

THE STRUGGLE OF MUTANT HUMAN AS A GROTESQUE CHARACTERS IN *FUTURAMA* (1999)

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Abstract

This study examined the struggle of the mutant human as a grotesque characters in *Futurama* animated series. The grotesque theory that is being used are from Bakhtin, Bloom, Haar and Thomson to analyze the mutant character in the story. The aims of this study was to identify the struggle of the mutant caused by their grotesque body as well as how the grotesque body has impacted their life in the story. The study examines a couple of material mainly scenes and the visual of the series. it does this using a qualitative research methodology. In order to be interpreted, the researchers specify the research into two section, the first section is analyzing Leela's struggle as a grotesque character because she was one of the main cast of the character, and the second one is analyzing the mutant human as a whole. The finding demonstrate that all of the mutant kind faced struggle caused by their body deformity, those struggle are usually in the form of discrimination, prejudice and degradation.

Keywords: grotesque, characters, body, struggle

INTRODUCTION

Movie as a genre has evolved since its first iteration, not only in its story but also in the form of the movie itself, some of the movies or films in this era uses animation instead of live actor and setting to convey its story. An animated film can be considered as a film even if it lacks the performance of its actor, animation replaces the actor with animated characters and uses voice actors, an animated film is the same as a movie because it also had narrative elements and script as a baseline to convey the story. An animated film can convey what an ordinary film cannot convey, it is more fluid to represent and convey the author's or director's points of view and message, animated films are more intricate and detailed in portraying the author's idea, imagination and can help in presenting an action or setting that is considered unnatural that can't be done through the human actor or natural setting (Petrie and Boggs 2018, p. 146-147). One of



the animated movies that portrayed the director's idea that can't be done by a human actor or a natural setting is *Futurama*.

Futurama is an American animated sci-fi series that has been broadcasted from 1999 to 2013, *Futurama* first aired in 1999 on American Television, the synopsis of the first episode of this series is told through the story of Phillip J. Fry who accidentally sleep in a cryopod and awake in the new year eve of year 3000 there she met a one-eyed woman named Turanga Leela a self-proclaimed alien and the last of her species, Leela tries to force Fry to his assigned job as a delivery boy but Fry refuses and escape from her, in the street he met Bender, a bending robot who tries to kill himself but then he joined Fry in his journey to find his nephew Professor Farnsworth, not long after that realize that Fry was right Leela let go of her assigned job and joined Fry to find his nephew, they become a fugitive because they did not have an assigned job chip but then they escape to space with Farnsworth who then install a job chip for them to work in his delivery company and lost their fugitive status.

Later in the series, it was revealed that Leela was not an alien like she believed but she is a mutated human that came from the sewer, the mutated human from the sewer is described as a monster with many body deformities and they are banished from the society above the ground to live in the sewer, they are also accepted they are a subhuman species and deserve to be treated lesser than them, the example above are similar to what Haar said that Grotesque being distrustful is embedded in our mind that if something has a bad form or appearance, then it also has a bad personality or effect. This problem can cause the "ugly" to be not accepted within the community. Grotesque characters appears physically cripple or a mental cripple, the presence from a grotesque character has the effect that conveyed through the pressure they face in the story (Haar 1983, p. 26).

The statement above became the reason to analyze the mutant characters in *Futurama*, the researcher wanted to find out how they struggle to overcome their body deformity and mental cripple because of the stereotype, discrimination and prejudice that they are faced in the story. The study will use Jones (1968) for the characters and characterization theory as for the grotesque, the researcher will be using several sources to describe the grotesque like Haar (1983), Bakhtin (1984), Bloom (2009) and Thomson (1972).

Grotesque is more commonly known in art, it turns out that grotesque in literature can be identified through characters from the literary works itself, Bakhtin (1984, p. 26) noted that one of the fundamental images of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated and born, Bakhtin (1984, p. 19) further explain that the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, it is the lowering or descending the standard of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract, it is a transfer to the material level, to the earth ground and body in its inseparable unity.

The most consistent distinguished characteristic of grotesque other than degradation is the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous or conflation of disparates (Thomson, 1972, p. 42). Its important that this disharmony has been seen not only in the work of art, but it can also be seen in the reaction it produces and in the psychological background of the artist.

Bloom further added that grotesque is essentially something we distrust, the hidden demonic fantasy that still torments and attracts us, the shadow we repress because we don't want to confront this central problem in our society (Bloom, 2009, p. 19). Grotesque being distrustful is embedded in our mind that if something has a bad form or appearance, then it also has a bad personality or effect. This problem can cause the "ugly" to be not accepted within the community. Grotesque characters appears physically cripple or a mental cripple, the presence from a grotesque character has the effect that conveyed through the pressure they face in the story (Haar 1983, p. 26), Bakhtin (1984, p. 29) also noted that from the points of view of these classic literature canon, the grotesque body or realism was hideous and formless. It did not fit the framework of the "aesthetics of the beautiful" or the perfection as conceived by the Renaissance.

The grotesque can be seen through the character just like Bakhtin mentioned above. A character is a person who is shown in a narrative work, or drama, which readers interpret as having moral qualities and certain tendencies as expressed in speech and what is done in action (Abrams 1999, p. 20). According to Stanton (in Prasetia 2020, p. 18-19). the use of the term "character" suggest that there are two different meaning, the

first one are characters in a story that are displayed, and as a attitudes, interest, desire, emotion and moral principle of these character

Characterization refers to the placement of certain characters with certain character(s) in a story. Characterization is a clear depiction of a person who is portrayed in a story (Jones, 1968, p. 33). Thus the character itself has 'actor of the story' and its characterization. It also includes what the characters are, how to describe them and how to put and illustrate them in the story, so that the characters can provide a clear picture to readers. Characterization is not only interpreted how the character behaves, but also the aspect of appearance and how it relates to the outer part of oneself are important points.

This research use qualitative descriptive study. Qualitative research uses analysis and description in analyzing the data that has been obtained. Creswell in Gufron (2021, p. 33) stated that qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis and draw on diverse designs. Bogdan and Biklen (in Ahsan, 2015, p. 32) said that qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of writing or verbally from the object being observed. This means that the researcher use this method because the data used for this research were in images and text form obtained from Futurama series structure. Thus the researcher use qualitative research to analyze how the mutant struggle against their grotesque appearance and the discrimination of the people from above ground.

In this research, the data from the research objects were collected in several ways. The researcher uses a technique based on the method of the research, qualitative method. According to Creswell (2013, p. 166) there are several techniques in making and collecting data in qualitative method, the first step is identifying the source which the data has been taken, in this research the data is Futurama (1999) animated movie series and it's transcript. Second one are identifying the type of data. In this research the sources of data are animated movies series (video and audio) and documents in the form of the series transcripts. After collecting data, the researcher analyze the data. Creswell (2013, p. 183) said that there are several steps in analyzing a data: (1) Data Managing. In this stage the researcher will also choose the data for the analysis, the data will be arranged according to Futurama series episode and season in its original production order. (2) Classifying the data by topic analysis. In this research the topic analysis is how the mutant

human as a grotesque character struggles in *Futurama*. (3) Analyzing every classified data to answer the research questions. (4) Representing or interpreting the data. The researcher presented the data descriptively and incorporated it into the study at this stage. (5) Concluding all the discussions in this research.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The data was collected from *Futurama* series seasons 1 to season 7, the first datum was the character Leela, Leela faces so much discrimination because of her grotesque appearance, she is physically crippled and had one big eye, it fits Haar (1983, p. 26) that the Grotesque characters appear physically cripple or a mental cripple, the presence from a grotesque character has the effect that conveyed through the pressure they face in the story. The first pressure or struggle she faces is in episode one when she chases Fry and Bender shown in those two scenes:



Figure 1. (a) this is the visual scene where Leela get her callsign 1B-DI (a joke that translate into one beady eye) to describe her appearance. (b) the scene where she was called by her deformity. The scene were both taken from *Futurama* season 1 episode 1 (11:11) and (12:53).

In the dialogue she faces the struggle of other people labeling her by her body deformity, for the first one, the government designated her as Officer 1B-DI shown in this dialogue “(11:11) Leela: This is officer 1B-DI requesting back-up.”, a joke about her body deformity and in the other scene, Smitty (the police officer) called her by her deformity Eyeball because she only had one eye. Another struggle she faces was as a child in the orphanarium shown in Season 3 episode 11 she was also getting discriminated shown in this scene and dialogue:



Figure 2. Leela struggled because she faces discrimination on her childhood (*Futurama* Season 3 Episode 11: *The Cyberhouse rules* 01:42)

Leela: No way, Jose-bot. I never wanna see those other orphans again! Not after the way they used to pick on me.
 [Flashback. In the kids' playground at the orphanarium (where everything is broken) the kids stand around young Leela, pointing and chanting.]
 Kids: [chanting] One-eye! One-eye! One-eye!
 Kirk: Nice depth-perception, one-eye!
 [He laughs.]
 Leela: How can you make fun of me, Kirk? You're blind!
 Kirk: My eyes may not work, but at least I got two of them!
 [He laughs again. Leela sighs.]
 [Flashback ends.]

Leela grotesque appearance aren't accepted within the community, they even ridicule her because of her one big eye, she argues her one big eye with a blind person, Kirk that is accepted within the community even though he is blind, this is similar to what Bloom (2009, p. 19) said that grotesque being distrustful is embedded in our mind that if something has a bad form or appearance, then it also has a bad personality or effect. This problem can cause the "ugly" to be not accepted within the community. Another thing to note is that why Kirk was accepted and Leela wasn't, it was because of Kirk body adhere to the classical human body concept even if his eyes didn't work anymore, this is similar to what Bakhtin (1984, p. 29) said that from the points of view of these classic literature canon, the grotesque body or realism was hideous and formless. It did not fit the framework of the "aesthetics of the beautiful" or the perfection as conceived by the Renaissance.

In the next datum we will see the struggle of the mutant kind as a whole, before their first appearance, they are described as a grotesue looking monster and became an urban legend among the people of New New York shown in season 2 episode 5 *I Second that Emotion* dialogue at 12:45 timestamp:

Leela: I guess we'd better go down into the sewers and look for him.
 Amy: Are you crazy? There's mutants down there! They'll eat you alive.
 Zoidberg: They're hideous!
 [He screams and clacks his claws at her.]
 Leela: There's no such thing as mutants. That's a ridiculous urban myth.
 [Farnsworth spins around in his chair.]
 Farnsworth: Oh, don't be so sure. Many scientists believe humans really could mutate down there. Uh, due to exposure to toxic waste and radioactive run-off and good old American faeces!
 [Fry holds his hand to his heart.]
 Fry: God bless America.

Mutant kind was seen as an urban myth, they are seen as a lower caste of a species and even the alien who are far more grotesque than them, they are living in the sewer and doesn't accepted on the ground above, when they first appeared in the story, they goes against the classical human body that is mentioned by Bakhtin (1984, p. 29) above that grotesque body was hideous and formless. It did not fit the frame work of the aesthetics of the beautiful or the perfection of the renaissance, this explanation was proven in this scene in the same episode at 14:45 timestamp:



Figure 3. The mutant appearance shown as a deviation from the perfect human body

[Time Lapse. Leela, Fry and Bender stand in the sewer water staring at the mutants.]
 Leela: Mutants! They're real!
 [She and Bender flinch. Fry pushes them aside.]
 Fry: I'll take care of this! [He sets the end of the guidebook alight and points it at the mutants.] Back! Back!
 [One of the mutants, Vyolet, a hideous woman with green scaly skin, a snout and gills, steps forwards and uses the flaming guidebook to light her cigarette. She smokes it and smoke comes out of her gills.]
 Vyolet: Thanks, handsome.
 [A mutant, called Dwayne, with a huge forehead and two noses steps forward.]
 Dwayne: Please, do not be frightened, we're harmless.
 Raoul: I have three arms.
 Dwayne: I said "harmless" not "armless".
 Vyolet: Lay off him. You know he's only got one ear.
 Fry: Hey, aren't you supposed to be eating our brains? You're mutants.
 Dwayne: Mutants? Perhaps it is you who are the mutants.
 Vyolet: Please, Dwayne, have you looked in a mirror lately?

The mutant are shown and described as an abomination against human classical view, their grotesque body aren't fit to be called human, one of them even have a gills instead of a pair of lungs like a normal human, another mutant is described as having two nose and a large forehead, the Planet Express crew who goes to the sewer gave them a prejudice that they are a brain eating human, they are judged based on their grotesque and hideous appearance before judged by their harmless action, this is similar to what Bloom (Bloom, 2009, p. 19) said that grotesque is essentially something we distrust, grotesque being distrustful is embedded in our mind that if something has a bad form or appearance, then it also has a bad personality or effect.

Another struggle from the mutant is that they are constantly cannot go to the surface world because of a rule, the rule are no mutant are allowed in the surface as shown in season 4 episode 5 titled *Leela's Homeworld* scene at 02:44 timestamp:



Figure 4. Vyoleet, a mutant was told by the police officer to go back to the sewer because there is no mutant allowed on the surface

Bender: Alright, environment, you've met your match!
 [He chuckles. He pushes the hose over the railings towards the street. On its way down the hose shoots some waste across the road where it hits and partially dissolves a tree. The tree falls onto a car which melts the road and disappears through a hole. The hose stops by a manhole and pumps waste into the sewers. Bender whistles and fans his money.]
 [Cut to: Outside Planet Express. Vyoleet the mutant crawls out of the sewer in a wedding dress. She splutters.]
 Smitty: Hey, get back in the sewer, weird-y. No mutants on the surface.
 Vyoleet: But he ruined my wedding dress.
 [Cut to: Planet Express: Attic Balcony.]
 Bender: Honey, that thing was ruined the minute it went on you. That's what I'm talkin' 'bout.
 [He struts off with his cigar and money.]

The mutant is struggling against this rule as they're bound to be living in the sewer, they are forcefully told to live on the sewer as mentioned from the explanation

above, their body doesn't fit the criteria of the beautiful human body and their grotesque body are clashed against the people who believe the idea that mutant are not considered to be human because of their body disharmony, this is similar to what Thomson said that the most consistent distinguished characteristic of grotesque other than degradation is the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous or conflation of disparates (Thomson, 1972, p. 42). They are also portrayed as distrustful, it is embedded in our mind that if something has a bad form or appearance, then it also has a bad personality or effect. This problem can cause the "ugly" to be not accepted within the community. (Bloom, 2009, p. 19).

The struggle of the mutant against this rule are shown when Leela was born with a minimum mutated body and considered as a normal human, their parent wanted a good life for Leela to do that they have to struggle to smuggle her out of the sewer shown in season 4 episode 5 titled *Leela's Homeworlds* particularly in this scene:



Figure 4. Leela was smuggled into the surface world by her mutant parents

Flashback: 20-Something Years Ago. 100-Something Feet Underground. A baby is born in the house Fry, Leela and Bender hid in in the sewers.]

Doctor: It's a girl.

[Two Cyclopes look at their baby Cyclops. The mother has tentacles and the other's mouth is sideways.]

Mother: My God! She's beautiful. No extra anythings.

[The father reaches his hand out. The baby grabs his finger and coos.]

Father: Good people skills!

Mother: She's completely perfect!

Doctor: In my professional opinion as an ear, ear, ear, nose and throat doctor, she is the least-mutated mutant ever born.

Father: And yet she's cursed to live the horrible degrading life of a mutant. Like all of us.

Especially him!

[He points at the Leg Mutant.]

Leg Mutant: It's true!

Mother: Maybe we can do better for her.

[Scene: Outside Cookieville Minimum-Security Orphanarium. The mutants come out of a manhole near the building with their baby. They put it in a basket outside the front door. The father puts a bracelet on the baby's wrist.]

Father: I made this bracelet so that in some small way we'll always be with you, even when it doesn't seem like it. During your entire life, for example.

[He kisses her.]

Mother: You won't pass for human, cutie. But if my PhD in exo-linguistics is worth diddly-poop, this note should convince them you're an alien. [She attaches the note to the baby's blanket.] And that'll be enough to give you a real life.

[She kisses the baby, puts her hood up and runs down the steps. The father rings the doorbell and follows her. Warden Vogel opens the door and sees the baby. The parents watch from the manhole.]

Father: She'll never know we're her parents.

Mother: That's our gift to her. Better we should die than have her learn the shameful truth of her origin.

Father: I'm with you.

[They hug. Then turn and watch Vogel.]

Vogel: What a beautiful gigantic eye you ha-- [The baby kicks him.] Well, come on in.

[The parents watch Leela disappear inside, hold their breath and dive into the sewers.]

[Flashback ends.]

They are pressured to live underground because of their grotesque body, even Leela's father describe their life as a curse and degrading life of a mutant, this is similar to what Haar said that grotesque characters appears physically cripple or a mental cripple, the presence from a grotesque character has the effect that conveyed through the pressure they face in the story (Haar 1983, p. 26), in the scene the mutant while they are shown as phisically cripple they are also shown as a mentally cripple people, they view their body as a degradation to humankind and they themselves views that their life on the sewer are well deserved as shown by what Leela's father said.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis that has been done above, it can be concluded that the mutant characters in the Futurama series are struggling because of their grotesque appearance. Using some sources of the grotesque body, the researchers found some scenes showing their struggle to live especially in the episode of *Leela's Homeworlds* where they are breaking the law and trying to get a better life for their most normal mutant character Leela, but in *The Cyberhouse Rules* episode Leela's was also shown as a struggling mutant because of her body deformity and she is getting much harassment in her childhood at the orphanarium.

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