

# Study on the Composition Design of Picture Book "Where the Wild Things Are" and the Aesthetic Imagery in Film Adaptation

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**Abstract**—Maurice Sendak's work "Where the Wild Things Are" was shocked the picture book world once published, and won numerous awards at the same time, which means that children's picture books came to maturity. In this work, the public from the traditional understanding of children's expectations to the children's psychological vision, opened up the cognitive and guidance of children's negative psychology, in 2009 his picture book was adapted into a film, the composition design of the picture book is in line with the process of lens movement in film, while the cognitive process of the picture blend with psychology. This article analyzes the children philosophy and cultural significance of his picture book and film adaptation from the perspectives of Sendak's creative style, aesthetic experience, composition design and its metaphor, as well as the aesthetic feelings of film adaptation.

**Keywords**—"Where the Wild Things Are"; composition design; film adaptation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Maurice Sendak was the "Picasso" in picture book world, he was one of the most important authors in the history of the picture book. In his hands, picture book from low and naive came to maturity. Sendak faced children's psychology and children's philosophy, for the children who evolved from animals and with innocent, wild and rude, these behaviors were not allowed and avoided mentioning in the range of Chinese and Western traditional ethics and morals, but this was in violation of the nature of human growth and development. Maurice Sendak's representative works include "Where the Wild Things Are", "Outside Over There", "The Night Kitchen". Barry Somne once said: "What we cast on babies and children is the characteristic that is opposite with what the adult admirers... Adults use children to define themselves in a process of ideology and self-definition, which is the similar way for men to define women and colonists define colonized people as 'others' ". [1] Maurice Sendak's work has a metaphor for a sense of loneliness, like the cover of the "Where The Wild Things Are" that the beast sit by the beach for meditation, it looks like the lonely "Thinker" David, which is also the thinking about the fate of mankind. In Sendak's works, it is full of references to humanities, history, art and philosophy. In the 1981 edition picture book "Outside Over There", the composition of the two sisters' encounter is

like Michelangelo's work "Creating Adam", which means that the two sisters have experienced the struggle with the devil and re-established self-consciousness.

In Sendak's works, Freud's thoughts are revealed, and "the importance of negative emotions in aesthetics is affirmed" [2]. This is also the aesthetic experience that it brings to children readers. Among these experiences, there are the author's own mental journeys in his early childhood, the sister's company and care replaced their mother, the frail and sick body with deaths comes at any time, and the incident of baby abduction and killing which was blast news at that time, and so on. How to face loneliness and fear, the parental roles in all works of Morris Sendak are missing, and this deficiency can be reflected in other works by Maurice Sendak.

## II. THE COMPOSITION DESIGN OF PICTURE BOOK "WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE" AND ITS METAPHOR

In the process of children's cognition to the world, firstly they perceive everything around us visually [3]. Maurice Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are" uses a pen drawing style, and the texture of the beast's hair is clearly visible. The composition of the entire picture book has a strong visual effect and film aesthetics. The cover is like a distant shot of a movie, which brings suspense to readers and viewers. "What is the beast thinking about?", "Where is this boat coming from?", "What happened under the night?", "Who is the owner of the boat?" Like the suspense setting of the opening of a film, it is fascinating; the title page is dense jungle leaves, peeling the leaves and gradually open the curtain; the first page of the picture book is like the long-distance shot of movie lens, showing the action of Max through the picture, revealing the protagonist's personality and the background of the event. Max wears a wolf costume, plays himself into a beast, joins the handcuffs to build his own tent, and the innocent cloth puppy is punished. There is a throne-like chair in Max's tent, perhaps he used it to pretend to be King, from this page we can see the background factors such like the protagonist's original emotions, personality and the lack of parental companionship and discipline. In the second picture, Max hold a shovel which his mother used for cooking and chase the puppy, the puppy's expression of helplessness and the painting on the wall all representing Max's devil habit has formed already. Then "Mom scolded: 'Beast!', 'Max also yelled, I want to eat you!'".

As a punishment, her mother chose violence must be met by violence and ask Max to go back to his room for reflection and not allowed to have dinner, and at the same time she reserved the dinner as a clue to the whole book. With the expansion of Max's anger, the whole picture is like a push lens in a movie, which magnifies the picture, in the subsequent picture, as the mood and imagination ferment, the composition of Max's room becomes larger and larger until crossing the entire layout, and in his imagination space, a tree grows in the room and grows into a whole forest, Max's expression is also from anger to pouting thinking to smile with hand covered with mouth, and when he departed with the boat, his face was already become a proud expression.

The character styling in Sendak's works has many metaphors and rich allusions, such as Griffin in "Where the Wild Things Are". In Greek mythology, there is a beast with eagle head, lion body and wings, which is the king of beasts. But at the same time, it is also a beast very loyal to its partner. If its partner dies, it will live the rest life alone; the beast shape on the cover which has cow head and human body and thinking by the beach is very similar to Minotaur in Greek mythology. Minotaur was hidden and humiliated by his biological parents because of its strange appearance and confusing life, and was finally smothered by the beautiful and energetic Hughes, and the person who hand Hughes the word that killed him happens to be his own sister, and the cow headed beast in the cover also has a pair of human feet and human teeth. When Max and the beasts are in trouble, Max was riding on his neck, these pictures are metaphorical to Max has the same characteristics as the cow head beast, who may be the embodiment of Max's father; and the changeable moon is a metaphor for Max's inner feelings, when Max haven't reach the beast country, the whole moon was a crescent moon at that time, and after he arrived the beast country, the moon was full, which symbolized Mike's relieved mood, and later when he returned home, the moon was also a full moon, meaning that Max has completed the identification of family and the resolution of self-emotion in his imagination space; "Leaf" also has important metaphorical function in this book [4], it is the embodiment of the anger in Max's emotions. When his mother does not give him dinner and ask hi to go to sleep, Max's room grow out trees, his psychological anger continues to ferment, so the anger turns into leaves and growing into a whole forest.

### **III. THE AESTHETIC ACCEPTANCE OF THE FILM ADAPTATION OF "WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE"**

The film "Where the wild things are", directed by Spike Jonze and adapted by Dave Eggers, is based on the picture book "Where the wild things are" published by Maurice Sendak in 1963. The Chinese translation is "The Beast Home". In the adapted film, it added the role of mother and sister Claire. The opening it took 16 minutes to render the loneliness of the little boy Max, sister's disregard for the younger brother, she left with her friends even after she saw the younger brother crying. Although his mother cared about him but she can't accompany the child because she has to afford the family all by her own. The film also features a close-up of the speech on the globe that his Dad left to Max, and the film clips his

mother drunk with other man to imply the absence of father's character in the family.

#### **A. Character Modeling and Action Design Style**

The character of the entire film is based on the original book, even fine to all the details. The beast in the picture book has become a real character that can be touched, but for the modeling style, there is no breakthrough in the roll role created by Hollywood, so that the audience has no surprises or breakthroughs in the visual sense. Max has always been running in his own beast country, when he saw that Carlo can leap, he had a surprise. This action was designed by Max for himself, the magical themes in both Chinese and foreign countries all have the action fantasy for flying over the eaves, running on the walls, and get rid of gravity of the earth. Except for the main character Max, in fact, all the beasts in Wild World are the external characteristics of Max's inner emotions and personality. The first beast Carol he met" always want to destroy something to prove itself", it find its existence through destruction, attract attentions of families and friends through destruction, which is a common feature of childhood; Douglas feels "nobody listens to me". K.W. wants to get recognition from others, and everyone feel it is very cool, this is the five-level self-fulfilling needs of Maslow needs. Judith believes itself is a "Buzz killer", and Aleksander likes to be sensational. And the "root" of the film is "Do you know how to cure loneliness? How to make happiness?" how to face loneliness and solve the problem of loneliness, I am afraid it is not just for young children, but for the entire human race, just like Shakespeare asked from Hamlet's mouth: "To Be, or not to be".

#### **B. Scene Picture Design Style**

The whole film is played in cool colors and darkness. In the path and way of Max to the Beast Country, the film is slightly different from the original, the original book is extended through the entire forest of Max's own room and the boat was floated in; but in the film Max fled his mother and home through crazy running, then he came to the shore in the dark, and boarded a small boat. In order to render Max's lost and angry emotions in the movie, he experienced storms in the sea which as a metaphor for his emotions are out of control.

#### **C. The Narrative Style Structure of Drama**

The narrative style of this film is based on the passages of "at home - left home - return home". When Max just arrived at the beast country in the film, he saw the beasts arguing and destroying things, his heart was fearful, but when he saw the lion was repeatedly attacked, he was full of sympathy, this is the construction process of his sympathy personality. When the beasts wanted to eat him, Max rebuilt the plot of his ice house destroyed by his sister's companions and described himself as the king of another kingdom. The beasts faced the magical power of Max, and hopefully he could solve the sadness and loneliness, and these emotions are exactly the incarnation of Max's own emotions. Faced with the sad expressions of the beasts, Max only have to lied that he had a "forget shield", when they started to enjoying and having fun, they started running to the sun, Caro here is the embodiment of Max himself, and KW is a beast with a woman voice, so it is

the embodiment of Max's sister. Max's first question for KW is "Will you stay?" In the film, the real-world sister ignored the shack of Max's dam, still abandoned him and left with her friends, so the contradiction between the big sister and younger brother escalated. The contradiction between Caro and KW in the beast country is a metaphor for contradictions in the real world.

#### D. Values and Emotional Communication

"The Beast Jungle" is a metaphor for away from home in Western culture. King Oedipus in the Greek mythology, Shakespeare's Hamlet and others penetrated the fate in the experience and realized self-salvation in the process of leaving home. In the narrative of this film, the original picture plot full of bizarre imagination is transformed into film language, but in the process of transformation, Max and the beasts communicate without any obstacles when they meet for the first time, the beasts speak fluently American English, this is logically difficult to bring the audience into the film plot, always feel a little divergent. This film is a fantasy fairy tale in 2009, Max experienced left home-self cognition and self redemption—return home, when he face the beasts that turned from his inner emotions, at that moment he understands his mom, Max's returning home means the reconciliation between him and his mother, the farewell to his inner beasts, and the farewell to his childhood. Zhang Tianyi, a well-known Chinese writer, once said that children's literature is a "literature of love" [5], the end of the film, Max returned to the family is the proof based on the mainstream values.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The development of contemporary society, the literature, art, film and television, and picture books that face the children's psychology are becoming more and more abundant. The works about children's emotions includes anger, barbarism, rudeness, and squeaky are also recognized by the contemporary public culture. Many picture books include Margaret Wise Brown's "The Runaway Bunny", "No, David", "When Sophie Gets Angry" and so on, film works such as "Coraline", etc., China's well-known family sitcom "Home With Kids", the cartoon "Big Head Son", etc., these works can lower the attitude, show the children's real psychology, provide an exit for children's emotions, and at the end of the work the returning of family was set as the final value guidance.

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