

An Exploration of Narrative Strategies in the Adaptation of the Cross-Media Text *Postmen In The Mountains*

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Abstract

The novel *Postmen In The Mountains* written by the famous writer Peng Jianming was adapted into a movie of the same name in 1999, and was adapted to the screen by director Huo Jianqi. Although the domestic box office was not good after its release, it successively won awards at major domestic and foreign film festivals caused widespread repercussions. The novel *Postmen In The Mountains* shows the exploration of life and the nostalgia for the countryside through the artist's "prose culture" words. The 1999 version of the movie uses a unique narrative perspective to show deep themes such as the meaning of life. The text of the same name *Postmen In The Mountains*, presented in different media forms, reflects a unique narrative strategy in its adaptation, and shows changes in aesthetic taste and narrative structure, aesthetic expression and narrative style from the perspective of narratology.

Keywords: *Postmen In The Mountains*, cross-media text, narratology, narrative strategy

1. Introduction

Peng Jianming published the famous short story *Postmen In The Mountains* in "Sprout" magazine in 1983. The novel won the National Outstanding Novel Award. The novel tells the story of an old postman and his son delivering letters together in rural Hunan in the 1980s. The author Peng Jianming uses "prose" writing to show his exploration of life and his nostalgia for the countryside. The novel also shows deep philosophical implications about the value of life. For example, when a father hands over work to his son, this actually reflects a kind of reincarnation of life. The father worked diligently throughout his life and dedicated everything to the "postal delivery". When the

son restarted the path he had traveled throughout his life and continued his work, it was a new beginning of life, and the value of his father's life was fully reflected at this time. When the father and his son are walking together on the mountain road, you can feel the father's inner monologue through the delicate words: he hopes that his life-long work of faith will allow his son to continue to realize value, but he also has a strong feeling of reluctance to let go of his son. As Nietzsche said in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "Everything dies, everything is reborn; the body of existence always builds the same house of existence. Everything separates and joins together, and the cycle of existence is always true to itself." (Nietzsche, 1987) The past,

present, and future constitute eternal time. Everything embodies its value in the inheritance of life. The father's memories of the past and the son's re-experience of his father's past experiences all reflect the inheritance of life.

When it was adapted into a movie by director Huo Jianqi and put on the screen in the late 1990s, it was one of the rare postal-themed feature films in the history of movies to show the style of western Hunan. The film uses the "postal route" as the central clue, and through a unique first-person narrative, vividly displays the customs and customs of western Hunan, allowing the audience to immerse themselves in it and appreciate the artistic charm and deeper cultural implications.

2. Film and Literature from the Perspective of Narratology

Film and literature belong to comprehensive arts and language arts respectively, and therefore present different aesthetic characteristics. As an artistic expression of comprehensive art, film embodies the characteristics of comprehensiveness, integrating elements from other art categories such as music, dance, art and other arts, and more intensively combines time art and space art, visual art and auditory art, Plastic arts and performing arts are integrated together to achieve a high degree of integration at the aesthetic level, thus possessing huge comprehensive performance capabilities. Literature uses words as a carrier, allowing readers to feel and imagine the emotions contained in them through the transmission of words. Among them, novels, as an important literary form in literature, attract readers with their ups and downs of plots, making readers sincerely accept the novelist's ideological characteristics while admiring them. Since both have narrative functions, the two completely different art categories have an inseparable internal connection.

Narrativity is the prerequisite for the adaptation of novels into film and television works. Therefore, in the process, narratology has become the theoretical accumulation and foundation of adaptation. The rise of narratology comes from the continuous progress and development of novel creation. From the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century, during this period, the novel attracted people's attention and gradually formed a theoretical framework. The actual

emergence of narratology is actually widely influenced by two theories, namely semiotic theory and mythological theory. "Although narratology has also accepted the influence of various academic trends that have stirred up after the 1960s in its later development process, such as psychoanalytic theory, hermeneutics, reception aesthetics, ideological theory, etc., structuralism is after all. The spiritual legacy it received during its gestation and formation stages, this influence is difficult to erase." (Luo Gang, 1994)

Narratology gradually matures under the changes and integration in this historical torrent. With the establishment of the theoretical system, other art categories such as dance, art, and film also chose to learn from the methods of narratology, resulting in new narrative theories such as art narratology and film narratology. Among them, film narratology is influenced by semiotics and structuralism and has become an important part of contemporary narratology. In the article "Film: Language or Speech", the famous French theorist Christine Metz tried to use codes to express various elements in the film, and put the film into Saussure's semiotic theory, thus forming the film Semiotic theory. "Metz's series of assertions that film is a special symbol system paved the way for film narrative analysis. Subsequent film narrative research is more or less connected with Metz's theory. Therefore, treating Metz as a contemporary film, it is fitting that he is the pioneer and founder of narratology." (Li Xianjie, 1999) And after him, following Allen and Warren's theoretical research proposed the "Image Symbol Coding Theory". The publication of the book *What is Film Narratology* co-authored by François Jost and André Gaudreau marked the official birth of film narratology. The above is a simple review of narratology. Through theoretical review, we will further explore the narrative strategy of the adaptation of the cross-media text *Postmen In The Mountains*.

3. Rewriting of Aesthetic Taste and Narrative Structure

3.1 Adjustment of Narrative Angle

Whether it is a movie or a story, a fictional character is needed to guide the audience into the plot structure and narrative network. This fictional character is the "narrator". (Li Xianjie, 2000) Specifically in the narrative process of a film, the director needs an identity to reflect his

attitude towards the story, and this identity is the film the narrator. (Xia Yuyan, 2015) Film theorists once divided the film person into two categories: personal narrative and impersonal narrative. This is based on the novel The narrative theory system is based on. Whether it is a novel or a movie, the narrative perspective of the story and the narrator of the story are essential. No matter what type of story, there must be a narrator, who can promote the development of the storyline and explain the background of the story throughout the work.

The issue of perspective is also an essential component of a film. In fact, there are many choices for the perspective of the film. How to choose is inseparable from the director's style, the theme to be expressed, and the deep meaning of the work. Therefore, the choice of person in film narrative is called an important symbol to distinguish the director's artistic style. Excellent directors can definitely choose a reasonable narrative perspective through their own knowledge reserves and mastery of skills, so as to further express their own views in the film. Aesthetic ideals as well as the plot and emotions of the story. Director Huo Jianqi is unique in his choice of perspective and person, which not only reflects his unique directorial style, but also reflects his careful transformation of the original work.

The novel and movie of *Postmen In The Mountains* are two completely different narrative methods, showing different advantages. In the novel *Postmen In The Mountains*, the author Peng Jianming chose to use the third person narrative method, like a storyteller, to show people the hidden plot and beauty. In the film, Huo Jianqi adopted his usual creative style, using a completely different method from Peng Jianming's novels, showing the audience in the first person. David Bordwell discusses the voice-over and narration of films in *The Poetics of Film*: "The plot narrative and style of a film are not limited by verbal communication. Film narrative serves as an audio-visual presentation rather than a written text, is an opportunistic and piecemeal borrowing of a communication model. This is why we have voice-over narration by our protagonists without any indication that they are speaking to anyone in the virtual world. (David Bordwell, 2010) At the beginning of the film, the son's monologue in the film is presented in the form of voice-over, which serves as the beginning and a special perspective

for the narrative of the entire film. This unique narrative method can shorten the distance between the audience and the characters of the work to a certain extent, giving the film a strong sense of intimacy. The more important point of the director's adaptation is that it can satisfy the audience's yearning for beautiful love. In the film, through the voice-over of the son, the feelings of respect and envy are highlighted through the memories of the younger generation's love for their elders. Therefore, it can satisfy the audience's aesthetic needs for pure love. The use of this technique is similar to Zhang Yimou's *My Father and Mother*, both of which are unfolded through the perspective of the son. The difference is that in *Postmen In The Mountains*, the love shown is only one aspect. The choice of first person in Peng Jianming's novels is actually to show a prose-poetic expression in the form of words, and to use this prose-poetic language style to show the storyline, character description, etc. This narrative method can actually leave room for the audience's imagination, embody the unique aesthetic value of its language art, and comprehend the deep philosophical implications. Although this narrative method makes the novel more colorful, it also brings some disadvantages to the adaptation due to too many monologues. Because the film has its direct characteristics and emphasizes spiritual communication with the audience, the screenwriter used his intelligence in the film adaptation. Therefore, in the film, he introduces his life as a postman to his son starting from one morning, reflecting the consistency of the way the original work looks like a person telling a story. The multiple appearances of the son's voiceover in the film reflect the closeness between the son and the audience, giving the audience the aesthetic feeling and illusion of having a conversation with the protagonist. So, it is precisely because of the existence of two completely different narrative methods, movies and novels, that the classic *Postmen In The Mountains* is available for people to appreciate.

3.2 Changes in Plot Structure

Novels and movies in literature both belong to narrative art, and their plot and structure are very important elements in these two arts. As a literary genre that focuses on narrating stories and shaping characters, novels have three indispensable basic elements: characters, plot and environment. The plot of the novel fully

reflects the various contradictions in life. Without contradictions, there is no novel. All in all, the plot of the novel is relatively complete, especially traditional novel creation, which strictly follows the structural sequence of the story's beginning, development, climax, and end. The structure of the novel is based on the artistic form, that is, the process of arranging and integrating the content of the work. From an artistic point of view, only the perfect unity of artistic content and form can constitute an excellent work of art. Therefore, the plot and structure must be closely integrated to achieve a harmonious state. Film and television adaptations of literary works are first of all adaptations of plot and structure. American film theorist George Bluestone pointed out: "Novel is allowed to be lengthy, but movies must be concise. The reading method of novels allows readers to control their own speed, but the way of watching movies is different. It is determined by the speed of the ruthless player, which the audience cannot grasp. You can imagine the difference between the two programs-the loose and more varied novel and the rigorous and concise film, which is the result of this." (George B. Ruston, 1981)

Movies have their own particularity in time, so it is obviously unrealistic to talk about every aspect of the novel when adapting the work. Therefore, the choice and abandonment of plots are important factors in the success of the adaptation. The choice of plot is basically based on factors such as the theme, meaning, and clues of the work. First of all, Peng Jianming's character relationship in the novel is that the father is strict and the son is filial. In the movie, it starts with the estrangement between father and son. As the storyline develops, the relationship between father and son finally becomes harmonious. The changes to the father-son relationship in the original work reflect the director's unique ingenuity. The important purpose is to make the conflicts in the film more intense, so as to better attract the audience's attention and follow the director's perspective to gain insight into the father-son relationship in the work. The disagreement between father and son presented at the beginning of the film also arouses the audience's curiosity and interest in this issue. In fact, in real life, disharmony between father and son is becoming more and more common, but it is easily ignored. From this perspective, such a

plot setting can help some viewers find answers and ease their relationship with their father or son in real life. What runs throughout the film is the relationship between father and son from initial estrangement to understanding. When expressing psychological changes, the work also arranges some details, such as the "crossing the river" plot. By crossing the river, the son gradually understood the difficulty of his father's work and his seriousness and responsibility for his work. At the same time, he also understood his own responsibilities and mission. At this moment, the father also had great psychological changes in his heart. He felt relieved and his son had grown up. Here, the relationship between father and son gradually shifts from estrangement to mutual understanding. Let the audience deeply feel the family affection that blood is thicker than water. This kind of family affection can never be let go. No matter how long the "freezing period" goes through, there will always be a day when the ice and snow melt. Throughout the history of film, there are many directors who like to express the relationship between father and son in their films. For example, Zhang Yimou's *Riding Alone, Thousands of Miles* does the same, using the relationship between father and son as a clue to show a road to redemption. The film has similarities in the expression of the relationship between father and son. The film's changes to the plot of the original work pushed the film to a climax and conveyed a deeper meaning to the audience: inheritance. This inheritance is hope and faith.

The film's artistic adaptation of the novel is reflected in its successful handling of details, making the plot more coherent and complete. For example, the novel conveys that the reason why the son takes over from his father is that "before talking to the old man, the branch director secretly asked his son to check his body, fill out a form, and study and train for more than half a month." In the movie, it is shown to people. What is more important is that it is not his personal wish for his son to take over, but his father's "stubbornness" and "toughness." However, at the beginning of the film, the father tells his son that he may soon regret it, and in the middle plot, the father once again asks if he regrets it. It is not until the end of the dialogue between the father and the mother that the father's words "Leave it to someone else, I don't trust" push the climax of the story. The

ingenious setting of such a detail shows that the father does not let his son take over out of selfish motives, but out of admiration and love for “work” and hopes that his son can pass on this “job” for him. The “job” here has actually changed qualitatively from the work of supporting a family in real life. The father in the film regards this special “job” as his lifelong career and pursuit, and not only devotes his whole life to it. He devoted all his efforts and asked his son to continue the inheritance for him. The true meaning of inheritance was vividly explained. In real life, the “succession” of the parents’ era is more for the children to have an “iron rice bowl”, which is in sharp contrast, further highlighting the brilliance of human nature in the film. Many of the prose features in the novel have been deleted from the film, and more emphasis has been placed on realism. For example: the protagonist uses “son” and “father” instead. The subtle plot settings such as listening to semiconductors, hitchhiking, and throwing darts in the film strive to show richer connotations and the artistic charm of the film.

4. Transformation Between Aesthetic Expression and Narrative Style

As novels and films are different categories in the classification of art categories, there are differences in the conversion of aesthetic expression and narrative style. As a small branch of language art, novels have the aesthetic characteristics of language art. Language art contains the characteristics of indirectness and vastness, emotion and thought, structure and language beauty. Therefore, when reading novels, readers need to rely on their imagination to fully use their imagination to examine the characters in the works through words. Therefore, when analyzing reading novels from this perspective, as a reader, you cannot get an immediate visual impact, but you can leave yourself enough room for imagination, so it is not limited by time and space. Therefore, the same reader will read the same novel at different stages. The works may produce different aesthetic feelings. Because film works are comprehensive arts, as a product of technology and art, they integrate other artistic elements such as art, music, dance, etc., reflecting their unique way of expression. Then movies constitute the narrative elements of their works through movie images, audio-visual language, characters, etc. Film is an art that

directly affects the audience’s senses, fully meets people’s aesthetic needs and has strong visual impact. Therefore, the basis and prerequisite for film and television adaptation is to replace the text carrier in language art with montage and montage in comprehensive art. Editing, sound, footage and other elements.

4.1 Conversion of Text and Images

Due to the characteristics of the medium, films and novels limit the audience’s thinking space. When the audience is watching a movie, it is easy to immerse themselves in the movie due to its intuitive nature and follow the movie scenes shown by the director. After watching a movie, the audience may still have those images, lines, sound effects, etc. in their minds for a considerable period of time. From this perspective, the audience is a passive recipient. Due to its unique aesthetic characteristics, language art will leave readers with a wider space for imagination. Every reader will have his or her own unique imagination, and even reading the same novel may produce completely different feelings when he or she has different life experiences. Aesthetic perception and understanding.

In the novel *Postmen In The Mountains*, although there is no specific description of the mountain scenery, it uses vivid language to personify the clouds and the sun, uses a lot of pen and ink to promote the development of the plot, and at the same time leaves the audience with a lasting impression. It leaves more room for imagination, as if the ethereal mountains are presented in the mind against the setting sun and fog. The mountains at this time are so mysterious and fascinating. The film works directed by Huo Jianqi use aerial shots to present the mountain environment to the audience, as if it were a very delicate light-ink landscape painting, thus fixing the audience’s imagination in such a special time and space.

4.2 Conversion of Text and Sound

Sound, as one of the audio-visual languages that constitute film art, refers to the sound form that appears on the screen to express ideas. In movies, sound includes three forms: human voice, music, and sound. Directors often use these three forms in their works. Director Huo Jianqi’s use of sound in *Postmen In The Mountains* is very appropriate. From the perspective of the film adaptation of the novel, the film’s music well interprets the fresh and natural artistic

characteristics. The following is an analysis using music as an example.

There are a variety of music presentations in film works. The use of theme music makes the emotions more delicate, and also helps the audience understand the son's mood and the meaningfulness of his father's words. In addition to the clever use of theme music, the film also features pop music and folk songs. The use of pop music is to highlight the characters' distinctive personalities, while the presentation of folk songs vividly expresses their strong national flavor. The use of music fully reflects the aesthetic characteristics of expressive art. Its lyricism, rhythmic beauty, and rhythm are fully demonstrated in the film, allowing the audience to feel the customs and distinctive character characteristics of this unique rural area.

4.3 Conversion Between Text and Lens

Film shots are a basic component of film structure and a basic visual element of film styling language. Huo Jianqi is exquisite in the use of lenses, especially long lenses. The director cleverly uses long shots to fulfill the narrative mission, which not only makes the narrative clearer, but also makes the shots more vivid and rich. The lyrical flavor expressed in the novel requires a long lens to further express it. For example, in the moving shot of the father and son having a heart-to-heart conversation in the village, the audience is greeted by a close-up of the dog and then subtly transitions from a mid-to close-up shot of the father to a full panorama. Panorama, close-up, medium shot, and close-up are perfectly transformed under a long lens. Such a shot can not only reflect the director's technical proficiency, but also express the director's good intentions. From this kind of lens language, the director actually wants the audience to experience the son's transformation from not understanding his father to understanding him and the deep comfort in his father's heart.

The above-mentioned long shots are shown many times in the film, such as when the son explains trivial matters at home to his father and when the father and son argue on the bus, etc., thus reflecting the undoubted authenticity. The clever use of long shots can help the audience better think about and appreciate the psychological changes and rich emotions of the protagonist, leaving the audience more room to think. The clever combination of shots makes the

rhythm of the film smoother and the characters more distinct, thereby improving and enriching the artistic charm of the film.

4.4 The Influence of Elegant Aesthetic Culture on Film and Television Adaptation Strategies

Elegant aesthetic culture meets the aesthetic needs of a small number of people in today's society. It is completely opposite to the popular aesthetic culture. It pays more attention to artistic beauty and deep aesthetic connotation. In real life, the audience of elegant aesthetic culture is not particularly broad, and the cultural literacy requirements of the audience are relatively high. In comparison, with the advancement of science and technology and the improvement of living standards, people's life pressure is becoming more and more intense, so more people are willing to appreciate popular aesthetic culture and enjoy the aesthetic feelings brought by art. Looking at the adaptation of film and television works, due to the influence of popular aesthetic culture, most directors will still choose to base themselves on popular culture, taking into account people's directional expectations and vision, moving towards a stereotyped narrative strategy, and weakening the theme of their films. As an elegant aesthetic culture that is easily abandoned and ignored, it will also have a significant impact on film and television adaptation strategies. Compared with popular aesthetic culture, it can make film works pay more attention to highlighting personality differences, rich emotional changes, and deeper themes. It is easy to be deepened and sublimated.

The film adaptation of *Postmen In The Mountains* can be said to reflect the influence of high-end aesthetic culture on its adaptation strategy. The film did not have much repercussions when it was released. Because the director used his elegant aesthetic culture as an entry point, many people had deviations in their aesthetic appreciation of it. However, the film later won many awards such as the Golden Rooster Award and also won the Golden Rooster Award in Japan. Directors and screenwriters put respect for originality as the first priority in the film and television adaptation process, fully consider the author's understanding and expression, and ingeniously use film language to truly reproduce the original work, thus reflecting strong artistic characteristics. The director's use of his elegant aesthetic culture serves as a reference for directors who are keen on film

adaptations and further overcomes the excessive influence of popular aesthetic culture on their adaptations. It is not about satisfying all the aesthetic needs of the audience, but correctly exploring the aesthetic and cultural needs of the public, which in turn can promote the vigorous development of literature from the side. As for the audience, they should strive to improve their cultural literacy and innovative expectations, and more accurately grasp the deep artistic implications and themes of different types of film adaptations.

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