Lost in the Stars: Humanity and Society in Metaphor

Yuhan Zhu*

The College of Chinese Language and Literature, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou, 350007, China

*Corresponding author's e-mail: yuhanzhu0206@163.com

Abstract. This paper is to explore the metaphorical approach the value of the metaphorical approach to film-making and to the presentation of film. Metaphors run through almost the entire film creation of Chen Sicheng's *Lost in the Stars*. Director Chen Sicheng not only gives the audience a visual and auditory impact through metaphors, but also expresses his thoughts about human beings in a simple, concrete and familiar way, and even criticises the sick psychology of the society and the weaknesses of national nature. In this work, we will discuss the metaphorical techniques in *Lost in the Stars* under Chen Sicheng's direction from the metaphor of animals and the metaphor of "cage", and explore the value embodied in the metaphorical techniques: metaphors are used to present multiple images of television characters and to map social problems.

Keywords: *Lost in the Stars*; animal metaphors; characterization; humanity; society

1   Introduction

The study of metaphor has a long history, traditionally, metaphor is considered a form of rhetoric. In the famous works *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, Aristotle proposed the following definition of metaphor: "Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy, that is, proportion." [1] In addition, Aristotle was the first to propose metaphor as a cognitive pathway, arguing that metaphors have the "power to dive into the essence of things." By the end of the 20th century, international academic research on metaphors has become increasingly heated, from traditional rhetoric to the gradual integration of multiple disciplines. In recent decades, research on metaphor from different perspectives has proved the cognitive nature of metaphor: metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a basic way and tool for human beings to cognise and grasp the world, which enables people to start from the known, to play with their imagination, and to gradually create new concepts as well as new perspectives on things. "Metaphors are pervasive in our daily lives, not only in language but also in thought and behaviour. The general conceptual systems by which we think and act are metaphorical in nature." [2] Film, as a medium that has the function of transmitting many kinds of semantics, uses images as a carrier to transmit semantic information with

rich depth and aesthetic value to the audience, and hides the semantic connotations in images with the help of audio-visual language, which shows the metaphorical characteristics of film.

As the closest friends of human beings in the natural world, animals share the same earth with human beings, and their images, certain essential characteristics and living habits are similar or even the same as those of human beings and human society. In the process of getting along with them, human beings gradually form a more comprehensive knowledge of them, and the image of animals gradually penetrates into people's thinking field and emotional world, which prompts human beings to associate themselves with animals through metaphorical thinking intentionally or unintentionally in their lives, and thus animals have become one of the most common metaphors.

In film narratives, it is not uncommon to use animal performance as a metaphor to refer to character roles, as well as to deepen the film's main idea and explain the philosophy of life. The object of study in this paper, *Lost in the Stars*, is one of them. However, the use of animal metaphors is rare in domestic suspense films. The so-called suspense can be understood as "the discovery and sudden turn in the plot". It constructs the narrative framework with unpredictable suspense and promotes the story development with meticulous and rigorous investigation and reasoning. Characters encounter twists and turns, and their destinies are full of misfortune. In terms of market performance, the current domestic suspense films have the problem of "over-emphasis on plot reversal and neglect of characterisation" [3], which is one of the reasons why many domestic suspense films have a "low reputation". When the domestic suspense film is in such a context, it must have the "courage to be a pathfinder" and "survival in the cracks" eyesight and wisdom in order to "survive".

Lost in the Stars is the "suspense +" combination mode after the "Detective Chinatown" series "suspense + comedy" and "Sheep Without a Shepherd" series "suspense + emotion" directed by Chen Sicheng. In *Lost in the Stars*, director Chen Sicheng adopted a dramatic approach, with the plot reversing and then reversing again, so that the audience will be surprised and then have the satisfaction of realisation. Driven by the film's "drama within a drama" mode, the film was quickly pushed to the climax of its popularity.

The sensation of the film has also attracted the attention of experts and scholars, who have analysed the film from multiple angles and at multiple levels: focusing on the content design of the film, the wonderful performance of the actors and actresses, the study of the social and contemporary issues reflected in the film, as well as analysing the legal issues in the film. The author was also attracted by the film and related film and television studies. Director Chen Sicheng's metaphorical approach to the characters precisely demonstrated his majestic artistry, as Chen converted the camera's "unintentional action" into "intentional action" in the eyes of the audience. In the film, animals, Van Gogh's paintings, lighthouses and other images appear many times, these highly saturated colours of the camera, contrary to the gloomy style commonly used in works of the same subject matter, it is not difficult to see that animals and other imagery have an important significance for this film. Therefore, the author selects the imagery of animals and cages in the film, and interprets and digs out the diverse characters and ideas presented in the film through metaphors, aiming to help the public understand and

appreciate the film more deeply and to help domestic suspense dramas to explore a new "road".

2   The Metaphorical Construction of "Animals"

According to Lankoff and Johnson, "the essence of metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of thing through another kind of thing"[4]. In addition to this, they suggested that "metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a phenomenon of thinking, a cognitive mechanism by which human beings understand abstract concepts with the help of concrete concepts. Metaphor maps the structure, relationships, characteristics and knowledge of the originating domain onto the target domain, and the mapping between the two domains is facilitated by our physical, social and cultural experiences"[5]. A metaphor is a cross-domain mapping from an originating domain to a target domain, and the condition for the mapping to hold is that these two different domains need to be similar [6]. Metaphors include physical metaphors, and the animal metaphors in Chen Sicheng's film are in turn physical metaphors, namely taking the common things in people's daily life as the source of metaphor, the abstract and vague intangible concepts such as thoughts, feelings, mental activities, events and states are regarded as concrete and tangible entities. Thus, it is possible to talk about it, quantify it, identify its characteristics and nature, etc. In the film *Lost in the Stars*, the metaphors of animals as a metaphorical source include: spiders, scorpions, vipers, chameleons, and so on. Director Chen Sicheng and the art director of *Lost in the Stars* have both stated that "the cold-blooded animals in the film all have hidden mysteries, and each colorful, aggressive and toxic animal actually hints at the character's situation and psychological state" [7]. In the following, the writer will map part of the origin domain, i.e. the "animal world", onto the "human world", and the animal characteristics onto the character characteristics in the film.

2.1   The "spider" metaphor

Spiders appear in the first shot of the film, its color is more special, is florid, beside that the background is colorful like a dream, giving people a punch of color, and the black is the dominant color in the picture, giving people and its depressing feeling. The scene "Spider weaving a web" lasts about 3 to 4 seconds, the film makes full use of the audience's fear of darkness, combined with the audience's psychological expectations of "suspense", the audience is plunged into the feeling that someone is waiting for an opportunity to take action and make a careful layout in this short but "long" period of time. However, at the beginning of the film, when He Fei insists on filing a case, this primacy effect allows the image of his beloved wife to dominate, and this net is woven by and for whom, which triggers the audience's thinking.

Spiders have appeared in many works of art as imagery. The appearance of the spider at the beginning of the film Lost in the Stars shows that the director has fully considered the spider's connection with the events and characters of the film, and that it must have an abstract significance that goes beyond the "object" itself. Actually, the

word "spider" has multiple meanings: the spider implies that the main character, He Fei, is both a hunter and a prey. As a hunter, He Fei carefully sets up a trap, like a spider spitting out fine and dense silk, to achieve his own successful hunt again and again, with the intention of pocketing all of his wife, Muzi Li's property. At the same time, as a prey, this web is woven by Muzi Li's best friend Chen Mai, in order to catch He Fei, looking for the truth. The "spider" could be a metaphor for He Fei and Chen Mai, both of them are carefully "weaving", "weaving" a web to let others into the game.

2.2   The "scorpion" metaphor

The appearance of the scorpion was arranged by Chen Sicheng in such a way that it appeared in the state of a "stomped scorpion". After escaping Officer Cheng's gunshot, He Fei climbs out of the waterfall and runs back to the hotel on his way, stepping on the scorpion. The scorpion likes darkness and is timid and easily frightened, which implies that He Fei is nervous, upset and panicky at the moment. "Is He Fei afraid?" "Not looking for his wife?" A series of questions arise in the audience's mind. Additionally, the fact that the scorpion's hard shell is crushed means that He Fei's originally strong psychological defence is shattered, and it also implies the inevitable end that evil people will be rewarded for their evil deeds and dig their own graves.

2.3   The metaphor of the "serpent"

The "snake" appears outside the studio where He Fei and Chen Mai have found a way to weave an illusion. A yellow and white serpent is entwined in a tree of the green bush, coils near it, and seems to be spy on it. Fake Li Muzi gives the audience the same feeling as this snake, charming and dangerous, and He Fei's image seems to be once again "made real" as a victim, suspense and horror drive the film forward. After the revelation of He Fei's conspiracy, the "serpent" mirrors He Fei's cold-blooded image. And He Fei is in fact caught in another dead end.

   The symbolic function of the snake is often antagonistic and dualistic, stemming from both the fear and worship of the snake. In addition to connotations of evil and desire, the snake is a symbol of extraordinary primal power. Interestingly, the director chose to use non-venomous corn snakes for the snakes at the entrance to the ruins. Corn snakes are endemic to the United States and are also found in the Cayman Islands, so the snakes here can also point to the "kidnapping gang" in the Cayman Islands, i.e., Chen Mai and the others; and secondly, since corn snakes eat lizards, He Fei is actually caught in another dead end, suggesting that Chen Mai and the others are hunting He Fei's operation.

2.4   The "chameleon" metaphor

"The chameleon" appears several times in this film, and the cold-blooded animal that appears at the end of the film is the lizard, which is creeping on the lotus leaves outside the hotel, silent as a lurker outside the noisy crowd. The lizard is a peeper in the midst of the lights and noise, a reflection of He Fei's calm layout while pretending to be

drunk; or Chen Mai lurking and peeping at He Fei, like a hunter waiting for a rabbit, quietly waiting for He Fei to take the bait.

In addition, the camera repeatedly shows He Fei's mobile wallpaper, and it is clear that the animal on the wallpaper is a chameleon. Changing colors is the chameleon's advantage in defending itself. He Fei, who has a chameleon on his mobile phone screensaver, hints that he is a fickle and hypocritical person. As for success, there is no such thing as an unbroken advantage in the world, and this becomes the way He Fei is eventually revealed. Chen Mai also lures He Fei into the game in the same way with the play-within-a-play, Mandela effect, drawbridge effect, etc. to create panic, and the cycle of cause and effect.

The animal, the chameleon, is also often found in film language and is commonly used to indicate casualties and passing away, and the shots of the lizard given in the film foreshadow the victimization of Li Muzi.

Throughout the film, the presence of animal metaphors makes the roles of the victim and the perpetrator interchangeable in the plot, breaking the characters' inherent images while blurring the audience's existing perceptions of good and evil characters. While the roles of good and evil doubles the suspense of the film, it also makes the audience suffer from the emotional identity of the characters that swings from side to side. This is what makes Lost in the Stars a hit with the audience.

3   Metaphorical construction of the "cage"

The ending song of the film, "Cage", renders the climax to the point of breaking the dike. "Cage" echoes the core of the story, and also blends with the deep emotion wrapped under the suspense of the film, bringing the audience a shocking reminiscence. The recurring piano melody is like a deep-sea undercurrent, creating a confusing atmosphere for the film. The metaphor of the "cage" symbolizes both the internal repression and bondage, as well as the external restriction and oppression, leading the audience to re-examine and rethink the complexity of the human heart and human nature.

"cage" is not only the "cage" that traps Li Muzi, a true reflection of the plight of women, but also the "cage" of Humanity, a pathological psychology that exists in society. Li Muzi is lured by He Fei into an iron cage at the bottom of the sea, and becomes a prisoner who cannot break free; the freak show footage that appears in the film is another prison. The reason why Lost in the Stars can mobilize the emotional resonance of some viewers lies in the fact that similar cases in reality really exist and are even more shocking, and the truth has its own power and cautionary value.

What is even more heartbreaking is the "cage" of human nature. In the film, He Fei believes that he is bound by the shackles, which come from his family, society and other injustices he believes, and he also has his own cage. As an advanced animal, man has a sense of self and can choose to be good or evil in the same matter. "One thought of heaven, one thought of hell" [8], the thought in his heart determines his own destiny. At the end of the film, one thought of evil leads to He Fei's drowning of his wife; one thought of good leads to the happy ending of the egg of the film. Famous director Mike

Lee once said, "Making people think is what cinema is all about". Through a series of metaphorical images, the film shows the audience the significance and charm of the aesthetics of reality, that is, through the deconstruction of real-life phenomena, it makes a silent and powerful appeal, which triggers thinking about the society and re-consideration of reality.

4   Conclusion

Through the use of metaphors, the film *Lost in the Stars* presents a visual and spiritual feast for people, and it also embodies the transcendence of the film, which "penetrates into the depths of human nature and the depths of society" to the fullest extent. This metaphorical approach is also endlessly enlightening and soul-nourishing for the Chinese film and television industry. Metaphor as an intermediary for thinking, with its mapping and conversion mechanism and indispensable way of thinking of "one is born two, two is born three, three is born everything", it provides an excellent entry point for the aesthetics, symbolism and transcendence of the film, and also plays a subtle tension on the depth and breadth of the audience's thinking. Therefore, judged by this criterion alone, *Lost in the Stars* is undoubtedly a great success.

References

1. Wang songting. (1999) Mechanisms and socio-cultural patterns of metaphor. Heilongjiang People's Publishing House, Harbin.
2. Lakoff G,Johnson M.Metaphors We Live By[M].London:The University of Chicago Press,2003.
3. Lin youfan. (2023) An Analysis of the Path of Creating Quality Domestic Suspense Films. https://www.21ks.net/lunwen/dyczlw/190291.html.
4. Zhang Huiyu. (2023) Gone with Her: The Anxiety of the Times Behind the Sense of Suspense. Film Arts, 411:66-69.
5. Lakoff G.,M Johnson.Metaphors we Live By[M].Chicago:Chicago university Press,1980:5.
6. Lakoff G. The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor[G].A.Ortony.Metaphor and Thought(2nd ed.).Cambridge:CUP,1993:202-251.
7. Qu xiuyan, Yan hongyong, Li diandon. (2017) Cognitive Metaphors Reconsidered. Henan Education (Higher Education), H05:140-141.
8. Liu Luoqi. (2023) Chen Sicheng, Producer of Gone With Her: I Accept All Audiences' Thoughts. China Film News, 006:1-3.