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A Gothic Analysis of India Stoker's Character Development in Film Stoker (2013)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the character development in the film Stoker. India Stoker was the leading character in the movie 'Stoker (2013)'. This study focuses on two research questions: how Stoker is portrayed in the film and how the transformation of India Stoker develops in the film. In analyzing the data, the portrayal of characters using the theory of nine ways proposed by MJ Murphy and the theory of Character development through the plot using the theory of structuralism by Seymour Chatman was used to identify character development in the film Stoker. This study uses descriptive qualitative methods. This research data is in the form of dialogue and scenes from the transcript of the film Stoker.

The source of data in this study is Stoker's Film. This study showed that India Stoker experienced character development from an innocent, isolated, and quiet character at the beginning of the plot. At the end of the story, the character undergoes transformation and development into a confident, independent, and psychopathic tendencies character. The conclusion of this study is that India Stoker, as the leading character, experiences character development along the plot of the film, but India Stoker's development is a negative character development. India Stoker decided to find her own identity and become a confident, Independent, and psychopath character.

Keyword: Character Development, Character, Plot, Structuralism, Film

1. Introduction

Literature is writing that resembles and copies human life, human behaviour, and human social life. Because literature describes how humans interact and react in real life, many authors use humans as objects. As Wellek and Warren (1949) state, some literary critics believe written or spoken works are products of human creativity. When we argue about literature, we assume that there is no end to the topics we can discuss. Many life lessons are available. Literature is a textual event or speech act that encourages a certain kind of extension; it is also the result of certain norms and types of extension (Culler, 1997).

In literature, character development is one of the key elements that determine the quality and attractiveness of a work. Character development describes how a character undergoes psychological, emotional, and moral changes as the storyline progresses. A narrative can provide depth of meaning through the development of complex characters, establish emotional attachment with the audience, and display internal and external conflicts that support the story's central theme.

Characters play a very important role in literature. They are not only the life of the story but also the messengers and the means for the reader to feel involved in the fictional world created. By analyzing these

characters, we can better understand the meanings and values hidden in a literary work. Characterism literary works refer to the characters involved in the story. They have traits, motivations, and goals that influence the story's plot. Literary characters can be people, animals, supernatural beings, or even inanimate things given human characteristics.

Oatley (2022) emphasizes that characters are essential in literature because they become a "lens" for the reader to understand and interact with the story and message. As noted by Alwi and Irwandi (2019), the main or leading character plays a key role in developing and presentation the central theme and message of the story. The main character also undertakes significant personal growth and development, providing readers with into human condition and the complexities of life(Gunayasa et al., 2023)."

In character analysis, one of the theories used as a basis for understanding is the theory of nine ways of describing character by M. J. Murphy (1972). This theory explains nine essential aspects in describing characters, namely physical appearance, direct speech from the author, descriptions of other characters, conversations that describe characters by other characters, the characters speech, the characters past lives, tought the character has, the attitude displayed by the character, reaction characters towards various events or situation.

India Stoker is portrayed through various narrative and cinematic elements that align with the theory of nine ways of describing characters, according to M.J. Murphy (1972). Her dark and mysterious physical appearance, brief but meaningful dialogue, relationships with other characters such as her mother and uncle, and her emotional responses to various events she experiences all play an essential role in shaping and animating the character of India Stoker.

The characters in the film did not escape the changes in their behavior and nature. The development of storyline and characters can bring significant changes to the roles they play. As the character develops, certain aspects undergo constant transformations, such as personal changes or learning to adapt to life. The main goal of character development is to create a more immersive, realistic, and engaging character for the reader or audience. In this process, characters can be faced with challenges, overcome their weaknesses or fears, learn from experiences, and change their views or attitudes towards the world(McCaffrey, 2008). The end goal is to give dimension and complexity to the characters so that the audience can feel the attachment and engage in the emotional journey presented by the film (Tseng et al., 2018).

Character development is essential in a story or movie because it can make the story more meaningful, enrich the plot, create opportunities for conflict and growth, and increase realism and contentedness with the audience. Analyzing the characterization or development of a character in a literary work, film, or television series helps us understand how a character changes or develops along with the storyline (McCaffrey, 2008).

This study is different from previous related studies that have been discussed. This study specifically focuses on the analysis of the leading character's development, India Stoker, by using the theory of characterization by M.J. Murphy and the theory of structuralism by Seymour Chatman. While the previous study cited more generally discusses narrative structure and overall character development, without a deep focus on the character development process or the development's negative nature. This Thesis integrates two theoretical approaches simultaneously, namely characterization theory and structuralism theory, to provide a portrayal of the India Stoker and character development process through the plot. This study specifically examines the development of India Stoker from innocent to psychopathic aspects and focuses on the negative aspects of those changes. Previous studies have addressed character development in general without highlighting the negative nature of the process. The use of data from dialogue and film scenes, as well as direct and qualitative descriptive analysis, provides a more concrete and empirical picture of the character development process in the film. The finding that India's development is negative and complex adds new insight into character studies in Hollywood films oriented towards dark and ambiguous character development, which is not commonly discussed in depth in previous studies.

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the character development of India Stoker in the film Stoker (2013) through the application of M.J. Murphy's theory of characterization and Seymour Chatman's structuralism theory. This research aims to identify how India's transformation from an innocent and isolated girl into a confident yet psychopathic individual is represented through the film's narrative structure and cinematic elements. Specifically, this study focuses on three main objectives: to describe the stages of India Stoker's character development as depicted in the film, including the exposition, awakening, and resolution phases; to analyze how narrative progression and plot structure influence India Stoker's transformation throughout the story; and to interpret the psychological and moral implications of India's negative development as a representation of Gothic character evolution in modern cinema. Through these objectives, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of character transformation within the Gothic

framework and contribute to literary and film studies by highlighting the complexity of human nature and the duality between innocence and darkness.

In this study, researchers used the theory of characterization by MJ Murphy to analyze how the leading character is portrayed in the movie 'Stoker.' In addition to MJ Murphy's characterization theory, this study uses Chatman's theory of structuralism to discuss the development of leading characters through the plot and storytelling throughout the film 'Stoker.

2. Method

This research analyzes the words, sentences, and narratives in the Stoker movie, which is the primary data source used in the research. The research process involved several stages: watching the movie, listening carefully, recording observations, and collecting relevant data. These stages were carried out to outline how the characters are portrayed and how is the development of the character of India Stoker as the main character shown in the film Stoker.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Character Analysis of India Stoker

To analyze how the main character is portrayed in this film, the researcher will use the nine ways of character portrayal by MJ Murphy (1972) to analyze how the character of India Stoker is portrayed in the film Stoker (2013).

3.1.1 Physical Appearance of the Character

India Stoker is described as having long, straight black hair, usually naturally loose. Her black hair strongly contrasts her pale skin, giving off an aura of mystery and elegance. Her hairstyle is simple and well-groomed, reflecting her introverted and organized personality.

India has an oval-shaped face with a delicate yet firm jawline. Her facial features are symmetrical and classic, emphasizing calmness and firmness. Her skin is very pale, which gives her the impression of being cold and isolated from the world around her. The paleness of India skin can also be interpreted as a symbol of emotional isolation or detachment. India eyes are one of the most prominent features. The eyes are almond-shaped ,with grey irises, which gives the impression of being sharp and intense. The gaze is often blank or cold, reflecting a hidden depth of emotion and analytical intelligence. Indian eyes are also frequently used in movies to symbolism introspection and observation of one's surroundings.

India has an upright and graceful posture, indicating a respectable and educated family background. Her calm and controlled posture reflects her quiet but calculating personality. India often wears simple yet elegant clothing, reflecting a classic and conservative style. Her costume usually consists of a long shirt and skirt, a dark knee-length dress, high socks, and black Mary Jane shoes, which are her trademark. The colour of her clothes are dominated by dark shades such as black, grey, and white, which emphasize her mysterious and serious aura. Her neat dressing style also reflects strong self-control and disinterest in materialistic things. India's facial expressions are flat and difficult to read, creating a cold and isolated impression. India rarely smiles or shows excessive emotion;she always looks calm in all conditions, emphasizing her introverted and mysterious personality.

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3.1.2 Direct Speech From the Author

In Stoker (2013), narration and dialogue are often used to provide insight into India Stoker's character. Although the film does not always use direct narration from the author, some of India's dialogue and internal monologues can be interpreted as the author's way of conveying his views on India Stoker's character.

India Stoker : "Just as a flower does not choose its color, we are not responsible for what we have come to be. Only once you realize this do you become free, and to become adult is to become free." (Dialogue 1:36:55-1:37:10)

India delivers this monologue in the movie's opening scene when India is walking in the meadow. Through this monologue, the author establishes the movie's central themes of growth, identity and self-acceptance. The monologue reflects the author's view that humans cannot choose their destiny or legacy but have the power to decide how to respond and grow from the situation. The monologue portrays India as a reflective and introverted character who is in the process of understanding herself and the world around her.

3.1.3   Description From the Other Characters

By analyzing the descriptions from the other characters, we can see that India Stoker is a complex character with a reflective, introverted, and secretive personality. These descriptions reinforce India's image as a unique teenage character who is in the process of understanding and trying to accept herself and the world around her.

The conversation between India and Evelyn after India's father's funeral and all the guests gathered at her house. Evelyn wants to introduce India to Charlie Stoker (India's father's younger brother)

(Dialogue 1:30:33-1:30:37)

Evelyn : "She hates to be touched. I'm her mother. What a curse,hm?"

This dialogue takes place in the tense atmosphere following the death of India's father. Evelyn describes India as introverted and has strong boundaries against physical interaction. This reflects India's independent and defensive nature in response to an unstable family environment. Her dislike of physical touch can be interpreted as a metaphor for her dislike of emotional intimacy or openness, which an unhealthy family dynamic may have caused.

Evelyn expresses her frustration as a mother who feels alienated from her child. The word "curse" suggests that Evelyn sees her relationship with India as bad and unchangeable. This dialogue also shows that India feels isolated in her family, which affects the development of her introverted and introspective personality.

3.1.4   Conversation That Describe the Character by the Others

Evelyn talked to Charlie about India. (Dialogue 10:32 - 11:39)

Evelyn : "Richard loved India, He would never have driven so far away on her birthday. Not unless for some reason. He was called away by some he couldn't say no to. Auntie Gin wanted to speak to me about you, but she never did comeback after that night, did she?."

Charlie : "People disappear all the time."

Evelyn : "Have me instead, but stay away from my daughter."

Charlie : "She's of age"

Evelyn : "Of age for what"

Charlie : "To live in this house on her own, while her mother travels the world. Don't you want to speak french in France.

Based on the dialogue above, it shows that India is described as an 18-yearold teenager in the midst of tension between her mother (Evelyn) and her uncle (Charlie). India is portrayed as a naive and mysterious figure who deals with her complex family dynamics after her father dies. India is very dear to her father (Richard). This reveals how India and her father were two very close people. India loved her father very

much and felt a significant loss when he died on her birthday. This dialogue also shows how India is central to the conflict between India and Charlie. Charlie's remark, "She's of age," reveals Charlie's hidden intention to get close to India, who is his niece. This reflects Charlie's sinister motive to manipulate and take India with him, but Evelyn tries to protect India. Charlie's presence triggers the development of India's personality in a bad direction or psychopathic tendencies.

3.1.5 The Character Speech

This analysis will discuss the dialogues and scenes where India Stoker speaks directly, depicting her own character. (Dialogue 1:37:29-1:37:51)

India : "My ears hear what other cannot hear. Small faraway things people cannot normally see are visible to me. These sense are the fruits of a lifetime of longing, longing to be rescued, to be completed. Just as the skirt needs the wind to billow, I am not formed by things that are of myself alone."

From the monologue excerpts of India Stoker in the film Stoker (2013), researcher can analyze that India is portrayed as a character with extraordinary sensitivity to her environment. Her statement about her hearing ability, catching sounds that others cannot hear, and vision ability to small and distant things show that she has a sharper perception than most people. This can be interpreted as a metaphor for her intuition or high emotional sensitivity.

3.1.6 Past Life

(Dialogue 38:18-36:34)

Evelyn : "You and your father were always on your hunting trips, how could I complete with all of does dead birds you constantly brought home?"

India : "I saw you in the dining room today."

Evelyn : "I don't know what you think saw…But, nothing happened. You were so still, I never even heard you there"

India : "Dad taught me that. Hunting, to wait in silence. We wouldn't need food and drink. We would watch everything. The patterns of tree branches spreading out the thousands shapes clouds make. I could count the number of leaves on a tree in five hours. I always thought dad like hunting. But, tonight I realized he did it for me. He used to say, "Sometimes you need to do something bad to stop you from doing something worse.""

Based on the dialogue above, the relationship between India Stoker and her father (Richard) is very close. Richard loves and protect India. India and her father often go hunting together. Richard uses hunting to teach India about patience, observation, and calmness. She spends a lot of time hunting with her father, which makes her mother, Evelyn, feel left out. This indicates that India is more attached to her father figure than her mother, which may be because they share a deeper emotional and philosophical experience.

The statement "Sometimes you need to do something bad to stop you from doing something worse" has a deeper meaning in India's character development. These words hint that her father was aware of the dark side of India and wanted to steer her away from doing something more terrible in the future. This philosophy then plays a role in how India interacts with the world after her father's death.

3.1.7 Thoughts that the Character Has

(Dialogue 46:33-47:31)

India : "Have you ever seen a photograph of yourself, taken when you didn't know you're being photographed? From an angle you don't get to see, when you look in the mirror, and you think, 'That's me. That's also me". Do you know what I'm talking about?."

Whip : "Yeah, I think I do"

India : "Well, that's how I feel tonight"

Whip : "So you're surprised at yourself?, you're not afraid of being touched anymore?"

India : "Please, don't spoil it"

Based on the dialogue above reveals that India has a high degree of self-awareness but also confusion about who she is. This is an important step in her emotional journey. India begins who she is. This is an important step in her emotional journey. India begins to realize that she is not just the person she sees in the mirror everyday, but also has a darker or unexpected side. India slowly experienced significant changes in herself. Initially, India was describe as very sensitive to touch and physical interaction, reflecting her fear and discomfort with her surroundings. This change shows that India beginning to overcome her fears and accept new aspects of herself.

3.1.8 The Attitudes displayed by the character

Figure 1. Attitudes displayed by the character

From the movie's beginning, India is portrayed as a quite teenager who doesn't speak much or show much expression and prefers to observe rather than interact with others. India has an incredibly sharpness sense of observation, as seen in the way she pays attention to her surroundings in detail. India is also very reflective, often contemplating her feelings and how she relates to the world around her. Based on the picture above, India's facial expressions show how indifference and disinterest in the people around her. India often shows a calm and controlled facial expression, even in tense or emotional situations. Based on picture above, India's attitude in the picture shows that India feels alienated and does not want to connect with others. She prefers to isolated herself, which reflects an introverted personality. India prefers to be alone rather than join with others.

3.1.9 The Attitudes displayed by the character

Figure 2. Attitudes displayed by the character

One scene has India watching Uncle Charlie kill Whip, India classmate. India's Reaction to this scene is very complex and illustrates the development of her dark and dangerous personality.

Figure 3. Attitudes displayed by the character

India showed no fear or shock at watching the murder. Instead, she appeared calm and even seemed fascinated by Charlie's actions. This reaction suggest that India has dark psychological tendencies or psychopathic tendencies. India was not disturb by the violence she saw, which reflects that she may have had a hidden dark side from beginning. It also shows that India began to respond to violence in an unusual way, which may have been influenced by her closeness to Charlie.

3.2   Character Development of India Stoker

India Stoker's character development in Stoker (2013) reflects a psychological and moral transformation that gradually unfolds through the film. Using Seymour Chatman's structuralist theory, this study examines how the film's narrative structure and plot progression shape India's evolution from an innocent, isolated girl into a confident and psychopathic young woman.

India's development can be divided into three major stages namely exposition, awakening, and resolution, each portraying significant changes in her personality and behavior.

3.2.1   Exposition-From Innocent to Confident

At the beginning of the film, India is depicted as a quiet, introverted, and emotionally distant teenager. Her father's death on her birthday leaves a deep psychological scar, intensifying her sense of loneliness. India's early scene show her as a submissive and obedient daughter who spends most of her time in silence and isolation. She avoids social interaction, finds comfort in solitude, and maintains a reserved attitude towards others.

However, the arrival of her uncle, Charlie, marks the beginning of her transformation. Charlie's charm and mysterious personality awaken India curiosity and hidden emotions. He becomes a mirror that a reflects the suppressed desires and dark instincts within her. Through their interaction, India begins to break away from her innocence and gradually gains confidence. She starts to challenge authority, especially her mother, and demonstrates independence in her decision.

In this phase, India's character shows early signs of internal conflict, torn between moral awareness and the temptation of power. Her newfound confidence symbolize her first step toward self-realization, though it is driven by dark fascination rather than positive growth.

3.2.2   Awakening the Darkside- From Isolated to Independent

As the story progresses, India relationship with Charlie becomes the catalyst for her psychological awakening. Charlie introduces her to violence and manipulation, reshaping her perception of control and strength. India begins to understand that power lies in embracing one's inner darkness rather than suppressing it.

This stage of development reflects the structural movement from rising action to climax in Chatman's narrative theory. The tension between India's moral conscience and her emerging cruelty reaches its speak. Scenes depicting her silent observation of Charlie's murders reveal nor fear, but fascination, suggesting her transformation into an emotionally detached individual.

Through these experiences, India learns to detach herself from conventional morality. Her isolation no longer stems from weakness but becomes a deliberate choice, a symbol of independence and dominance. The Gothic atmosphere reinforces this transformation, as India's psychological detachment mirrors the dark and decaying spaces surrounding her.

3.2.3   Resolution- Quite become Psychopathic

In the resolution, India transformation culminates as she fully embraces her darker nature. The killing of her uncle becomes a symbolic act of liberation. She inherits his violent tendencies while freeing herself from his control. This paradoxical act of violence represents both empowerment and moral decay.

By the end of the film, India is no longer the innocent girl who sought affection and understanding. She becomes self-sufficient, fearless, and disturbingly calm. Her final demeanor, emotionless and composed, signifies her acceptance of her identity as both victim and predator.

According to Chatman's framework, this transformation demonstrates a complete character arc shaped by narrative progression and psychological tension. India's Journey from innocence to psychopathy is not portrayed as a moral failure, but as a reflection of human complexity within Gothic fiction, where identity and monstrosity coexist within the same self.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Stoker (2013) using M.J.Murphy's characterization theory and Seymour Chatman's structuralist approach, the study concludes that India Stoker undergoes a significant and complex character development throughout the film. Initially portrayed as an innocent, isolated, and introverted teenager, India transforms into a confident, Independent young woman, with psychopathic tendencies.

This development is influences by her traumatic experiences, including the death of her father, a dysfunctional relationship with her mother, and the manipulative presence of her uncle, Charlie. These factors awaken the darker side of India's personality, which had been repressed during her earlier years. Through the narrative structure and plot progression, it becomes evident that India is a dynamic character whose transformation align with the thematic elements of Gothic Literature, particularly themes of psychological trauma, familial distortion, emotional repression, and moral ambiguity.

The portrayal of India's character also reflects core aspects of the Gothic heroine in a modern setting: emotionally suppressed, spiritually detached, and shaped by her environment into someone capable of embracing violence and control. Her journey is not towards redemption or clarity, but rather toward the acknowledgment and acceptance of her dark identity.

Thus, the film Stoker presents a rare example of negative character development, where the protagonist's growth is not towards goodness but towards a more sinister self-awareness.

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