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# *Group Narratives in Multiple Perspectives-A Comparison of the Narrative Structure and Character Functions of Twenty-Five, Twenty-One, and Dead Poets Society*

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***Abstract.*** Twenty-five, Twenty-one presents a journey of growing up marked by both enthusiasm and trauma during adolescence. At the same time, *Dead Poets Society* calls for individual freedom and spiritual independence, emphasizing subjectivity and anti-traditionalism. Although these two works belong to different countries, eras, and media types, they both provide the audience with complexity and even contradictions, yet at the same time have a connotative group portrait through the narratives and interactions of multiple characters, enhancing the representation of the conflicting relationships between youth, dreams, and social norms. This paper mainly adopts a combination of content analysis, film analysis, and comparative study to explore the similarities and differences in the narrative structure and character functions of Twenty-five, Twenty-one, and *Dead Poets Society*, as well as the comparisons of ideological implications expressed by the different group portrait movies and videos.

***Keywords:*** Group portrait, Multiple perspectives, Emotional resonance, Group narratives

## 1. Introduction

The term 'group portrait' has been repeatedly mentioned on social media in recent years, and people always say that they love the 'group portrait' in a movie or drama series, so the reasons for this phenomenon are thought-provoking. When it comes to 'group portraits', people always think of their own past days, which generates emotional resonance; or they are fascinated by each character's characteristics and deeply attracted to their unique experiences. So what is the real definition of "group portrait"? This paper observes moments from each character's individual life. As the narrative develops, it becomes clear that these seemingly unconnected people unintentionally influence one another in both public and private spheres. Their personal struggles reflect similar patterns, and their lives frequently intersect in everyday settings [1]. In other words, if the supporting characters in a work serve only the protagonist in one direction, it is closer to a centralized protagonist narrative. However, a group portrait is truly established only when the characters have relatively complete stories of conflict and growth, and these stories interact and work together to fully express the theme.

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*Twenty-five, Twenty-one*, and *Dead Poets Society* were born in different media and cultural environments, respectively. The former is a 2022 South Korean drama about a group of teenager searching for themselves through friendship, love, affection, and athletics When their dreams seem unattainable due to the times; the latter is a 1989 American film set in an elitist boys' school in 1959, focusing on the theme 'carpe diem' advocated by a distinctive English teacher Keating, and showing a groups of boys struggling between social pressures and self-awakening [2]. Superficially, the subject matter of these two works is extremely different: one is skewed towards youthful memories and the other towards educational criticism. But if people cut through the group's narrative perspective, they will find that both aim to develop the theme by presenting multiple characters. This paper will use content analysis, film analysis, and other methods to conduct a comparative study of the group narratives in Twenty-five, Twenty-one, and *Dead Poets Society*, exploring the division of character functions, the types of group narrative structures, and the profound significance of group narratives across works of different backgrounds. Through such analysis and comparison, this paper hopes to illustrate how films and television dramas can enhance emotional resonance and social reflection through the joint voice of multiple characters, and this analysis also has certain reference significance for the reading and creation of youth and growth themes at present.

## 2. Division of character functions in *Twenty-five, Twenty-one*

Layers of complementary character functions first characterize the group narrative of Twenty-five, Twenty-one. As the drama's central character, Na Hee Do has the clearest goals and needs. The strongest power of action to drive the plot forward: she transfers to another school due to the disbanding of her school's fencing team, keeps training due to Ko Yoo Rim's disdain as someone who has higher power, and attracts those around her because of her passionate and cheerful personality. Na Hee not only strives towards her dream but also involves the people around her in forming the 'group'.

If Na Hee Do is the driving force of the story, then Beak Yi Jin is the most important connector. The character is unique in that he is a college student who dropped out after his family went bankrupt due to the IMF. He is in a community of youth on the one hand, but on the other hand, he is much closer to the harsh world of adulthood than those high school students. He is a young man who tries to rebuild his life, and the setting itself carries traces of the times' crisis. Beak Yi Jin connects the worlds of adolescence and adulthood, as well as love, time, and family. While Na Hee Do and her friends symbolize the recklessness of youth, Beak Yi Jin introduces the harsh realities of crisis, class slippage, family breakup, and employment into the story, making the whole drama of Twenty-five, Twenty-one both full of pure romantic youthful fantasies and the cruel social facts under the IMF. Korean studies have generally pointed out that the instability of young people's lives, tensions in family relationships, and increased social competition have profoundly affected the social structure and cultural expression of Korean society in the wake of the financial crisis during 1997 and 1998 [3, 4]. As a result, Beak Yi Jin functions not only to connect the various characters but also to lead the audience back to that youthful community through the trauma of times past, triggering emotional resonance.

Ko Yoo Rims's identity as a fencer is the same as Na Hee Do's, which officially makes her a vivid contrasting character in the drama. On the surface, she is Na Hee Do's rival and also a close friend who is moving forward together; however, on a deeper level, we can see her as another possibility of Na Hee Do: sharing the same passion for fencing and growing up in a high-pressure environment, they have distinct family backgrounds, which leads Ko to be more closed-minded and become a person who sees success as a responsibility for survival compared to Na's passionate and active

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approach. The rivalry and competition between them are not always natural enmities but are driven by differences in economic bases stemming from historical background. Variations in access to economic resources are likely to affect how women participate in same-sex competition, particularly in terms of tactics like rival derogation and self-promotion [5]. Through such a contrasting relationship, the audience can see how different women in the same period are shaped into distinct personalities, and how they break stereotypes after understanding each other, which gives the group narrative of Twenty-five, Twenty-one a distinctive gender dynamic.

The importance of Ji Seung Wan and Moon Ji Woong is precisely reflected in the fact that they seem to be on the periphery of the main characters, but are, in fact, irreplaceable. Ji Seung Wan is remembered as a typical good student who always gets good grades and follows the rules, but she actually does more than that. She takes on the role of traveling conflicting values in the group: she seeks harmony, justice, and fairness. In this unjust and numbing environment, she is a survivor, but never gives up any opportunity to speak out for justice. She makes the whole story not only about romance and friendships, but also explores deeper perspectives on school rights, family expectations, and social commentary. Moon Ji Woong, on the other hand, functions as an emotional warm bath. He seems relaxed and outgoing, and he never focuses on studying, which prevents the whole group narrative from being completely overwhelmed by a sense of crisis. Together, the two characters combine to give the group portrait of *Twenty-five, Twenty-one* a different rhythm, a different mood, and a more vibrant quality.

As a result, the division of character functions in Twenty-five, Twenty-one is not a casual combination, but a tightly knit structure in which that everyone is indispensable: Na Hee Do is in charge of active growth, Beak Yi Jin takes the responsibility to connect the reality, Ko Yoo Rim mirrors alternative possibilities, Ji Seung Wan reveals the injustices, and Moon Ji Woong regulates everyone's emotion. The weakening of any one of the five characters would deprive the work of some key dimensions.

## 3. Division of character functions in *Dead Poets Society*

If we say that the division of character functions in *Twenty-five, Twenty-one* gradually forms a community of youth, the group in *Dead Poets Society* is more like a ray spreading outwards from a central idea. The movie begins with the arrival of Mr. Keating, but what really gives the story its engaging complexity is the multiple outcomes and costs of how different students respond to Keating's ideas, rather than the traditional one-way pattern of a great teacher changing a group of students.

In this movie, Keating serves as the catalyst for the theme and as the leader. He mentioned in his first class, "Now in this class, you can call me Mr. Keating. Or, if you're slightly more daring, Oh Captain, My Captain." Light humor permeates Keating's classroom, and the imagery of the 'captain' symbolizes his view of himself as a guide who leads his students into the world of poetry. He maintains an equal relationship with his students and accompanies them as they explore new horizons in poetry. Meanwhile, he warns students about the risks of blind obedience and encourages them to see and understand the world from multiple perspectives [6]. The movie places Keating at the beginning of the group narrative, making students realize for the first time that knowledge is not only about obedience and memorization, but also about imagination and self-expression.

Neil is the most tragic central character in the movie. He is special because he responds most quickly and strongly to Keating's ideas. Instead of accepting 'seize the day' passively, he translates it into the requirements to act, to express, to be the one he really is. However, because he pursues self-realization most passionately, he also faces the double difficulty of both a patriarchal family and an

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elite education system directly. Neil himself brings together the movie's most poignant conflicts: personal dreams versus family control, youthful passion versus social discipline. As a result, his death is both dramatic and inevitable in the movie's direction. Because of this, Neil becomes the true tragic core of the entire movie. His ending allows the movie to avoid being a light-hearted inspirational story. Instead, it becomes a sobering indictment of institutional violence, prompting the audience to reflect more on personal meaning and growth.

Todd, on the other hand, is a typical growing character, going from observer to participant. Unlike Neil, Todd was not very articulate or active at first. He is more the embodiment of most people in real life and an emotional representation for the audience: introverted, afraid of being discussed, and afraid of being wrong. His awakening is not accomplished through a sensational revolution like Neil's, but rather through a slow transformation that begins when Mr. Keating forces him to write his first poem. The best exemplification of Todd's awakening is that he becomes the first to stand up on the table at the end of the movie and shouts, "Oh Captain, My Captain" [7].

Knox, Charlie, and Cameron make up a very key supporting cast in the movie. Knox absorbs Keating's ideas into his quest for love, so he represents youthful impulsiveness and romantic idealism; Charlie transforms it into a more overt, dramatic rebellion, so he represents direct provocation of the rules; and Cameron eventually retreats to the side of the original system and becomes a representation of conservatism, conformity, and self-preservation. When these three are juxtaposed, the function of different characters within the group portrait becomes very clear: Keating's ideas do not positively influence everyone, but are absorbed by different people in different ways.

## 4. Comparison of different narrative structure types

### 4.1. The parallel structure of *Twenty-five, Twenty-one*

Twenty-five is closer to a parallel-group portrait structure. While Na Hee Do and Beak Yi Jin have a strong centrality and one of the center topics of the story is their love, the drama series does not pull all the narrative on the two on them, instead, Ko Yoo Rim, Ji Seung Wan, and Moon Ji Wong are allowed to have relatively independent and complete storylines of their own, with emotional motivations and the space for growth. What's more, these sub-storylines are not just decorations for the protagonists; they actually influence the progress of the main plot. Without the transformation of Na Hee Do and Ko Yoo Rime from competition to mutual understanding, Na Hee Do's growth would only be reflected in the love line, and the story would not be meaningful enough; without Ji Seung WAN's rebellion against the unfair education system and rules, the whole drama would be too romantic and ideal; without Moon Ji Wong's role as the 'clown', the innocence of the main characters would have been greatly reduced. Meanwhile, the drama's narrative structure of looking back and diary reading allows the audience to shift between multiple storylines and emotional threads, with different stories presented as the diary reads, making the story itself even more empathetic.

### 4.2. The radial structure of *Dead Poets Society*

In contrast, *Dead Poets Society* is more like a radial grog portrait structure. The so-called radial structure does not mean the whole story revolves around a single character. Still, the highly defined ideological center, 'Carpe Diem,' allows different characters to develop in different directions around this theme. Audiences won't initially focus on the development of character itself when they watch the movie, as in Twenty-five, Twenty-one; the impactful central idea will draw them in, and then

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they will compare and contrast to see how that idea manifests itself across different characters in the group portrait. Neil represents tragic self-realization, Todd represents progressive awakening, Knox represents romantic pursuits, and Cameron represents a return to primitive institutions. Through this strong contrast, the movie's narrative is driven. It is this spirit of 'Carpe Diem' as the core that links and converges with each other, allowing the audience to feel the spiritual point of the poem and, at the same time, be able to perceive and internalize the meaning carried by the group portrait, thus releasing and conveying the deepest emotions of a person's heart [8].

The difference between parallel and radial structures also directly affects how the emotions of the two works are expressed. The mood of *Twenty-five, Twenty-one* is like a tidal wave, sometimes bright, sometimes sad as the characters grow; the mood of *Dead Poets Society* is more like a gradually shrinking rope, from the excitement and freshness at the beginning, gradually to repression, conflict, and explosion. This difference suggests that the group portrait structure is not a fixed template, and that the director can adjust its focus to the subject matter and themes they want to convey.

## 5. The embodiment of the significance of group narrative movies

The reason why group portraits are particularly suited to the subject of youth is that youth itself is not a completely isolated individual event. A person's youth always unfolds in the context of friends, family, school, social expectations, and the times' environment. Single-protagonist narratives can, of course, also show growth, but it is easier to understand growth as the victory or failure of individual will; group portraits can more clearly show that growth is never a process completed by one person behind closed doors, but a socialization process that is constantly reflected, corrected, and witnessed by others.

What stands out most about *Twenty-five, Twenty-one* is that it expands youth from mere memories of a relationship to a shared memory of the times. Set against the backdrop of Korea's 1997-1998 financial crisis, the drama series places the narrative of youth amid social upheaval and economic disorder, thereby giving the characters' growth a deeper sense of reality. It was a time of extreme instability for young people, and it also had a profound impact on Korea's cultural industry [3, 4]. From the stories of Na Hee Do, Beak Yi Jin, and others, the audience will recall their own experiences living in that time period, turning youth into an emotional archive of a generation [9]. Furthermore, the companionship, understanding, rivalry, and reconciliation among the young girls in the drama not only show the complexity of youthful relationships but also lead the audience into a utopia where they once fantasized about having such like-minded partners. Against the backdrop of the collapsing order of reality, this kind of friendship is particularly precious and has become an important object of emotional projection for the audience. Meanwhile, the work's conclusion does not perpetuate the traditional imagery of romantic narratives in which love is ultimately consummated, but rather questions the myth of eternal love through an ending tinged with regret. But this does not mean that feelings of love are fake; on the contrary, it shows that youthful love, though real and passionate, may not withstand the changes brought by time, reality, and personal growth. Therefore, what is really touching about Twenty-five, Twenty-one is that it reveals that youthful memories are precious because the friendships, love, and companionships that existed in real life during a particular time of hardship are precious.

The significance of the group portrait in *Dead Poets Society*, on the other hand, lies in its transformation of a problem that seems to belong to a few heroic figures into an institutional problem shared by a group of ordinary youths. Through the structure of the group portrait, the movie allows the audience to see the impact of Keating's idea on different individuals, whose sense of self-

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subjectivity awakens. It makes them a little bit crazy [10]. At the same time, the movie prompts people to reflect deeply on the archaic education system and the patriarchal order: Neil's tragedy is not just due to his father's authoritarianism, and Todd's silence is not just due to his natural introversion. Through the varying fates of a group of students, the movie shows the audience the logic of the elite education that Wilton College represents—stifling creativity and diverse expression in the name of tradition, discipline, and excellence [11]. When multiple students exhibit varying degrees of rebellion, the audience realizes that these alienating behaviors are no longer due to one individual being too vulnerable or rebellious, but rather to the entire education system itself. So the value of the group portrait here is that it lets the audience stop sympathizing with the individual and go on to question the overall environment.

## 6. Conclusion

As we can see from the above comparisons, although these two works are stylistically different in terms of era, country, medium, and subject matter, they both draw on group narratives to take their work to the next level by breaking away from the constraints of a single hero's growth. The greatest significance of group portraits in works about youth life is that they shift the focus from a shining protagonist to a group of people witnessing each other's growth. This is exactly the reason why *Twenty-One, Twenty-Five* is most comparable to *Dead Poets Society* on the level of group portrait. Looking ahead, group portraits will remain a highly promising direction for youth development themes. As the audience focuses more and more on the reality of the situation, intergenerational relationships, identity anxiety, and emotional community, it becomes difficult for a single protagonist to carry the complexity of the present fully. In contrast, group portraits can present a more diverse view of youth through a multi-perspective structure, allowing marginalized characters, collective relationships, and social environments to have greater room to express themselves. Especially in the context of evolving streaming platforms and the creation of long episodes, future group portraits may be able to move further away from the traditional love- or hero-centered paradigm and towards more in-depth writing about friendship, group identity, institutional oppression, emotional trauma, and collective memory.

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