



The Plot Narrative of *Love in the Time of Cholera* and Its Film Adaptation

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Abstract. Plot narrative is an essential aspect of a novel, profoundly affecting the presentation of content and characterization. Various narrative methods were used in the novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*, but its film adaptation altered the plot narrative. This paper, mainly consisting of 3 parts, analyzes the plot narrative of *Love in the Time of Cholera* and its film adaptation. The first part details all abridgements or additions of plots in the adapting; the second part analyzes the changes to the narrative method in the adapting and further discusses the abridgement of plots; the third part discusses the difference in the characterization of Urbino between the original work and its film adaptation. *Love in the Time of Cholera* is an excellent work, and so does its film adoption, so the discussion of the adapting can enrich the study of *Love in the Time of Cholera* from another perspective.

Keywords: Love in the Time of Cholera · plot narrative · novel adaptation · characterization

1 Introduction

Love in the Time of Cholera, a famous novel by Márquez, has long been studied by scholars since its publication in 1985. Among them, the study of characterization, love and death has been more profound. Thanks to the development of the film industry, a Hollywood film of the same title directed by Michael Neville, was released in 2007 for a wider audience. The author and the director are different in treating the plot, leading to the difference in the characterization, which has a great potential research ability. Although there are numerous papers analyzing the love theme and characterization of the original novel as well as many scholars analyzing the film adaptation, studies on the difference in the plot narratives between the novel and its film adaptation remain inadequate, so a study of their plots can provide a better understanding of the meaning of them.

2 Literature Review

This paper is to study *Love in the Time of Cholera* and its film plot adaptations and the different effects that adaptations have on the characters. So the author thinks there are three keywords can be used to cover them: film adaptation, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and characterization.

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2.1 Film Adaptation

“The principles of film and television adaptations are affected by practical needs” as Huang Shuquan mentioned in *On Network Television Adaptation of the Novel*. Novels should boast aesthetic and social value, but film and television adaptations should put economic value in the first place, which may affect the direction of film and television adaptations [1]. In addition, Chen Linxia pointed out the rights entanglement of adaptations of classic works in *From Adaptation to Production: Finding a Balance Between Literature and Movies*. Among them, “the first level of power issue is how to deal with the different ideologies and class affiliation. The second level of power issue is issues arising from experts and scholars’ interpretation on the meaning of classic works that have been formed over a long period of time. The third power issue is issues arising from the multiplication of meaning produced by the classics in circulation process [2]. In *The Wisdom of Narrative: A Study of Film and Television Adaptations of Contemporary Fiction*, Chen mentioned erotic writing, namely love, lust, and pornography. Love involves profound philosophical questions, more of “interrogating the existential nothingness”. Lust is self-centred and pornography is more of a symbol of trading [3].

2.2 About Love in the Time of Cholera

In *Researches on Garcia Márquez’s Narrative Art*, He Wenyu pointed out that flashbacks, interlacing, sketch, mute narrative, and equal narrative are mix used and expansion, repetition, and analysis of narrative hierarchies are employed in *Love in the Time of Cholera* [4]. In Chen Feng’s love theme study of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, he also mentioned that love performance in *Love in the Time of Cholera* uses flashbacks and canonical interspersed methods [5].

2.3 The Characterization in Love in the Time of Cholera

The Utopia of Love: On the Love and Death in Love in the Time of Cholera mentions Urbino Tan Qingyan held the belief that Dr. Urbino is “a poor man imprisoned for lifelong time by family ideas and social status” [6].

In summary, the plot adaptations of *Love in the Time of Cholera* are not caused by a single factor but by multiple factors. Economic factors are inevitable to be avoided. In addition, the adaptor’s understanding of the original and the theme that he wanted to represent under the lens: the embodiment of love are also factors accounting for it. In terms of its narrative, the original is more complex. But in the film, in order to facilitate the audience’s understanding and the smoothness of the film’s plots, flashback is mostly used. As a Hollywood film, in order to be more in line with the aesthetics of the public, the image of Dr. Urbino also tends to be stereotyped to form a contrast with the love between Fermina and Alyssa. Such adaptations can better cater to the love aesthetics of most people so as to obtain higher economic value.

Current research mainly focuses on novel adaptations and the narrative and characterization of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and there is a lack of research that compares film-version *Love in the Time of Cholera* with the original. So this paper aims to fill in the gap by examining the plot narrative of *Love in the Time of Cholera* and its novel and the characterization changes brought by adaptation.

3 The Paper

3.1 The Plot of *Love in the Time of Cholera* and Its Film Adaptation

Love in the Time of Cholera is a long novel with rich stories, whose plot is mainly conveyed to readers through the text and has aesthetic and social values. The film adaptation of the same title was a good Hollywood movie, but unlike the novel, it has a wider audience, so the present of plot must appeal to all audience for generating economic value [1].

In the original novel, the plot about Urbino's love is richer and more specific, showed not only in his love with Fermina, but also in his love for the town. But the film, on the other hand, is more stereotypical love story, showing almost exclusively the love between men and women.

3.1.1 Urbino

In the original novel, the plot about Urbino is more complicated, for both Urbino's career and love for Fermina are shown in more detail. In the novel, Urbino is not only an ordinary husband, but also a great doctor dedicating to the society. In the marriage life, Urbino's love for Fermina is shown in a delicate yet deep way. Urbino shows enough respect for Fermina. To his friends, Urbino was a well-respected doctor. Urbino said that if his best friend did not leave have enough money for the burial, he would pay for him instead. Urbino love his town, too. Not only did he stop the last cholera outbreak in the province, but he also financed the first medical society, built the elevated aqueduct for the town. He also contributed money to the church and the municipal art center.

However, in the film, the plot about Urbino is mainly about the love. Urbino fallen in love with Fermina when he was young. Dr. Urbino's appearance was due to cholera which lead him to meet Fermina who was having cholera-like symptoms such as diarrhea and fever. Afterwards, Dr. Urbino, with the support from Fermina's father, began to pursue Fermina and eventually married her. Another plot about Urbino's romantic love took place in his twilight years, in which he cheats on his wife. Urbino met Barbara, a patient, in the clinic consultation, then they fallen in love. At this point, Urbino broke away from his dull marriage, showing his passions for romantic love. After being discovered by Fermina, Urbino again promised that he would not do it again, but his promise only to be sneered at by Fermina as cowardice. The plot of the film shows more of Urbino's retreat and conservatism in terms of love. His pursuing of Fermina and the dull marriage between the two seems are just the way it should be, and his fervor for Barbara only lasted until the moment it was discovered.

3.2 The Different Narrative Methods

"Love in the Time of Cholera" follows Márquez's magical realism in previous works, expressing the content from multiple directions, and thus using rather complicated narrative methods. However, in order to present an easier and smoother story to the audience, the film adopted the narrative methods of the original novel, by using simpler narrative methods to make a cleaner story line.

3.2.1 Complex and Varied Narrative

The narrative in fiction is rather complex, because as a medium of narrative, the text is much freer than the film. In terms of literacy device, the novel mostly uses flashbacks and interludes. “In terms of narrative order, Márquez intentionally disrupts the chronology of the story, using both narrate from the beginning and narrate from the end.” [5] This gives the plot more room to express itself and to shape round and complete fictional characters.

Now take the first part of the novel as an example. The novel uses this part as a separated narrative at the beginning of the text. In the novel, this part is the ending of Urbino and the starting of the continued love between Fermina and Ariza. As a small unit. Sequence of events in this part is simple: after autopsying the body of his best friend, Dr. Urbino went to a party held by his students before returning to his home, where he tried to catch a parrot and eventually died after falling. But thanks to interludes at this part, Urbino’s achievements, marriage, and lifestyle were presented to the reader. It is obvious that the narrative of the novel is complex, and it is the complex narrative that enables the novel to expand the plot and to shape the characters in a better way.

3.2.2 Smooth Story-Telling

Compared with the original novel, the film *Love in the Time of Cholera* has a more concise and smooth narrative. The main storytelling device in the film is flashbacks, with interludes as the device for the plot.

The narrative of the film is clearer than that of the original novel. The film begins with the death of Dr. Urbino, the ending of Fermina’s love for Ariza so the subsequent parts can be considered as a prelude to this ending, even the whole film can be considered as a flashback. The love between Fermina and Ariza is the focus of the narrative because the majority of the film is devoted to the love between them. The narrative of Urbino and Fermina’s love is merely an interspersion to the main narrative of Fermina and Ariza’s love. As the main love narrative of the entire film, the love between Fermina and Ariza also surpassed that between Fermina and Urbino in terms of amount of the plot, which makes Ariza a complete and round character, and Urbino, who was seldom portrayed, a rather one sided and wish-washy character.

3.3 Differences in Characterization

As the characterization is largely shaped by the plot, the plot was changed accordingly in adapting. Urbino in the original *Love in the Time of Cholera* is a round character with diverse love and affection, while Urbino in film adaptation looks more like a negative character, a stereotypical nobleman.

3.3.1 Urbino: Spiritual Aristocrat and Stereotypical Aristocrat

The novel and the film adaptation are totally different in the characterization of Urbino. It can be said that in the original novel, Urbino has a greater and more diverse love for people around him, not just romantic love between men and women, which makes him a real aristocrat in the spirit and status. However, in the film, the characterization

of Urbino was mainly focused on the love between men and women, presenting him as a stereotypical aristocrat, or even a negative character, “a poor man who has been a prisoner of family values and the social status for all his life” [6].

The Urbino in the novel is a more wholesome character. He is a highly intellectual man who has studied modern medicine in the West, who made great contributions to his town, such as building a drainage system and making house calls to treat cholera patients during the outbreak. He shoulders the fate of the town, using his professionalism to propel the modernization of the town and to get rid of the threat of cholera. These contributions undoubtedly come from Urbino’s love for the town, as well as his self-identity as a nobleman. Urbino is a great figure bringing moderation to his town, a fictional hero saving Latin America by Márquez.

In the film, Urbino’s true spiritual aristocracy is not the focus of narrative, which makes him a stereotypical aristocrat. In the film, Urbino’s manners, dressing are all elaborated to make Urbino conforms to the public perception about the aristocrat. Urbino’s medical knowledge merely leads to a chance for Urbino and Fermina to meet each other and fall in love. Fermina’s father also supported Urbino’s dating with Fermina out of his achievements and status. Urbino’s aristocratic bearing also became more prominent after the marriage. His love for Fermina is bland and wish-washy, more like for fulfilling the duties of an aristocratic husband than out of love. The film also mentioned that Urbino has affairs with Barbara, his patient. The film presents Urbino’s infidelity in marriage in a deep way. In terms of the characterization, Urbino in the film is mere a one sized character, a negative nobleman character, only serving as a companion to Ariza’s passionate love for Fermina.

4 Conclusion

The plot of the original novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* is more complex and complete than that of the film. It tells not only Urbino’s marriage with Fermina, but also his personal achievements. The narrative devices used in the novel is also more complex; even a single narrative may adopt chronological narratives, flashbacks, interludes at the same time, and thus containing more plots. However, the film adaptation uses almost exclusively simple flashbacks, which are smoother and in line with the plot unfolding. Different plot and narrative shapes different characters; in the original novel, Urbino is not just a man bearing a noble family name but also a great contributor to his town; in the film, Urbino is portrayed as a more stereotypical nobleman.

The main differences between *Love in the Time of Cholera* and its film adaptation are displayed in three aspects: the deletion of the plots, the difference in narrative, and the change of characterization. In terms of plot, the original *Love in the Time of Cholera* has more complex and complete plots. The novel not only shapes the love between Urbino and Fermina, but also talks about Urbino’s personal achievements indicating Urbino’s obligations and responsibilities to the town. In terms of narrative, the novel is more complex and may contain sequences, flashbacks, interludes, etc., which can display more plots. But the film only uses flashbacks. Such narrative is smoother and complements the plots, but it will also lead to a reduction in plots compared with the original. In terms of people and characterization, changes in plots and narrative of film

shape different characters compared with the original book. Urbino in the book is not only an aristocrat with a noble surname but also contributes greatly to the development of the town. His love is not only expressed in the marriage with Fermina, but also in the development and contribution of the town. Urbino in the film is slightly stereotyped as only his bland married life with Fermina is displayed and portrays him as a stereotypical aristocrat.

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