



Research on the Aesthetic Analysis of Film from the Misconception of Literary Film and Art Film

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Abstract. In recent years, the variety of films has been increasing, but literary films still account for half of the world. And it is still difficult for audiences to distinguish between the genre of literary films and art films. They are easily confused. Therefore, this paper will explore the difference between literary genres and art films by means of literature review and qualitative analysis. Two films, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, are used as case studies to analyze how artistry is expressed in films. A literary film is a film in which the director expresses his or her own ideas through his or her own style of filming and narrative. Artistic films are films that do not aim at a profit, have aesthetic value, and break new ground in film language. Usually tell the natural stories of ordinary people, so that the film as a whole can achieve aesthetic purposes. It is a form of commercial film, and its artistry comes from two aspects: the artistry of film language and the artistic exploration of film narrative techniques.

Keywords: literary film · art film · narrative art · art of light and shadow · film language

1 Introduction

In recent years, movies have become an increasingly close part of people's lives, and the movie market is expanding, and Chinese literary films are also being seen by the public. However, due to the ambiguity of the classification of film categories, this has led to many viewers being unable to distinguish between literary films and art films. Literary films refer to forms in which directors use their unique filming and narrative techniques to express their own ideas. In this type of film, the film itself is no longer a form of entertainment, but a medium used by the director to communicate his or her ideas [1].

In contrast, art films are films that have artistic appreciation value and have innovative parts in terms of film language. Most importantly, art films are films that are not aimed at profit at all, which is a type of film in opposition to commercial films. And literary films belong to the genre of commercial films. When the screening conditions allow, a successful literary film can also become a successful commercial film when the screening conditions allow.

Generally speaking, when a country's cultural prosperity or film industry development is judged by the development of mainstream commercial films, then the country's artistic creativity can be judged and evaluated by the development of art films. Artistic cinema is the essence of a film, as well as the soul of a film, which is the deeper spiritual function of a film other than the narrative function [2].

This paper further exemplifies the sources of artistry in art cinema by comparing two world-famous art films, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, and citing their new explorations of the artistry of film language and new means in narrative to illustrate their sources of artistry.

2 Literary Films and Art Films

2.1 Art Films

Art films are films with artistic value that are not for profit, and have a distinctive audio-visual language that is different from that of ordinary commercial films. Unlike mainstream commercial films and popcorn movies, which need to narrate stories with strange twists and turns to suit the public's taste, the stories of art films are often calm but thought-provoking. Moreover, many art films are known for their beautiful composition, music, color and other audio-visual language. In this regard, the author believes that art films need to explore artistry in film language or artistry in film narrative on the basis of not aiming at profit. At the same time, art cinema is also exploring new narrative forms that are different from those of previous films, and art cinema often reflects humanistic and critical consciousness in its films [3].

2.2 Literary Films

Literary film is a genre that Chinese moviegoers, after watching some of the films, grouped together some of the films with 'small freshness' and 'cool temperament', with obvious regional cultural characteristics. Until now, the word "literary" is still difficult to be explained, and even becomes a feeling that can only be understood but not expressed. Since literary film is a genre that cannot be defined exactly, it is mostly classified as a commercial film. Commercial films are profit-oriented films, which include a variety of genres, including literary films, romance films, comedy films, chick flicks, westerns, fantasy films, action films, and so on. The hotter movies in China in the past two years, such as *Love Letter*, *We Made a Beautiful Bouquet* and *A Rainy Day in New York* are all categorized as literary films in the eyes of the audience. However, under the traditional classification of film genres, *A Rainy Day in New York* is classified as a comedy, while *Love Letter* and *We Made a Beautiful Bouquet* are classified as romance. We generally believe that comedies and romances belong to one of the commercial films, in other words, these 'literary films' are commercial films. In other words, these "literary films" are commercial films, but they become literary films because the plot/tone/tone/editing gives the audience a 'literary' feeling.

2.3 The Difference Between Literary Films and Art Films

The most essential difference between commercial films and art films is whether the purpose of the film is to make a profit or not. There is no doubt that artistic films need to be released to theaters, they need to make profits, and they are oriented to the market and many audiences. According to Fang Li, president of Laureate Films and a famous producer, there is only a difference between popular and niche films. Commercial films and literary films are popular films, and their narrative style and progressive expression of characters' emotions are characteristics of popular films. In order to have high attendance in theaters, their stories are structured in a slightly coquettish manner, and their plots are mainly scattered story segments with characters having internal and emotional entanglements. Art films, on the other hand, are niche, less invested, and difficult to get into theaters, with characters whose expression is rational and philosophical thinking [3].

3 The Artistry of Art Films

A film is defined as an art film that requires some innovation in artistry and a new exploration of the boundaries of film language, or a narrative approach that is different from previous films and gives the audience a deeper impact. Artistic innovation can be manifested as innovation in cinematic languages such as composition, perspective, color, light and shadow, or in the narrative approach to the shaping of characters, the embodiment of their inner activities, and the exploration of narrative linearity. In this paragraph, the representative films *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* will be selected as cases to analyze the common expressions of artistic cinema.

3.1 The Grand Budapest Hotel

The Grand Budapest Hotel combines a multi-layered sound and visual narrative, blending narrative form and narrative content. The film pays tribute to the "light of civilization" by telling the stories of small people in a grand socio-historical context [4]. The film uses reminiscence and oral narration, combined with nested forms, to present the complete story to the audience in a variety of narrative structures.

In the beginning, the viewer sees a girl who has read the author's book come to the memorial statue, holding the author's original novel in her hand. Through the transformation of the camera, the scene changes to the author's recollection of his convalescence. Then, through the author's memories, the film frame is transformed into the Grand Hotel during the convalescence. Finally, the camera switches to the hotel where the author lived in his old age to begin the story. This kind of mosaic "set within a set" narrative is still rare in today's cinema, and is a leap forward in the exploration of narrative techniques". Each narrative is inseparable from the narrator and the receiver, and cannot be separated from a closely coordinated environment, which allows "the narrative to gain the fullness and richness that the message lacks [5].



Fig. 1. (a) Purple uniform; (b) Zero and Agatha falling into the pink dessert cart (screenshot from The Grand Budapest Hotel)



Fig. 2. (a) Zero and Agatha; (b) Hotel; (c) Writer who is telling the story (screenshot from The Grand Budapest Hotel)

Color

The film's characters are dressed in saturated purple, in the pink background of the hotel as a clever blend (Fig. 1(a)), making the film's tone highlight the elegance. The pink hotel tone is also a clever use. Pink tone in the film for the audience to show a fairy-tale dreamy color. And especially in the clip where the porter Zero and Agatha fall into the pastry delivery truck from upstairs (Fig. 1(b)), the background color is dominated by pink and powder blue. These two colors surround the film characters, allowing the audience to be pulled into a brief moment of sweetness, forming a clear difference between the dangerous situation of being chased and killed [7].

Composition

The stable and balanced composition in The Grand Budapest Hotel is also excellent. The symmetrical composition of the film makes the characters solemn and dignified (Fig. 2(a)). The symmetrical framing is also quoted in the architecture to make the buildings more quiet, stable and dignified (Fig. 2(b)). Under this composition structure, the film is clean, regular and coordinated, achieving a unified harmony. At the same time, it also reflects Wes Anderson's solemn remembrance of the writer Zweig (Fig. 2(c)) [8].

Frame Ratio

The Grand Budapest Hotel is also unique in terms of the size of the film frame ratio. Usually, the film frame is 2.35:1, but there are three different ratios in The Grand Budapest Hotel, respectively. This different ratio design pays tribute to the different times of the film frame.

The first frame ratio is from the 80s when the young girl walks into the cemetery to commemorate the old writer. 2.35:1 is the same film frame ratio commonly used in today's movies (Fig. 3 (a)). The frame in which the old man and the writer meet and talk is 1.85:1 (Fig. 3 (b)), the film frame of the 35 mm film era, which appeared after the 1950s. The central part of the film, the story told by the old man, is in 1.37:1 (Fig. 3 (c)),

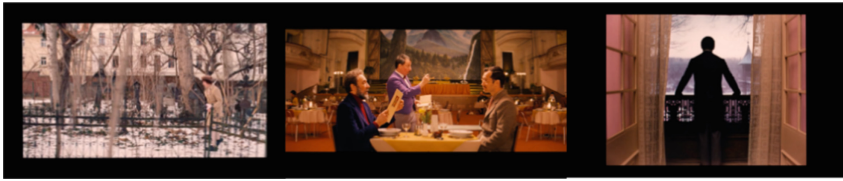


Fig. 3. (a) 80s, 2.35:1; (b) 60s, 1.85:1; (c) 30s, classic ratio 1.37:1 (screenshot from *The Grand Budapest Hotel*)



Fig. 4. Griet appeared on the night Vermeer's wife gave birth to her 11th child (Screenshot from *Girl with a Pearl Earring*)

the film format used until the 1950s and the format used at the time of the first films. This kind of creativity in aspect ratio is rarely seen in films and can be considered an innovation in film language.

3.2 *Girl with a Pearl Earring*

Color Tones

This film is a film related to the painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, an art film that pays homage to the original painting by the painter John Vermeer. Therefore, the director used a lot of jumping yellow and blue tones to echo the lemon yellow and blue commonly used in the writer Vermeer's paintings. In the film, the lemon yellow is reflected in the warm tones of the film, while the blue is presented in the cool tones of the film. This jumpy use often makes the viewer visually uncomfortable, but it is highly echoed in Vermeer's use of color in his paintings.

While warm tones are usually thought of as expressing warmth, the film uses them to express a crowded, chaotic, and hot situation like fire. Warm tones are mostly used in scenes where the painter's children are playing together. Especially on the night of Vermeer's wife's birth, the family is in a hectic atmosphere, which is heightened by the predominantly orange tones (Fig. 4). When Griet and Vermeer are alone, they are mostly treated with cool tones, and white, which represents purity, is used extensively to express the artistic pursuit between Griet and Vermeer.

In addition, the film uses different tones in different scenes to distinguish the changes in the characters' environment. Figure 5(a) is when Griet lives in the basement with the servants, the picture mainly uses warm tones, while Fig. 5(b) is when Griet is allowed to move to the attic after being appreciated by Vermeer, it is replaced with large areas of white and cool tones.



Fig. 5. The color tone corresponds to the scene (a basement, b attic) (Screenshot from *Girl with a Pearl Earring*)



Fig. 6. The first appearance of Vermeer's wife (Screenshot from *Girl with a Pearl Earring*)

Light and Shadow

In *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, a number of techniques are used to overexpose parts of the shot and then adjust the exposure values of dark details in post. This technique allows for the presence of highlights on the faces of the characters while ensuring that the shadows are visible, a way that brings the art of painting and 'painting with light' into the cinematic transformation of light and shadow [9]. This approach not only fits the characteristics of Vermeer's paintings, but also enhances the characters' personalities through their unique expression.

For example, at the beginning of the film, during the appearance of the painter Vermeer's wife, the director uses a unique style of photography. The overexposed face suggests that Vermeer's wife is a very arrogant person, an aristocrat who is no longer rich and noble, and whose whole body radiates a harsh and uncomfortable light (Fig. 6).

3.3 Summery

Through the introduction of two art films, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, the author hopes to prove that art films must have explored the language of cinema or the language of narrative in order to be classified as art films. For example, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* shows a mosaic of narrative innovations in its narrative language, as well as unique innovations in color, composition, and scale in its cinematic language. In *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, the tones and light and shadow prove that the director has an original design in the language of cinematic art.

4 Development Problems and Solutions of Chinese Art Films

4.1 Development Status and Dilemma

Low Success Rate of Art Films

Since the promotion means of commercial films, such as advertising and self-promotion, are not applicable in the promotion of art films, many film companies are reluctant to risk trying to invest in art films. In addition, the nature of art films requiring innovation also predestines them to be a product of burning money. Therefore, in the immature Chinese film industry, few people are willing to put money into art films. Therefore, the success rate of art films is extremely low.

As art films are almost equal to commercial films, they can be released or launched in theaters if they do not involve sensitive subjects or contain sensitive content. Therefore, in the early stages of film preparation, most art films are able to get investment and successfully establish projects. Therefore, in the Chinese film market, the market share of literary films is larger than that of art films, and they can bring commercial profits to investors. The 2020 total box office of Chinese films was 20.417 billion yuan, of which domestic films accounted for 17.093 billion yuan, accounting for 83.72% of the total box office. According to the State Film Bureau, in 2020, there were 548 million moviegoers in China's urban cinemas. A total of 531 feature films were produced throughout the year, with a total film production of 650. 5,794 new screens were added throughout the year, bringing the total number of screens nationwide to 75,581 [10]. In 2020, under the influence of Covid-19, the Chinese film market was hit hard, with a closure period of more than six months and an effective movie-going period of less than six months. However, the total box office still managed to reach 20.417 billion yuan after the opening of movie viewing, indicating the potential of the Chinese movie market. However, in 2020, art films in domestic theaters are rarely seen in people's eyes. The only repertoire available has a relatively low attendance rate.

Poor Resources of Art Films

Art films currently have fewer promotion efforts, and therefore lower publicity and exposure. Without the help of promotion, it is impossible to make an excellent film seen by more people by relying on the audience's own publicity.

In China, larger commercial films generally have enough financial strength to be promote and marketed through various means. Melodramatic films, on the other hand, can guarantee their marketing and distribution through the state's administrative channels and are less dependent on the market. Art can only rely on fate and audience recognition through awards, and is basically in a self-perpetuating state of unattended [11].

For the promotion of art films, many filmmakers are constantly emphasizing the need to set up more art theaters dedicated to art films. However, the number of art cinemas in China today is small. The average number of commercial cinemas in cities is much larger than that of art cinemas, which is an extremely unreasonable distribution. Shanghai has 10 art theaters thanks to the Shanghai Art Cinema Alliance, established in 2012 (Table 1), which is arguably the largest attempt at art cinema in the country today [11].

In addition, the Chinese film industry suffers from the problem of unprofessional filmmaker interpretation. Due to the low support for art films, few film practitioners are

Table 1. Number of commercial and art theaters in the city (made by the author)

| No | City | Total No. of cinemas | No. of commercial cinemas | No. of art cinemas |
|----|---------------|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Shanghai | 126 | 116 | 10 |
| 2 | Beijing | 125 | 122 | 3 |
| 3 | Shenzhen | 90 | 89 | 1 |
| 4 | Chongqing | 82 | 81 | 1 |
| 5 | Guangzhou | 70 | 69 | 1 |
| 6 | Chengdu | 67 | 67 | 0 |
| 7 | Wuhan | 49 | 48 | 1 |
| 8 | Dongguan | 47 | 47 | 0 |
| 9 | Tianjin | 46 | 46 | 0 |
| 10 | Shenyang | 44 | 44 | 0 |
| 11 | Hangzhou | 38 | 37 | 1 |
| 12 | Foshan | 37 | 37 | 0 |
| 13 | Nanjing/Hefei | 34/34 | 33/33 | 1/1 |
| 14 | Xian | 32 | 29 | 1 |
| 15 | Changsha | 30 | 30 | 0 |

willing to promote art films professionally. Most of those who produce commentary videos on the Internet today are half-way self-publishers, whose interpretation of films is mostly limited to the senses and storyline, with little research on the deeper aesthetics of art films. They need a certain number of viewers to help them achieve their goals, so their starting point is to attract viewers to click on their channels and videos. They prefer to interpret literary films with appealing storylines and beautiful images rather than overly academic art films.

4.2 Future Development Program

In order for more art films to emerge in the country, the government should increase its support for art films, rather than just supporting melodramatic films that can unite the nation. During the burst of art films in the 1980s, the soil and nutrition needed by the fifth generation of Chinese directors in the process of artistic exploration came mainly from the state-run film directors under the planned economic system [12]. Therefore, the vigorous development of national culture also needed to be supported by the government or the economic system. In addition, the establishment of more art cinemas or the creation of a specific screen for art films in a specific commercial cinema is a good way to support it. In many European countries, there are small cinemas dedicated to the screening of art films, called art houses. These measures to create art house cinemas play an important role in protecting and encouraging the development of art films. Creating special screening

theaters for art films not only improves the effective use of the theaters, but also plays a role in promoting the development of art films and lays a good foundation for the development of domestic art films [13]. And after the screening of art films, professional art film researchers can explain the memorable details of art films for the viewers to attract more audiences.

5 Conclusion

Art films are innovative in terms of narrative style and film language and offer more possibilities for the development of subsequent films. This innovation can be reflected in the narrative style or color composition. At present, there are few successful art films in mainland China because of the low success rate of art films in China and the lack of vigorous promotion. Therefore, the author would like the government to increase its support for art films, and also agrees that filmmakers from all walks of life should increase the spirit of creation and promotion of art films.

Due to the limitations of the author's knowledge, there are still some shortcomings in the process of completing this paper, such as the one-sided viewpoints. In order to improve, we can visit the Chinese art film market or conduct a questionnaire survey. Interviews with film lovers can also be conducted to understand the public's views on art films.

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