

Analysis on the Sound of the Movie *The Man Who Knew Too Much*

Yiwen Zhang ^{1,*}

¹*School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan Institute of Technology, Wuhan, Hubei, China, 430000,*

^{*}*Corresponding author. Email:13317586156@163.com*

ABSTRACT

Sound is an important symbol of films, and the application of sound largely determines the success of the film's quality. The essence of movie sound is to control the rhythm of the movie, and convey the consciousness and logic of the movie to the audience. This paper discusses the employment of three elements of sound in Hitchcock's remake film *The Man Who Knew Too Much* based on the original version in 1934, and tries to explore how these elements shape the relationship between the characters in the film, create the atmosphere, and combine with each other. The sound of movie owns a soul, and reflect an auteur's theory of aesthetics.

Keywords: *Hitchcock, Sound use, Speech, Noise, Music*

1. INTRODUCTION

Hitchcock's own second version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), based on his own 1934 film was a rare and perfect test during the history of remakes, which contributed to its special status. The remake amplified what Richard Allen called vertical irony, "in which the author manifests himself as the organizing inspiration behind the work, orchestrating its self-evidently fictional elements". Hitchcock did it well, revealed his work in 1950s with aesthetic and thematic features. [1]

The Man Who Knew Too Much in 1956 version described the story happened during a family's vacation, featured a couple Ben and Jo, and their son Hank. Their peaceful holiday was interrupted by the murder of a spy. The spy told Ben the critical assassination before he died which caused the kidnapping of their child Hank.

As is known, the sound of a movie contains three elements, speech, noise and music. As the master of movies, Alfred Hitchcock knew the power of sound to enhance the story clearly as an auteur. In this paper, the main technique of sound adoption in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* will be analyzed.

2. THE UTILIZATION OF SOUND

2.1. Speech

Alfred Hitchcock often mentioned the concept of pure film during his life which means to avoid over-reliance on dialogues, so as this movie, a large part of dialogues were rarely heard but more suspenseful atmosphere was added through pictures, at the same time, the actions promoted the development of the plots, while using some silence to increase tension.

2.1.1. Images Shaping

Speech is a vital element to display character's personality, deeply connects with the whole backgrounds, which is also a great promotion for the development of plots. So the main character's personalities are obviously presented. It is inferred that Ben is a veteran of World War II's North African and a doctor with a successful medical practice who lived in Indiana now; Jo used to be a famous singer who owned her performances but tended to be a housewife after she got married. Their speeches showed complex aspects of their personalities. Ben was firm but clumsy. Jo was clever, brave and more sensitive. Ben was routinely dismissive of Jo, characterized as an antagonistic and even hostile spouse regardless of her concern and feelings.[2]

Some speeches also featured a typical monogamous heterosexual marriage in that period. When the spy Louis Bernard had a conversation with them in the bus, it mostly were the dialogues between the males. Bernard threw a question, and Ben answered it who was naturally regarded as the representation of the family, and Jo would add some questions. It was not hard to find Jo's questions were clever and pointed, although she spoke far less than Ben while he kept sharing information of themselves without the sense of suspicion and vigilance. There were charming personalities hidden behind the mask of a typical, and middle class mother. The reflection of metaphorical symbols of American society was: repressive, well-dressed, middle-class mother. In 1950s, there were three patterns of female images: the domesticity pattern, the career pattern and the glamour pattern. The first pattern was often expressed as an ambitious woman who abandoned their family, and eventually went to extinction at all costs for her inflated desire. The last pattern, although they were captured as pretty, sexy, but seemed dumb and been regarded as the objection of the male gaze. So, a kind of family-oriented, gentle, fashionable, and good citizen female image who could contribute to the community has been promoted.[3]

2.1.2. Deeper Meanings of the Plots

In some ways, speech has multiple meanings and roles. In the market, Jo asked Ben when they were going to have another baby, saying that “you’re the doctor; you have all the answers”, which sounded like a serious joke not only talked about his occupation, but also suggested that he was the only one could answer in their relationship, and implied that Ben was taken as a more rational role for granted. It turned out that at the beginning, Jo’s doubts about the spy and couples in the hotel was right, and he had to search their child at the aid of Jo’s talent and professional identity, when she rescued ambassador and been invited to sing a song at the party. That was the proves of his failed rationality and contradictory points between the speeches and facts. So he did not have all the answers, making him different from the images of Jo said, that’s another perspectives of the meaning of the plots. [4]

2.1.3. Other Techniques

Hitchcock believes that a very important condition of suspense is that the audience always needs to know more than some roles. Because the characters in the film are exposed to more one- sided dialogues and scenes, while the audiences are exposed to a more complete one. For example, in this film, the spy Louis Bernard gave Ben a critical information “Ambrose Chappell”. So, when he searched information about Ambrose in London, it was decoded as a man's name at first, so Ben rushed to the man Ambrose Chappell and found out it

was a mistake and made fool of himself which set the suspense. But the turning point was when Jo realized Ambrose was a name of a place with her friends'help, at that time Ben did not know this information in the film until he came back home and picked the phone of Jo, but the audiences know it before, so the information gaps were composed of a sense of tense.

Hitchcock took to sound-cinema with amazing speed and facility, which adapted to new medium with incredible ingenuity. At the same time, he never cut his way off silent films, and some of his striking sequences are the “pure cinema” of image and sound. He emphasized less on speeches, and created a blackly comic counterpoint to murder [5]. The speeches in this film were very simple, even in the assassination during the symphony, the dialogues between Jo and Ben were totally covered by the cantata, to some extent, it restored the characteristics of the silent films. But the audiences still could guess the mainly contents of their dialogues, and it did not affect the anxious atmosphere that Hitchcock created in this climax.

2.2. Noise

2.2.1. Classic Noises

The fatal gunshot was masked by the clash of cymbals in Arthur Benjamin's “Storm Cloud Cantata ”, and because of Jo's screaming, the killer missed the shot. The serial noises almost happened at the same time. The noise of cymbals was tightly followed by the screaming, and the chorus has promoted the whole atmosphere tenser and tenser, affected the emotions of the audiences, and ultimately burst out at the moment of screaming and cymbal crashing. As the most important noises in this movie, they created indispensable effects with common responsibilities. First, this played a key role in saving the prime minister, and being invited to a banquet and finding their son from the perspective of plot advancement. Second, generally speaking, the sound of the cymbals in “Storm Cloud Cantata” was a normal noise, but the woman's scream unexpectedly appeared before the sound of the cymbals, which seemed to imply that in a seemingly peaceful situation, contradictions were on the verge of breaking out. It also suggested that the real organizer of assassination was actually a hidden traitor of British government, and the hypocrisy and gloom were concealed under the smiling faces on the surface.

Normally the screaming voice is on behave of a way in which horror could control the feelings of the audiences. Some sound effects the body reactions of the audiences, often showed through the screams of the characters, and also a great release as the suspense is revealed and true “monster” or darkness appears. Although *The Men Who Knew Too Much* is not a

horror movie, the scream technique was also able to replant in some parts which needed suspense.[6]

2.2.2. *Other Noises*

There were still typical noises that were worthy of discussing because Hitchcock used brilliant skills in these scenes. For example, there was a man walked after Ben when he was on the way to find Ambrose Chappell. The clear footsteps made by the man strengthen a simulation of Ben's tracking scene in his brain, which deepened his suspicion, so that after meeting with the man Ambrose Chappell, Ben believed the man was the kidnaper without hesitation. The noise in the Moroccan market, such as the shouts of market traders, and the sound of bus horns, are all displays of different cultural elements, which also enables cross-cultural content to be better integrated with these soft implants.

2.3. *Music*

The music and singing in this remake version mostly blended in the plots, rather than simply been dubbed in background music. There were two important music in this film - "Storm Cloud Cantata" and "Que sera, sera", which appeared at the climax of the film.

The prelude of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* actually implied the story, with the subtitle, "A single crash of Cymbals and how it rocked the lives of an American family", which appeared after the crash of the cymbals. The symphony in the beginning was also the hint of the climax of assassination hidden behind the cantata.

Ray Evan's Que sera, sera sang by Doris Day in this film had become a classic song around the world. At first the production company wanted to add this song just for the commercial consideration, but Hitchcock turned it into the essential clue throughout the film, and the necessary tool for the protagonists to find their kidnapped child. Another ingenious point was, Jo gave up her career because of her love and child, so at first, she just sang this song with her own son. But at last, the unique skill she had about singing was the critical approach to rescue her own song, and she restart to sing also because of her love and child, while this time her audiences became a bunch of important figures.

Also, there were some other music. For example, when Jo and Bernard were having conversations in hotel, the killer first appeared on the scene, and the background music was relatively depressing. At that time, the information about this person was still a stranger who accidentally went to the wrong door, but with the help of the background music, it could arouse people's suspicion.

3. THE INTERACTION OF THREE ELEMENTS

Although people perceive movie stories through vision, they create hallucinations through movie sounds. The sound of the movie is logical. This kind of logical tonality decompose, re-organize, interpret, and create a movie from the perspective of sound. In the meantime, it tells the sound story of the movie through the balanced combination of speech, noise and music, and sets off the overall tone of the movie.[7]

Speech accelerates the plot, and shows the personalities of the characters, the music highlights the mood, and renders the atmosphere, and the noise balances the relationship between authenticity and artistry. Hitchcock has mastered the rhythm of the utilization of sound in his films, and created waves of sound using in the world of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

Making Movies are a process of rebuilding the world. Various humanistic, historical, and social factors can be included in it. This is why these small and insignificant sounds can constitute the universe of movie sounds.

And there are tight connections between audio-visual medium. For example, from the beginning of the concert to the scream of the woman, the new version in 1956 lasted for 12 minutes, adopting a total of 124 shots, and there were no dialogues at all. The original song was quoted in the concert killing, but a prelude was added, as well as more sound elements, and the scale was expanded several times, which make the effect more shocking.

4. CONCLUSION

People sometimes regard sounds of films as the secondary things, serving the movie frames. But the sound of a movie has a soul, and it is another character of the movie. This paper investigates the application of sound in the movie *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Hitchcock's clever combination of speech, noise, and music made this remake more appealing and vivid, and more Hollywood film characteristics were shown. The speech modifies the characters, and reveals the deeper meanings. The noise in this film becomes the classic elements what later movies learn from; and the music is especially popular all over the world. The sound travels through the time and space, expressing rich meanings. Even if some elements in the original version were replaced, the adoption of movie sound techniques was very natural and perfect. Especially when it came to the use of speech, Hitchcock tried to avoid large sections of speeches, and often implied deeper meanings in the dialogues. The film was full of charm and personal style. From a certain level, the audience can have

emotional participation in the film. When the sound and picture reach the unity, the audience can be completely immersed in it, and even forget the existence of sound. This is the highest level of sound application.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by the author.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to all the people who helped me during the writing. My thanks would go to my assistant teachers, Lillian Lu, Frida and Hanmin, who helped me from different aspects and always been so patient. They gave me a lot of help so I can finish my target.

REFERENCES

- [1] Matthew Bolton. "The Director Who Knew Himself: Remaking the Romance in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*" [J] *Hitchcock Annual*, 2019, 23: 170
- [2] Matthew Bolton. "The Director Who Knew Himself: Remaking the Romance in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*." [J] *Hitchcock Annual*, 2019, 23: 174
- [3] Fan Linlin. "The Relationship between the Hollywood Female Movie Star and American Social Culture in 1950s." [J] *Contemporary Cinema*, 2014, (01): 115-119
- [4] Matthew Bolton. "The Director Who Knew Himself: Remaking the Romance in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*." [J] *Hitchcock Annual*, 2019, 23: 179
- [5] John Mauceri. "The Music of Alfred Hitchcock." *Toccata Classics*, London, 2014
- [6] Emma Shehan MA, Film Studies, Carleton University. "Sound, Screams, and the Score: An Exploration of Sound in Classic Horror Slashers Render"[J] *The Carleton Graduate Journal of Art and Culture*, Volume 5
- [7] Wu Liying. "Logical Tonality and Emotional Participation: Experience Aesthetics of Film Sound." [J] *Contemporary Cinema*, 2019, (04): 102-106