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What makes a good man? An Irigarayan analysis of male-female relationships in Lopes-Curval's *Toi et moi*

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Summary

- Research consisted of a close reading of Julie Lopes-Curval's *Toi et moi* (2006) using Luce Irigaray's ideas for developing healthy male-female relationships.
- *Toi et moi* provides a productive example of how Irigaray's ideas may be applied to film as each of the two female protagonists experiences an unhealthy followed by a healthy relationship. The healthy relationships lead to better outcomes for the women.
- The research is useful to scriptwriters as well as teachers and students of gender communication and film.

Introduction

- *Toi et moi* shows how respectful and supportive male behaviour toward a woman can lead to the development of a healthy relationship.
- In the film, each of the protagonists, Lena (Marion Cotillard) and Ariane (Julie Depardieu), experiences an unhealthy followed by a healthy relationship.
- The unhealthy relationship is hierarchical as the woman's subjectivity is not considered by the man.
- In contrast, the healthy relationship is egalitarian as the man shows respect for the woman by listening to her and supporting her development. After leaving the unhealthy relationships, both women take positive directions to grow as individuals.
- Irigaray's ideas were applied to the film as her entire corpus of work is oriented toward helping to develop a feminine culture that is different to men's but equally valued. Film is one avenue through which a feminine culture can be developed. Irigaray does not have all the answers for improving women's lives, but is viewed as a theorist of change (Whitford, 1991).

Irigaray's ideas for healthy male-female relationships

- Irigaray is a French psychoanalytical feminist whose ideas have been applied to film by other writers (e.g. Bolton, 2011; Bainbridge, 2008).

- Irigaray's ideas provide rich symbolism for women's films and are therefore a useful foundation for describing and evaluating any male-female relationships represented within such films (Bolton, 2011).

Four key ideas were distilled from Irigaray's work:

1. For desire to remain, the man and woman must remain two and neither must appropriate the other or allow appropriation of themselves
2. Each partner must be able to "self-affect"
3. The relationship between the man and woman must be reciprocal
4. Both the man and the woman must be special for one another

Research method

- The method was a close reading of male and female relational behaviors in *Toi et moi* using Irigaray's ideas.
- Characters, plot, dialogue, settings and visuals were all examined.
- The interpretations are my own and offer a point of departure for other researchers..

Ariane's relationships

Ariane and Farid

- This relationship violates all Irigaray's ideas for a healthy coupling.
- Farid shows little desire to maintain a relationship with Ariane. According to Irigaray's ideas, His loss of desire for Ariane occurred because he appropriated her, which she allowed him to do.

Ariane and Pablo

- Pablo follows all Irigaray's ideas for developing a healthy relationship with a woman.

- Pablo never tries to appropriate Ariane. Also, he has self-affection and helps Ariane to cultivate her own self-affection. In every meeting, the two engage in dialogue, and Ariane's specialness for him allows him to become special for her.

Lena's relationships

Lena and Francois

- This couple also violates all Irigaray's ideas for developing and maintaining a healthy relationship.
- Lena and Francois demonstrate that they have no self-affection. As Irigaray said, every person should develop self-affection before entering a relationship.
- Their relationship is not reciprocal as they are unable to engage in dialogue, and he does not help her with anything.

Lena and Mark

- When Lena and Mark meet, their eye contact indicates their attraction to one another. Mark shows that he has self-affection, but Lena does not yet have any.
- Mark is attractive to Lena because she finally meets a man who can express his emotions and who engages her in dialogue, compliments her, helps her to develop, and shows her that she is special for him.

Conclusions

Toi et moi provides a helpful example of how Irigaray's ideas can be represented in film. Pablo's behavior toward Ariane and Mark's toward Lena demonstrate that satisfying relationships can be cultivated through respectful male behavior.

References

Bainbridge, C. (2008). *A feminine cinematics: Luce Irigaray, women, and film*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
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