Cinematic Imagination of Cyborgian Mise-en-Scène: Titus Thotawatte's Anthology Film Thevatha (1970) Through Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory

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Abstract

This study examines the Sri Lankan anthology film *Thevatha* (1970) by the Sri Lankan filmmaker and film editor Titus Thotawatte (1927-2011) that comprises three short films: 'Picture Pissa', 'Gilihunu Mal', and'Ahala Pahala'. Thotawatte collages a different aesthetic through accelerated montage, rapid cuts, and a deliberate juxtaposition of aesthetic registers from Silent cinema to Western generic tropes and Sinhala literature. This paper argues that the film's formal techniques, including its visual distortions, pastiche of Western genres, and even its song sequences ('Dekkama Okkoma' and 'Gama Sathutin Awadi Wuna'), visualize a cyborg. This research theorizes Thotawatte's cinematic chaos using feminist theorist Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg (1985). This concept refers to post-gender expressions of resistance against established borders and dualisms, such as human/animal, organism/technological, physical/non-physical, etc. This study is a qualitative film-analysis. It engages in a close textual analysis of Mise-en-scène, style of editing, work of sonicscape, and functionality of collage incorporating pastiche, literature, and film history. For example: sequences such as the beginning of the 'Picture Pissa', show how Nilame's character immerses into the film-theatre-screen and the hero of the cowboy film, The superimpositions show the character's subjectivity: for example, the sequence during the zoom-in to Nilame's character with cowboy costume in the beginning of the Dekkama Okkoma song functions as an early French impressionist film-device and pastiche in using montage made incorporating cowboy film footages, usage of Dziga Vertov's Kino-eye and French impressionists' photogenie technique in the sequences such as how the massive world of bungalow including its gate, dogs and surreal appearance of wall-decoration made by lobster perceived in a fresh way by Silindu the little boy and how that sequence gives fresh perception to viewers in a destructive way are precisely a "cyborg writing" – a retelling stories (silent cinema, western generic tropes, literature) that reverses and displaces hierarchical dualisms/ logic of binaries (Haraway, 1991, p.251). In conclusion, Thevatha's boundary blurring willy, unfaithful, and illegitimate mise-en-scène enacts cyborgian organism that collapses boundaries/ binaries instances like between Silindu's eye, filmmaker's eye and viewer's eye including its cinematic-apparatus world; Nilame's subjectivity and retelling stories (Haraway, 1991).

Keywords*: Cyborg, Haraway, Boundaries, Silent Cinema, Pastiche, Sri Lankan Cinema*