectivist principles and prioritisation of community harmony, biographical films have the potential to underscore the significance of teamwork, sacrifice, and charity. Moreover, the portrayal of persons in biographical films can be influenced by cultural conventions about gender, ethnicity, and class, resulting marginalised groups frequently encountering stereotyping or marginalisation. Comprehending the impact of society's values and conventions is crucial for analysing biographical films about their cultural milieu and acknowledging the prejudices and viewpoints that shape their depiction of actual individuals.

b) Political Agenda and Biographical Films

Political agendas often play a considerable role in shaping biographical films, especially when portraying individuals with substantial historical or political impact. Moviemakers may aim to promote specific stories or goals by supporting or questioning existing political beliefs. In certain instances, biographical films can function as instruments of propaganda, effectively advancing a specific political agenda or bolstering nationalist emotions. In contrast, filmmakers may employ biographical films to scrutinise political systems, question authority, or promote social transformation. Politicising biographical films can result in controversial interpretations and arguments as viewers and critics evaluate the film's precision, partiality, and underlying

intentions. An essential aspect of comprehending the intended messages and consequences of biographical films lies in comprehending the political context within which they are created and received.

c) Cultural Context and Interpretation

The interpretation of biographical films is deeply influenced by cultural context, encompassing historical, social, and cultural factors that shape audience reception and understanding. The portraval of characters in biographical films and the themes and ideas that resonate with audiences can be influenced by cultural conventions, traditions, and beliefs. For instance, biographical films created within diverse cultural contexts may place varying degrees of importance on different facets of a person's life narrative specific ethical teachings hiahliaht characteristics. Furthermore, it is essential to note that cultural perspectives on heroism, leadership, and morality can exhibit significant variation, resulting in a wide range of reactions to biographical films across distinct cultural viewers. In order to engage in nuanced readings and fully appreciate the multifaceted meanings hidden within biographical films, it is imperative to acknowledge the cultural context in which these films are set.

VII. Audience Reception and Influence

a) Perception Formation in Biographical Films

The reception of biographical films by the audience is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by various elements, such as individual experiences, cultural heritage, and exposure to media. Biographical films can influence viewers' perspectives of historical personalities by employing a specific lens or narrative framework to depict them. In cinema, directors employ several strategies, including character development, storytelling, and visual imagery, to create portrayals of characters that evoke distinct emotional reactions and interpretations among viewers. Furthermore, the depiction of historical events and social situations in biographical films has the potential to shape viewers' comprehension of broader historical narratives and societal concerns. Audience members frequently participate in critical analysis and conversation on biographical films, wrestling with inquiries like genuineness, partiality, and historical precision. In biographical films. the process of perception construction is characterised by its dynamic nature, which is influenced by the interaction between cinematic storytelling and the interpretation of the audience.

b) Psychological Effects on the Audience

The impact of biographical films on viewers can be significant, as they can evoke emotional reactions, mould attitudes, and influence behaviour. By actively engaging with people and narratives in an empathetic manner, viewers have the potential to undergo a diverse

array of emotions, encompassing empathy, admiration, sympathy, and moral outrage. Identifying with the main characters and their challenges can result in heightened emotions of connection and emotional attachment, cultivating a sense of personal investment in their narratives. Furthermore, the consumption biographical films has the potential to impact individuals' attitudes and views, moulding their interpretations of historical figures and events. For instance, a figure in a good light may be viewed more positively. However, a character who is depicted in a negative light may elicit feelings of contempt or disapproval. Moreover, biographical films can function as conduits for moral and ethical contemplation, compelling spectators to contemplate the consequences of personal actions and decisions. Recognising the potential impact of biographical films on audience attitudes, values, and behaviours necessitates a comprehensive understanding of their psychological impacts.

c) Role of Media and Criticism

The media and criticism exert a substantial influence on the way audiences perceive and engage with biographical films. The impact of media coverage on audience expectations and impressions of a film and its reception upon release can be influenced by several factors, such as promotional materials, reviews, and interviews. Critics and historians offer unique perspectives and meticulous examination, assessing biographical films through the lens of criteria such as historical veracity, artistic excellence, and cultural import. Critics have a significant role in shaping broader scholarly conversations regarding the representation of individuals in biographical films and their societal implications, as evidenced by their reviews, essays, and academic contributions. Furthermore, media and criticism function as forums for conversation and deliberation, enabling audiences to interact with a wide range of viewpoints and understandings of biographical stories. By analysing the influence of media and criticism on audience perception, we can understand the broader cultural and socioeconomic consequences of biographical filmmaking.

VIII. CHALLENGES AND CONTROVERSIES

a) Legal Issues and Defamation Claims

Biographical films frequently encounter legal disputes and allegations of defamation due to their actual characters depiction of and events. Cinematographers must traverse a multifaceted legal environment, ensuring their depiction of individuals does not violate their privacy, publicity, or defamation entitlements. Defamation claims are typically initiated when individuals believe that the film has caused harm to their reputation or has shown them deceptively or inaccurately. In order to address potential legal liabilities, filmmakers may adopt various approaches, including acquiring life rights or permits from individuals or their estates. Furthermore, filmmakers may employ legal disclaimers or incorporate fictionalised parts to safeguard themselves against potential legal ramifications. Nevertheless, legal disputes can incur substantial expenses and consume considerable time, presenting substantial barriers to creating disseminating biographical films.

b) Cultural Sensitivities and Taboos

Cultural sensitivities and taboos are frequently addressed in biographical films, particularly when portraying persons from varied cultural backgrounds or marginalised communities. Cinematic practitioners are confronted with addressing matters about representation, authenticity, and cultural appropriation to guarantee that their depiction of individuals upholds their cultural history and identity. The portrayal of religious beliefs, traditional customs, or historical events may give rise to cultural sensitivities, necessitating filmmakers to demonstrate cultural competency and sensitivity in their representation. Furthermore, various cultural contexts may deem some topics or ideas taboo, requiring thoughtful deliberation and engagement with pertinent stakeholders. The absence of consideration for cultural sensitivities and taboos may result in negative consequences such as backlash, criticism, and audience alienation, thus compromising the film's integrity and legitimacy.

c) Handling Public Backlash and Controversies

Biographical films frequently elicit public criticism and generate disputes due to their depiction of controversial or delicate topics. In order to effectively navigate public perception and criticism, filmmakers must foresee and address potential controversies proactively. This may entail actively involving stakeholders, effectively resolving their concerns, and offering contextual information regarding the creative decisions made in the film. Furthermore, filmmakers can utilise various public relations strategies, including disseminating press releases, conducting interviews, and implementing social media campaigns, to influence the narrative surrounding the film and minimise anv adverse publicity. Nevertheless, effectively managing public backlash necessitates meticulous communication, transparency, and a readiness to accept errors and derive lessons from constructive feedback. Inadequate handling of disputes can harm the film's standing, isolate viewers, and endanger its financial prosperity.

IX. Case Studies and Comparative Analysis

Comparative Study of Deification vs. Demonization The examination of deification demonisation in biographical films significantly contributes to understanding how filmmakers influence how audiences perceive real-life characters. Scholars can pinpoint shared motifs, methodologies, and storytelling approaches employed to glorify or demonise subjects by analysing divergent depictions of historical characters in various films. By adopting a comparative perspective, filmmakers can understand how they traverse ethical, moral, and cultural factors while depicting persons on screen. Researchers can identify recurring themes in narrative, character development, and thematic focus by conducting a methodical examination of biographical films that demonstrate different levels of deification and demonisation. This process provides valuable insights into the intricate nature of portraving real-life individuals in the realm of cinema.

b) Analysing Specific Biographical Films

The investigation of particular biographical films offers a comprehensive analysis of how filmmakers effectively negotiate the inherent problems and controversies associated with portraying real-life characters. Researchers can explore the creative decisions, historical precision, and thematic interpretations inherent in each film by directing their attention towards uniaue case studies. This methodology facilitates an in-depth exploration of the political. and societal frameworks encompassing the creation and understanding of biographical films. By employing meticulous textual analysis and contextual interpretation, researchers can unveil intricate layers of meaning, symbolism, and subtext intricately woven into every film. This process enhances our comprehension of the intricate nature of human experience and the portrayal of history.

c) Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Biographical films provide filmmakers, scholars, and spectators with valuable lessons and insights through case studies and comparative analysis. Researchers can uncover optimal methods for ethical, responsible, and culturally sensitive filmmaking by analysing successful and problematic depictions of reallife individuals. The analysis of case studies can provide valuable insights for filmmakers, enabling them to develop biographical narratives that are genuine, captivating, and influential. Furthermore, conducting a comparative study allows for recognising trends, patterns, and recurring themes in creating biographical films, emphasising the need for additional research and investigation. Scholars have the potential to make valuable contributions to the advancement of ethical principles, critical frameworks, and educational techniques in biographical filmmaking through synthesising data derived from case studies and comparative analysis.

Conclusion X.

Recap of Key Findings and Insights

In summary, the analysis of biographical films about the dichotomy between deification and demonisation has unveiled the intricate nature of depicting actual humans in the realm of cinema. In the analysis, have present we examined conceptualisations and attributes of deification and demonisation within the realm of biographical cinema. Additionally, we have delved into the prevalent methodologies and tactics adopted by filmmakers to influence the perceptions of their audience. In addition, we have analysed case studies and instances, offering a valuable understanding of the ethical, moral, and cultural factors that influence the depiction of historical figures in film. By employing a comparative analysis and conducting a thorough evaluation of the text, we have successfully identified recurring patterns, themes, and valuable insights that shed light on the complexities and contentious issues of creating biographical films.

b) Implications for Filmmakers, Audiences, and Society

The findings of this study have substantial ramifications for filmmakers, audiences, and society as a whole. This research highlights the significance of ethical, responsible, and culturally sensitive narrative techniques for filmmakers in depicting real-life characters. This emphasises the necessity of conducting comprehensive research, seeking input, and ensuring transparency in creating biographical films. Additionally, it underscores the significance of actively involving a wide range of opinions and interpretations. This study promotes the active involvement of spectators in critically analysing biographical films, challenging them to critically examine the narratives, representations, and ideologies depicted on the screen. This statement underscores the significance of media literacy in effectively navigating the intricate nature of biographical narratives and comprehending its influence on both individual and collective awareness. This study prompts inquiries on the manner in which biographical films influence historical recollection, cultural affiliation, and public communication within society. This statement highlights the significance of power relations inherent in cinema's portrayal. It emphasises the ethical obligations of filmmakers in influencing the narratives that form our comprehension of historical and contemporary events.

c) Future Directions and Areas for Further Research

There will be multiple opportunities for additional investigation into biographical cinema in the Subsequent research endeavours investigate the influence of technical progress, digital media, and internet platforms on biographical films' creation, dissemination, and reception. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for future research to explore the influence of audience participation, fan cultures, and

social media interaction on the reception and interpretation of biographical tales. Furthermore, it is imperative to conduct comparative research in other cultural settings, analysing the variations in biographical filmmaking across different areas, languages, and historical eras. Moreover, it is crucial to investigate the portrayal of marginalised perspectives, disregarded historical events, and underrepresented communities in biographical films to advance diversity, fairness, and inclusiveness in cinematic narratives. By examining these specific areas of investigation, forthcoming scholarly studies can enhance our comprehension of the intricate nature of biographical filmmaking and its ramifications for individuals, groups, and societies on a alobal scale.

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