The Color Trilogy Of Little Buddha Essay, Research Paper

The Color Trilogy of Little Buddha

In movies, directors will use any device to convey their message. They may use lighting, dialogue, costumes, certain styles of cinematography, or setting choices to guide the audience in a certain direction to understand the meaning behind the film. Bernardo Bertolucci s Little Buddha is a good example of where a director used color symbolism to convey a message to the audience. Bertolucci uses color in every aspect of the film to foreshadow the events that happen later in the movie. This foreshadowing allows the audience to understand the message in a clearer way. Bertolucci s message is that in today s society, the self and the other must become one. If this is reached, than each individual in that society will become enlightened in there own way and thus lead to a better society and a greater sense of humanity.

The film Little Buddha is a film that uses the Tibetan Buddhist monks to be the conveyers of the message. The monks are in search of Lama Dorje, who was a great teacher in the Buddhist religion. They believe that the reincarnation of their late Lama, might be a western boy, Jesse. Since Jesse, his family, and the western audience are unfamiliar with the story of Prince Siddhartha and the Buddhist religion, Bertolucci s uses the monks to tell the story and give hints to the final message of the film. Then the audience finds out there is two more candidates for the reincarnation, so Bertolucci sends Jesse and his father, Dean, along with the monks to interview the other children. Through the process of the interviews and traveling, the rest of the story of Siddhartha is told and the children have all become friends and almost one person. The film ends in Bhutan where the children are told who is the reincarnation of Lama Dorje, and where the final message is conveyed to the father, the three children and the audience.

The major color symbolism throughout the movie is the weaving together of the primary colors of red, green, and blue. In general, combinations of these three colors can make any other color in the color spectrum. Bertolucci uses these colors as dominates in the film. A quick example is that most of the footage of Seattle is shoot with a blue tint, where as Katmandu is primarily red and India is green. This would suggest that in the end of the film, these three cities must come together somehow to view the world in all its color and truth.

The way the story goes, Jesse is the little boy from Seattle. He is the first candidate for the reincarnation of Lama Dorje. He is surrounded by the color blue. Seattle is blue, Jesse s jacket is blue, and his shirts are blue. Jesse is from one part of the world and one culture that most of the audience can relate to. Jesse would represent the self to the audience.

Raju, the boy from Katmandu is the first child that is introduced besides Jesse. He is surrounded by the color red. Katmandu is red, the boy s skin is a reddish brown, and his clothes have primarily a reddish tint. Raju is a representative of the other in society. He is different from Jesse, in that he comes from another culture and has a different set of beliefs. However, he is closer to Jesse than the third child. Raju symbolizes the other in society that is similar to the self, but a little different. This is shown in the movie by the scene in which the gameboy, a device associated with the western child, is played.

Gita, the girl from India is the last child to be considered for the reincarnation. She is surrounded in a setting that is primarily green. The trees all around her, the garden, her house and her clothes are dominated by green tints. Gita is also representative of the other in society. She is from another culture and another set of beliefs. However, she is symbolic of the other that is very different from the self. She doesn t relate to Jesse or even to Raju for the most part in any way. She automatically confirms her choice for the reincarnation by saying to the two boys, You don t go to school and you are a foreigner. She is the other that disassociates from the society that is different from her.

Bertolucci set the stage where the three primary colors come together to show the true image and the true color of life. Through the story of Siddhartha, the colors are all there. The blues, the reds, and the greens are all prominent. This would suggest that by the three colors coming together that a sense of returning to the time of Siddhatha and his quest for enlightenment, understanding, and compassion could be reached. Bertolucci has the Siddhatha story come to an end with all the children present, so that after the story is done and the children begin to understand the message of compassion and becoming one with the self and the other, the film can be shown with all three colors together. After the story is complete, the green of the tree is seen with the red of the earth and the blue of the sky. This represents the idea of opening of the cultural/color blinders humans have that block cultures/colors out and by seeing them all and thus seeing the truth of humanity and society.

The combination of these colors is reinforced when the children travel to Bhutan for the final decision. The children are all wearing clothes that symbolize where they come from using the color of fabric. Also, the final decision is made and the idea of three reincarnations of the same Lama becomes a reality. By combining the three children/colors, Lama Dorje is found in all aspects of life. Raju represents Lama Dorje s body. Gita represents Lama Dorje s speech. Jesse is the reincarnation of Lama Dorje s mind. These three things combine a person and develop a self.

The end of the movie shows one more time where Bertolucci uses the idea of the trilogy of colors and life to reinforce his message. When the children are dispersing the ashes of their finder, they chose methods that represent all three aspects of life. Gita disperses the ashes over the ground, earth. Raju disperses the ashes by air, using three balloons of the three primary colors. Jesse disperses the ashes by water. These three symbols of life show again the three parts of life.

Bertolucci uses the three colors to symbolize a few things, but most importantly they symbolize life. Life is full of color and for a human to see the truth of life, they must see all the colors. Not just the colors of Seattle, Katmandu, or India, but the colors of the world, the colors of the earth, the air and the water. The colors of the people must be seen too. Colors are symbols of differences. Differences between the self and the other. Bertolucci uses the color symbolism to show that an individual, a society and the world must see the truth of this world in order for there to be peace, compassion, and happiness.

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