

A Thematic Analysis of Narrative Elements and Technical Aspect in “*Blood Flower*” (2023) Based on Film Reviews

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a thematic analysis of the narrative elements and technical aspects of the film *Harum Malam* or “*Blood Flower*” (2023) directed by Dain Said, based on reviews written by various critics. The analysis aims to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the film's narrative elements and technical aspects. A qualitative approach is employed, using thematic analysis with a coding system to categorize the narrative elements mentioned in the reviews. A total of 26 reviews were collected from various online sources. The study finds that reviewers have offered a range of insights into the film's narrative and technical aspects. According to the reviews, the film's premise and themes are unique and engaging. Technical aspects such as visual effects (VFX) and sound design are also praised. However, the film exhibits notable weaknesses in narrative elements, such as character development and plot structure, which impact the overall storytelling. The thematic analysis based on these reviews provides a more objective understanding of the narrative elements in “*Blood Flower*” and offers guidance for filmmakers aiming to create improved films in the future.

Keywords: thematic analysis, narrative elements, reviews, technical aspect, film, *Blood Flower*

INTRODUCTION

Film analysis serves as a convergence factor for numerous disciplines, allowing a profound exploration of how films bring narratives and have an impact on audiences. Fundamentally, there are various elements that shape a film's narrative, including the premise and theme, the characters, how the plot develops, the setting and time where the story takes place, the perspective from which it is told, and the symbolism used throughout. Additionally, the position of technical issue cannot be omitted, as they contribute substantially to the narrative elements. These components synergize to craft a coherent narrative that captivates viewers. Understanding those factors is imperative for unravelling a film's storyline and discerning their collective impact on enriching the storytelling, consequently enhancing the film's attraction and engagement for audiences.

In this study, we adopt a rigorous thematic analysis of the narrative elements within the film “*Blood Flower*” (2023) directed by Dain Said, a fascinating cinematic work for its compelling storytelling and thought-provoking subject matters. Through an analysis of film reviews, we seek to uncover the perspectives and interpretations of esteemed critics regarding the narrative elements and technical aspects. By addressing the gaps and limitations in the existing literature, this study aims to make valuable contributions to the field of film analysis and thematic studies. By employing open coding, we identify and categorize various aspects such as premise, theme, characters, plot structure, setting, point of view, symbols, narrative coherence, and technical issues discussed in the film reviews, ensuring a thorough evaluation of “*Blood Flower*”. Through an evaluation of the film's strengths and weaknesses as perceived by critics, this study adds valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on cinematic storytelling.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to critically examine how the narrative and technical elements of the Malaysian horror film *Harum Malam (Blood Flower, 2023)* are interpreted by film critics through the lens of published reviews. Specifically, the research aims to address the lack of structured thematic analysis based on critic responses within Malaysian cinema studies, particularly in relation to horror genre films.

To address this gap, the study employs open coding as a methodological tool to systematically extract and categorize recurring elements such as premise, theme, character development, plot structure, setting, point of view, symbolism, narrative coherence, and technical execution. This method allows for a more grounded, pattern-oriented analysis of how critical discourse engages with cinematic storytelling.

Furthermore, the study contributes to existing literature by offering a hybrid analytical framework that merges the methodological rigor of social sciences with interpretive insights from film theory. In doing so, it provides both an academic and practical reference for scholars, critics, and filmmakers seeking to understand the reception of local genre films, especially within the globalising context of Southeast Asian horror cinema.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to foundational contributions by Bordwell and Thompson (2019) in “Film Art: An Introduction,” the exploration of narrative elements in film studies has been extensive, with a focal emphasis on various components such as premise, theme, characters, plot structure, setting, point of view, symbols, narrative coherence, and technical aspects. Their seminal work not only establishes a substantial framework for understanding narrative structure, visual style, and editing techniques but also guides the analytical approach to comprehending how filmmakers craft compelling stories.

Cutting's (2016) research on narrative theory and popular movies, however, offers a complementary perspective. Cutting's studies on shot durations, noncut transition frequency, motion, and luminance align with the four-act narrative theory proposed by Thompson and Bordwell. Despite this alignment, Carmona's (2017) perspective emphasizes the divergence between filmmakers' intentions and audience interpretations, highlighting the completion of a film narrative through audience experience. In contrast to the broader exploration of narrative elements, scholars like Mulvey (1975) delve specifically into character analysis, focusing on the nuanced representation of gender and the influential role characters play in shaping spectatorship. Similarly, Barthes (1977) expands the analysis into the realm of symbolism and semiotics, exploring encoded meanings within films through visual and auditory elements.

Propp's (1968) structural analysis of characters and Todorov's (1975) introduction of the equilibrium-disruption-restoration model further enrich the understanding of character and plot development in films. These perspectives complement Wang et al.'s (2007) unique approach in "Film Narrative Exploration Through the Analysis of Aesthetic Elements," which utilizes aesthetic components to extract high-level narrative structures in films. This methodological expansion broadens comprehension of narrative elements and their collective contribution to the overall structure of a film.

Enyindah (2022) emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between film aesthetics and narratives in shaping a film's meaning. Shakeri (2016) extends this exploration into interactive films, proposing a novel narrative structural model and delving into the aesthetics of narrative elements. These comparative analyses underscore the multifaceted nature of narrative exploration in film studies, highlighting diverse perspectives that contribute to this evolving field.

While past research has contributed richly to our understanding of narrative structure, symbolism, and aesthetic interpretation within film texts, there remains a gap in applying these frameworks specifically to audience-based interpretations derived from film reviews particularly within Malaysian cinema. Existing literature often treats thematic analysis from a textual or symbolic angle rooted in humanities, rather than using a structured coding system adapted from social science research. This study addresses that gap by integrating thematic analysis à la Braun and Clarke (2006), applying it to critics' interpretations of *Harum Malam* to examine both narrative and technical elements. Film reviews are treated as interpretive texts that reflect decoding practices (Hall, 1980), enabling the extraction of thematic patterns across narrative structure and cinematic technique. This approach bridges the divide between formal film theory and audience reception, providing a more comprehensive analytical model.

Despite the richness of existing narrative frameworks, most studies remain within humanities-based methodologies and rarely apply structured thematic analysis derived from the social sciences to interpret critics' perspectives. This study bridges that gap by offering a methodological contribution: adapting Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model to analyze published film reviews of *Harum Malam*. In doing so, it positions reviews not merely as opinion pieces, but as critical decoding sites that reflect broader cultural, ideological, and technical considerations embedded within cinematic storytelling.

Furthermore, while previous studies tend to prioritize narrative content or symbolic meaning alone, this study expands the lens to incorporate underexplored technical dimensions such as sound design, mise-en-scène, and editing as perceived by critics. These aspects are systematically coded and analyzed in conjunction with narrative elements, thus reinforcing the dual emphasis of this research which is to investigate how both story and style contribute to the reception and interpretation of Malaysian horror cinema.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The rise of Malaysian horror films to global prominence, exemplified by the inclusion of "*Blood Flower*" on Shudder, stands as a remarkable milestone for the industry. The film's prestigious 'Best Film' award at the 2023 Fright Nights Horrortant Film Festival adds further distinction to this achievement. However, this success is accompanied by a complex reception in critical circles. Despite accolades, the film has generated a diverse array of critiques and reviews from various quarters. This research is significant as it navigates the intricate terrain of film criticism, providing valuable insights into the reception and interpretation of "*Blood Flower*". The examination of critiques not only enhances academic dialogues on Malaysian horror cinema

but also holds practical implications for filmmakers and storytellers aiming to understand audience responses and refine their storytelling prowess.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, using thematic analysis to investigate the narrative elements and technical aspects of the film "*Blood Flower*" through the lens of film reviews. Thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), offers a flexible and systematic means of identifying patterns and recurring themes in qualitative data. Although traditionally rooted in the social sciences, this study adapts Braun and Clarke's methodology to fit within the interpretive frameworks of film studies (Nowell et al., 2017).

This interdisciplinary adaptation is necessary due to the dual focus of the research, evaluating both narrative and technical aspects from film reviews. While remaining qualitative in nature, the approach bridges systematic coding with film criticism and interpretive analysis, allowing for a structured yet theory-sensitive evaluation (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Through this approach, we examine elements such as premise, theme, character development, plot structure, setting, point of view, symbolism, narrative coherence, and technical execution as highlighted in critical reviews.

The method facilitates the systematic analysis of recurring critical viewpoints, particularly how film critics interpret the artistic, thematic, and technical choices made in "*Blood Flower*". This allows the study to present insights not only into narrative construction but also into the ways in which these elements resonate (or fail to resonate) with audiences.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in a hybrid theoretical framework that combines David Bordwell's structuralist approach to film narrative with Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. Bordwell's framework, especially his analysis of classical narrative structure, the distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, and the function of cinematic style in shaping viewer comprehension (Bordwell, 1985; Bordwell & Thompson, 2019) guides the identification and evaluation of narrative coherence, plot logic, and character development in "*Blood Flower*". His approach provides a systematic foundation for examining how formal elements contribute to storytelling.

Complementing this, Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory provides insight into how ideological meanings are constructed and interpreted by audiences. Film reviews are treated as audience decoding practices that reflect broader cultural and ideological negotiations. Together, these frameworks facilitate a dual-layered analysis that accounts for both the internal structure of the film and its reception within critical discourse.

This dual theoretical orientation ensures that the study maintains both methodological rigour and conceptual coherence, integrating film form with audience interpretation to yield a richer and more nuanced analysis.

Thematic Analysis in Film Studies

Thematic analysis has emerged as a widely applied method in qualitative research, including in media and communication studies. In psychology and social sciences, it seeks to identify recurring concepts or patterns in participant data. In contrast, in film studies and the humanities, thematic analysis often aligns with interpretive textual analysis and aesthetic theory.

Thematic analysis in film studies integrates perspectives from both the humanities and the social sciences. From a humanities standpoint, scholars such as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson adopt a structural approach that emphasizes narrative, film form, and aesthetic elements, as illustrated in their foundational text *Film Art: An Introduction* (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019). Roland Barthes' (1977) semiotic exploration of mythology decodes the cultural and ideological themes present in films, while Michel Foucault's (1972) theories on discourse and power allow an examination of how films portray knowledge, norms, and authority.

Conversely, from a social sciences perspective, Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model emphasizes the ideological framing of media messages and their interpretation by audiences. John Fiske (1987) provides further depth through his analysis of how popular culture, including films constructs cultural meaning. Tzvetan Todorov's (1975) structuralist theories on narrative, and Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of cultural capital and symbolic power, offer essential tools to analyze representations of class and social hierarchies in film narratives.

In light of these diverse foundations, it is critical to distinguish clearly between thematic approaches (as theoretical frameworks) and thematic methods (as analytical procedures). Thematic approaches in the humanities are generally interpretive, symbolic, and grounded in film and cultural theory. Thematic methods in the social sciences, on the other hand, often focus on data-driven pattern recognition through coding and categorization. This paper adopts a thematic method rooted in social sciences (Braun & Clarke, 2006), while also acknowledging and integrating relevant approaches from both domains to enrich its interpretive depth.

By collecting and coding 26 written reviews from various sources, the study uses thematic analysis as a framework to map critical discourse. Codes were developed to identify narrative and technical categories based on recurring critical language, which were then organized into themes. This analytic process allows us to quantify the frequency and significance of specific critiques while remaining grounded in film theory (McKee, 2013).

In doing so, the study situates itself at the intersection of social science methodology and humanities-based film analysis. This hybrid approach offers both analytical rigor and interpretive depth, thus contributing to evolving methodologies in film and media studies.

DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected from written movie reviews. In this case, the reviews appear to have been sourced from various platforms, such as websites, blogs, or other online sources. The data collection process follows a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the richness and depth of human experiences, in this case, reviewers' experiences and opinions regarding the movie "*Blood Flower*". Textual data, in the form of movie reviews, was gathered. These reviews are valuable for capturing individual perceptions, opinions, and critiques regarding the film. Multiple reviews were collected and summarized, providing a broader perspective on the movie. This approach is common in qualitative research to ensure diverse viewpoints.

DATA ANALYSIS

For the data analysis, we use thematic analysis which involves a systematic review of the coded segments within the film reviews. Through a process of comparison, contrast, and iterative exploration, common themes and connections related to narrative elements are identified (Guest et al., 2012). This process allows for a comprehensive interpretation of the film's storytelling aspects. By employing thematic analysis and a rigorous coding framework,

this research aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the narrative elements in "*Blood Flower*", based on film reviews.

The first critical step involved immersing in a comprehensive understanding of the data. Each review was carefully scrutinized, with the objective of gaining an intricate grasp of the content and contextual nuances encapsulated in the reviews. After that initiation of analysis entailed open coding, a process through which initial codes were identified within the reviews. These codes consisted of succinct words or phrases, serving as fundamental markers to encapsulate the primary narrative elements critiqued by reviewers. For instance, these codes included descriptors like *Conflict*, *Cultural Element*, *Character portrayal*, *Acting performance/acting strength*, *Dialogue delivery*, *Script quality*, *Plot Issues*, *Story pacing*, *Inconsistent storytelling*, *Logical consistency*, *Creative decision*, *Missed opportunity*, *Disappointment*, *Technical Excellence*, *Make up*, *Enjoyable Visual*, *Sound Effect & Audio Quality*, *Memorable horror moments* and *Horror set-pieces*.

Once the initial coding was completed, the subsequent stage involved the formation of themes. Themes were conceived by amalgamating and categorizing related codes, offering a more abstract and comprehensive representation of the data. For instance, codes correlated with *Character Potrayal*, *acting performance/Acting strengths*, *Dialogue delivery* collectively contributed to *Character*; *Plot confusion*, *Plot hole*, *Story pacing*, *Logical consistency*, *Inconsistent storytelling*, *Script quality* to *Plot structure*; *Technical Merit*, *Make up*, *Enjoyable visual*, *Sound effect & Audio Quality*, *Memorable horror moments*, *Horror set pieces* to *Technical Excellence*.

The description of the codes and theme (Table 1 and Table 2) are adapted from various studies such as those by Sharff (1982); Daiute, C. & Lightfoot, C. (2003); Snyder (2005); Mckee (2011); Smith (2018); Bordwell and Thompson (2019); Maku, S. E., Jayantini, I. G. A. S. R., & Juniartha, I. W. (2022) and Zairul Anuar Md. Dawam (2024). Below is the description of each code and themes.

Table 1: Codes description

Codes	Description
Conflict	The central struggle or tension within a narrative, arising from opposing forces, desires, or goals that drive the characters' actions.
Cultural Element	Aspects of a narrative influenced by or reflective of a particular culture or cultural context, including customs, traditions, beliefs, values, language, folklore, and social norms.
Character portrayal	Analysis of how characters are portrayed and developed in the film.
Acting performance/acting strength	Analysis of the actors' performances and their ability to convey emotions.
Dialogue delivery	Critique of the delivery and effectiveness of the dialogue.
Script quality	Assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the screenplay.
Plot Issues	Inconsistencies, gaps, or contradictions in the storyline or narrative logic that undermine the coherence or believability of the plot, often leaving unanswered questions or unresolved issues.
Story pacing	Examination of the pacing and tempo of the narrative.
Inconsistent storytelling	The lack of coherence and consistency in the narrative structure.
Logical consistency	Evaluation of the logical consistency and absence of plot holes in the story.
Creative decision	Examination of the bold and distinct creative choices made in the film.

Missed opportunity	The perception that the film had the potential for greatness but fell short.
Disappointment	The feeling of disappointment and unmet expectations from the film.
Technical Excellence	Evaluation of the technical aspects of the movie, such as visual or cinematography, sound and audio, make up which create memorable horror moments
Make up	The application of cosmetics, prosthetics, or visual effects to enhance the appearance or alter the features of characters, creatures, or elements within the narrative, contributing to the overall visual aesthetic and realism.
Enjoyable Visual	Elements of visual storytelling, including cinematography, production design, special effects, and composition, that captivate or engage the audience, enriching their viewing experience and contributing to the overall enjoyment of the narrative.
Sound Effect & Audio Quality	The quality and effectiveness of sound design, including dialogue clarity, ambient sounds, music, and special effects, which contribute to the immersive experience of the narrative and enhance its emotional impact.
Memorable horror moments	Highlighting the impactful and memorable horror scenes in the film.
Horror set-pieces	Assessment of the impactful and memorable horror scenes in the film.

Table 2: Theme description

Theme	Description
Premise	The foundational concept or idea upon which a story is built, outlining the basic scenario, situation, or conflict that sets the stage for the events of the narrative.
Theme	The underlying central idea or concept explored throughout the narrative, conveying broader messages or insights about life, society, human nature, or other significant topics.
Character development	The portrayal and development of characters and their relationships.
Plot Structure	Identification of plot-related problems, logical inconsistencies, and plot holes.
Setting	The time, place, and social environment in which the events of the narrative take place, including physical locations and cultural or historical contexts that shape the story.
POV	The perspective from which the events of the narrative are presented to the audience,
Symbol	An object, character, action, or element that represents or stands for something else, conveying deeper or abstract ideas beyond its literal significance within the narrative.
Narrative coherence	Assessment of the overall coherence and consistency of the story and plot.
Technical	Acknowledgment of the film's technical achievements and merits.

RESULT

Based on the data, we have gathered 26 reviews from various platforms. Below are examples of how the data has been organized based on the reviewer's excerpts from the article, identified as codes, and then categorized into themes (Table 3):

Table 3: Review Data Organization: Codes and Themes

Reviewer	Excerpt from Article	Codes	Themes
1.	The storyline revolves around a teenage boy with extraordinary abilities, combined with mysticism through exotic plants, which is a quite good theme.	Conflict, Creative boldness	Premise
	The performance delivered by the main character, Idan Aedan, is also outstanding	Acting performance, Acting strengths	Character
	Props like blood and so on appear almost real, while the effects on the faces are truly terrifying.	Technical Excellence, Horror set-pieces	Technical excellence
	This is because to allow the film to be classified as P13. For me, when this happens, the film feels a bit flawed and awkward.	Censored scenes, Dialogue censorship Missed opportunity, Disappointment	Plot structure
	There are also several plots that are somewhat confusing; however, they do not make the film difficult to understand.	Plot confusion, Inconsistent storytelling	Plot structure
2.	Similarly, the terrifying makeup technique is quite frightening and looks very realistic.	Makeup effects	Technical excellence
	The film “ <i>Blood Flower</i> ” also offers a beautiful experience through the presence of exotic botanical gardens that are quite beautiful, as well as a dark world filled with clever subtext.	Setting, Subtext, Creative boldness	Premise, symbol, Technical Excellence
3.	Other than the exceptional visuals, which are crucial for a convincing horror (kudos to Studio Voxel)	Set design	Technical excellence
	Starts high on top of the flat apartment with blue skies. The descent begins with a breaching of a taboo. It is a mix of splatter, body, and dark fantasy horror revolving around an entity that is of the title, of a real-life plant called “ <i>Blood Flower</i> ” or the scientific name Titan Arums (<i>Bunga Bangkai</i>).	Setting, Subtext, Creative boldness	Premise, symbol, Technical Excellence
4...	The audience is presented with a ghost character, and it is clear that the ghost is male...	Character portrayal	symbol

...25	"Blood Flower" twists show harm to its female characters and never let them be more than just victims	Character portrayal,	Character, pov
	There could be more atmosphere in a film of this nature, but it goes the gory route and makes the plot feel clunky and crammed with points that make absolutely zero sense.	Plot issues, Inconsistent storytelling,	Plot Structure
	Shudder has had a long list of remarkable international acquisitions for its subscribers these past few years, but "Blood Flower" is a definite miss...	Disappointment	Narrative Coherence
26.	Supernatural movies need an intense build-up to really capitalize on the curiosity of viewers with a horrific sequence. Except, the scenes in "Blood Flower" are rushed.	Story pacing, Inconsistent storytelling,	Plot Structure
	Instead of music, the story generates eeriness with squelching and cracking sounds that continuously haunt Ilya and Iqbal.	Technical Excellence	Technical excellence
	Believability becomes an issue in "Blood Flower" as the story jumps from one scene to another	Logical consistency, Inconsistent storytelling	Plot Structure

Based on the compiled codes and themes from the 26 reviews in Table 3, we have outlined each code and theme as follows:

Table 4: Summary Codes and Themes Analysis for 26 Reviews

Reviewer	Premise and Theme	Character	Plot Structure	Setting	POV,	Symbol	Narrative Coherence	Technical Excellence
1	/	/	/					/
2	/					/		/
3	/					/		/
4			/			/		/
5			/					/
6		/	/				/	/
7			/				/	/
8	/	/	/				/	
9		/	/				/	/
10	/					/		/
11		/	/					/
12	/		/			/	/	/
13	/		/				/	
14	/	/	/				/	/
15	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
16				/				/
17				/			/	/
18	/		/					/
19			/		/		/	/
20		/						/
21	/		/				/	
22			/					
23		/	/				/	

24							/	
25		/	/				/	
26			/					/

Based on Table 4, reviewers emphasize the importance of the film's premise and theme in reviews 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18, and 21. Character development and portrayal are discussed in reviews 1, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 20, and 23. The plot structure is analyzed in analysis 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, and 26. Meanwhile, the setting is discussed in reviews 16 and 17. Review 19 particularly mentions the point of view (PoV). Symbolism is cited in reviews 2, 3, 4, 10, and 12. Additionally, reviewers comment on the narrative coherence of reviews 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, and 25, while also comparing the technical excellence in reviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 26.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Premise and Theme

Overall, “*Blood Flower*” movie have a unique concept, strong premise and theme. The storyline, as highlighted in Review 1 and 12, revolves around a teenage protagonist possessing extraordinary abilities intertwined with mysticism through exotic plants, deemed quite compelling by the reviewer. It tells the story of a small family gifted with the ability to ward off spirits that possess humans.

Review 2 praises the film's depiction of beautiful botanical gardens juxtaposed with a dark world rich in subtext, suggesting themes of nature, beauty, and darkness. Meanwhile, Review 3 describes the film's descent into a mix of horror genres centered around the real-life plant “*Blood Flower*” infusing cultural and supernatural elements into the narrative. Family dynamics and cultural values are explored in Reviews 8, 13, and 18, with a focus on the relationship between parents and children and the portrayal of patriarchy in Malay families. Review 10 applauds the film's use of symbolism and backstories, adding depth to the narrative experience. Furthermore, Reviews 14, 18, and 21 commend the film for its cultural authenticity and representation, particularly in its portrayal of Malaysian culture and Islam. Collectively, these analyses underscore the thematic richness and cultural authenticity of “*Blood Flower*”, contributing to its narrative depth and overall impact.

Character

The character aspect of “*Blood Flower*” receives a diverse range of evaluations from critics, as gleaned from the provided excerpts. Some reviews, such as Review 1 and Review 20, laud the performances of the cast, singling out the main character, Idan Aedan, for delivering outstanding portrayals. Review 6 similarly commends the solid acting and effective character portrayal that evokes emotional responses from the audience. Meanwhile, Review 8 praises the cast as superb, indicating a high level of talent among the actors. However, Review 9 notes clear creative decisions in acting style and character placement, suggesting intentional choices by the filmmakers to enhance character portrayal.

On the other hand, Review 11 expresses disappointment in the film's character development, citing shortcomings in scriptwriting that result in lackluster roles, particularly for Nadiya Nisaa and Remy Ishak. Review 14 acknowledges the charm of the lead actor but raises concerns about the lack of distinct qualities given to the main character, Iqbal, throughout the film. Additionally, Review 25 criticizes the portrayal of female characters, noting their portrayal primarily as victims without agency or depth. In essence, while some reviewers appreciate the performances and creative decisions in character portrayal, others lament the missed opportunities and inconsistencies in developing compelling and nuanced characters within “*Blood Flower*”.

Plot Structure

Critiques of “*Blood Flower*” consistently target its plot structure, highlighting numerous shortcomings that hinder the film's coherence and narrative progression. Review 1 notes concerns regarding confusing plot elements, though they don't render the film entirely incomprehensible. In Review 5, issues with sequence arrangement are cited as disrupting the flow of the plot, indicating a lack of smooth transitions between scenes. Review 6 suggests that editing and cuts, possibly influenced by censorship board involvement, have resulted in plot holes that weaken the storytelling.

Review 7 criticizes the loose storyline, particularly in the film's initial 60 minutes, describing it as unintelligent and dragging. Additionally, Review 8 points out a loose script and disjointed scene transitions, suggesting a lack of seamless connection between plot points. Review 9 goes further, describing the film's plot as a “jumbled mess” with a poor script, underscoring the importance of narrative coherence for a successful film. Review 11 mentions the discrepancy between strong technical visuals and a weak narrative medium in “*Blood Flower*”. Review 12 echoes this sentiment, highlighting excessively slow storytelling pace and a loose script criticized for its overreliance on CGI, indicating a failure to effectively develop plot points. Furthermore, Review 13 remarks on the weak plot, which diminishes the film's tension and fails to inject excitement into the spectacle. Review 14 adds to the criticism, mentioning poor pacing and overexposure leading to audience desensitization.

Review 18, while praising a shocking opening scene, implies that subsequent plot development may not meet expectations. Review 19 expresses disappointment in the film's trajectory towards a lackluster conclusion, suggesting an underwhelming plot structure. Review 21 further criticizes the film's slow pace, indicating a lack of momentum in plot development. Review 22 highlights logical leaps and tonal shifts that contribute to a disjointed plot. Review 23 comments on the film feeling like two different narratives, indicating a lack of coherence in plot execution. Finally, Review 25 criticizes rushed scenes, leading to issues with believability and coherence as the story jumps abruptly from one scene to another. In summary, critics consistently identify problems with “*Blood Flower*” plot structure, spanning from confusion and poor pacing to disjointed storytelling, significantly diminishing the film's overall quality.

Setting

The evaluation of the setting in “*Blood Flower*” offers contrasting perspectives, as found out within the furnished excerpts. Review 16 expresses disappointment over the dearth of local flavor in the setting, suggesting a missed possibility to immerse viewers within the cultural context of Malaysia. This critique means that the film won't correctly seize the precise surroundings and essence of its setting, doubtlessly restricting its authenticity and resonance with local audiences. In evaluation, Review 17 highlights the film's incorporation of Malaysian folklore and Islamic ideals into its setting.

This suggests that; “*Blood Flower*”; actively engages with cultural factors inherent to its setting, enriching the narrative with layers of depth and importance. By drawing from local traditions and beliefs, the movie establishes a rich and immersive environment that provides authenticity and texture to the tale. Overall, at the same time as Review 16 criticizes the film for its loss of local flavor in the setting, Review 17 commends its incorporation of Malaysian folklore and Islamic beliefs. These views underscore the significance of setting in shaping the general tone and environment of a movie, with cultural authenticity playing a vital function in enhancing the audience's viewing experience.

Symbolism

The analysis of symbolism in “*Blood Flower*” draws from various elements within the film that carry deeper meaning and thematic significance. Review 2 highlights the presence of exotic botanical gardens, which could symbolize beauty and nature juxtaposed against the dark world depicted in the film. This contrast suggests underlying themes of duality and the coexistence of

light and darkness. Additionally, Review 3 mentions a descent that begins with the breaching of a taboo, indicating a symbolic journey into the unknown or forbidden realms. The use of taboo themes may symbolize societal or moral boundaries being crossed, inviting reflection on the consequences of such actions. Review 4 introduces a ghost character, suggesting the presence of supernatural elements that often symbolize unresolved issues, trauma, or the lingering impact of the past. Ghosts in storytelling frequently serve as symbols of memory, guilt, or the lingering effects of tragedy.

Furthermore, Review 12 raises concerns about the lack of narrative development hindering the extraction of meaning from the film's visuals. This critique underscores the importance of narrative coherence in conveying symbolic messages effectively. Symbolism often relies on narrative context to resonate with viewers and convey deeper themes or allegories. Overall, "*Blood Flower*" appears to employ symbolism to convey themes of duality, societal taboos, and the lingering impact of the past. However, the effectiveness of these symbolic elements may be contingent upon the film's ability to develop its narrative and provide sufficient context for interpretation.

POV

The analysis of point of view (POV) in the reviews of "*Blood Flower*" reveals a critical perspective on the portrayal of female characters within the film. Review 19 emphasizes the final twist, which revolves around the theme of sexual violence against women. However, it criticizes the lack of development for most female characters, indicating a disparity between the weight of the narrative twist and the depth of characterization. This suggests a skewed POV that prioritizes the shock value of violence over meaningful exploration of female experiences within the story.

Similarly, Review 25 underscores the portrayal of female characters as mere victims, with the film's twists highlighting the harm inflicted upon them. This critique suggests a limited POV that fails to provide agency or complexity to female characters beyond their roles as targets of violence. The absence of nuanced perspectives from female characters may contribute to a one-dimensional portrayal that overlooks their individual narratives and experiences. Overall, the analysis of POV in these reviews points to a need for more thoughtful and inclusive representation of female characters within the film. By prioritizing their perspectives and experiences, "*Blood Flower*" could offer a more balanced and nuanced portrayal that moves beyond stereotypical victimization narratives.

Narrative coherence

The analysis of narrative coherence in the reviews of "*Blood Flower*" reveals a mixed reception towards the film's ability to maintain a cohesive storyline. Review 6 expresses concern about censorship by the FCB (Film Censorship Board), suggesting potential disruptions to the narrative flow. Additionally, Review 7 critiques the film for its loose storyline, indicating a lack of cohesion in plot development. Review 8 further reflects on the lack of rewatch value, implying dissatisfaction with the overall coherence of the film.

Furthermore, Review 9 emphasizes the importance of narrative coherence, noting that great individual parts do not necessarily make a great film if they do not cohere as a whole. Review 12 echoes this sentiment, highlighting the difficulty in extracting meaning from visuals when narrative development is lacking. Similarly, Review 13 acknowledges the film's visual and technical prowess but criticizes its inferior storytelling. However, Review 17 provides a contrasting perspective, praising the film's ending for bringing all the narrative pieces together in an exciting and suspenseful final sequence. Yet, Review 19 suggests that while the visual effects are striking, they overshadow more interesting narrative strands, contributing to a lack of balance in storytelling. Review 21 expresses hesitation in fully endorsing the horror movie, implying unresolved issues in narrative coherence. Moreover, Review 23 acknowledges the potential for interesting thematic exploration related to the titular flower and nature but criticizes the underexplored nature of these narrative elements. Finally, Review 25 categorizes "*Blood*

Flower” as a miss, indicating overall dissatisfaction with its narrative coherence among other factors. In summary, while some reviews acknowledge moments of narrative coherence and excitement, overall, there is a prevalent sense of dissatisfaction and critique regarding the film's ability to maintain a cohesive and engaging storyline throughout.

Technical excellence

“*Blood Flower*” receives widespread praise for its technical brilliance, encompassing various facets of its production. Notably, reviews commend its exceptional visual effects, makeup techniques, and creature designs, contributing to a chilling atmosphere and heightening the horror experience, as emphasized in Reviews 1, 2, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, and 16. The film's clear sound effects and immersive audio quality, noted in Reviews 6, 16, and 26, effectively draw viewers into its eerie world and sustain suspense throughout.

Furthermore, commendation is given to the well-crafted visuals, lighting, and cinematography, indicative of meticulous attention to detail, as acknowledged in Reviews 13, 16, and 18. Additionally, praise is directed towards the dynamic musical score, tasteful jump scares, and great set design, enhancing the horror experience and adding to its appeal, as highlighted in Reviews 17, 18, and 24. Despite its strengths, some reviews, like Review 19, point out the film's overreliance on soar scares as doubtlessly unsophisticated. In summary, “*Blood Flower*” stands out for its technical brilliance, offering a terrifying and immersive horror reveal through its realistic visual effect (VFX), haunting sound design, and innovative use of computer-generated image (CGI), solidifying its reputation as a standout in the style.

CONCLUSION

“*Blood Flower*” offers a promising premise and thematic intensity, exploring nature, cultural values, and supernatural motifs through a distinct Malaysian lens. However, the narrative is constrained by critical weaknesses in coherence and structural clarity, as observed through systematic thematic analysis of 26 film reviews. The findings underscore recurring issues in plot progression, character development, and narrative consistency highlighting the dissonance between strong technical execution and weak storytelling.

Through the lens of Bordwell’s narrative theory, the analysis reveals that the film's syuzhet (plot presentation) often disrupts the fabula (narrative logic), leading to confusion and disjointed emotional engagement. The film's reliance on visual spectacle, while praised, cannot compensate for structural flaws in the narrative arc. Similarly, from Hall’s encoding/decoding perspective, critics appear to decode ideological representations such as gender dynamics and cultural motifs, in ways that reflect a lack of narrative agency and thematic depth, particularly in the portrayal of female characters.

Despite these critiques, “*Blood Flower*” excels in technical elements such as VFX, sound design, and production aesthetics. These contribute significantly to its horror impact and visual storytelling, reinforcing its potential as a cultural export within Southeast Asian genre cinema.

This study contributes to the academic discourse by offering a hybrid analytical framework that merges formal narrative theory with reception-based decoding practices. It demonstrates the value of employing structured thematic analysis to critically evaluate both form and meaning in film, bridging the divide between social sciences and humanities approaches in film studies. Future research may further examine how audience interpretations beyond critics, engage with the narrative and technical dualities found in local horror cinema.

In sum, while *"Blood Flower"* reflects the aspirations of Malaysian horror storytelling on an international stage, it also highlights the importance of narrative craftsmanship in elevating cinematic experience. This research underscores how integrating theoretical clarity with rigorous methodology can deepen our understanding of film reception, form, and cultural resonance.

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