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PROFILE

Project Title

The Politics of Gender and Humour within Hollywood Romantic Comedy Films 1989-Present

Supervisor(s)

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Abstract

This thesis investigates comedic moments as sites of gendered power dynamics within Hollywood romantic comedies in the era of so-called postfeminism(s), third- and fourth-wave feminism(s). It furthers a reparative mode of reading present and near-present culture, through romantic comedy films as textual case studies. It reviews feminist film theory, gender theory, and comedy theory, in order to inform both a study of romantic comedies as texts, as well as the discourse around romantic comedy films, and their place as part of a wider Western cultural discourse around gender relations and modern dating practices as a social phenomenon. It examines the interplay of dialogue, sound, image, plot, and the marketing of romantic comedies in reinforcing a film's perceived ideology, with a view to contributing to discussions of performing gender and relationships, and comedy films' involvement therein. Romantic comedies of the late 1980s and early 1990s such as *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) and *Pretty Woman* (1990) mark a turning point in favour of a broadly postfeminist, neoliberal attitude, but this thesis argues that the diversity of cast belies a conservatism of plot and character development. This thesis builds on Butler and Halberstam's rejections of binary gender in order to explore a richer variety of gender and sexual identities found within Hollywood romantic comedies. It uses multi-layered analyses of dialogue, plot, character, and setting to explore the performativity and intersectionality of gender, which combine to produce a holistic understanding of romantic comedy films as part of a wider discourse on sexuality, gender, and dating practices within Western culture. With the rise of contemporary streaming services and the modern viewer's instant access to films intended for an entirely different generation's societal culture, this research seeks to problematise what pleasures, outrages, and insights can be gained by viewing romantic comedy films as historical artefacts, and asks what contemporary romantic comedy writing practices might be documenting about today's relationship culture.

Profile

I am a comedy writer, actor, improviser, and first-year research student. I recently completed the MA Writing for Stage and Broadcast Media course at Central, where I mainly wrote funny little comedy things.

My background is in comedy, where I have written, directed, produced, and performed in numerous shows across the UK, including at the Edinburgh Fringe.

As an improviser, I work a lot in devising shows that blend established culture with innovation and immersive theatre practices, and explore the creative reinterpretation of problematic entertainment from a millennial perspective. Recent projects include *Shaken Not Stirred: The Improvised James Bond Film* and *The Show That Must Not Be Named*.

I also teach acting, devising theatre, improv and public speaking.