

“The Aesthetics of Film and Television” under the Theory of Visual Metaphor: Taking Howl's Moving Castle as an Example

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Abstract. *Howl's Moving Castle* is a film by the famous Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki, depicting the story of Howl and Sophie's redemption of each other and their joint endeavour for peace against a backdrop of fighting. A large number of symbolic visual symbols are used in this film, which give visual impact on modelling through exaggeration and representation, and also better promote the characterisation and the development of the storyline. Taking *Howl's Moving Castle* as an example, this paper turns from the popular topic of characterisation explored at home and abroad to the visual representation technique, and explores the treatment of the film's visualisation by mining the symbolic meanings in different contexts. Vision is the most important form of the senses in cinema. This paper discusses how to perfect the visual expression effect and make reasonable use of symbolic metaphoric rhetoric, so as to enhance the meticulousness of the visual effect, enrich the amount of information in the scene, and improve the texture of the film.

Keywords: Visuals; Symbols; Howl's Moving Castle.

1. Introduction

Howl's Moving Castle is the work of the famous Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki, adapted from the novel *Harwell the Magician and the Demon of Fire* by the British writer Diana W. Jones, released as an animated film in 2004. It received an overwhelmingly positive and well-received response and has been re-released many times in various countries and regions over the years. The film focuses on the mutual redemption of Sophie and Howl to achieve the growth of the two together, but also reflects the criticism of war and the desire for peace. Under the influence of war, people's lives are devastated, and powerful people make the whole world fall into the plight of disaster for their own selfish interests. In Miyazaki Hayao's animated film, the end is always good, this film is also the same, at the end of the war, decision-makers are finally moved to stop the war. Miyazaki's animation of goodness, beauty, and healing tone, so that adults in the real world in the confusion of the return of a simple and calm heart, coupled with the characterisation of the fullness of the storyline moving, which makes Miyazaki in the field of animation to obtain the status of unparalleled. It is worth mentioning that Miyazaki's female characters are independent and free, not dependent on others, reaping the benefits of family, friendship and love with their bravery and strength, which is also respected today under the current trend of independent women.

The characters under his pen come alive because Miyazaki Hayao's control of details is extremely fine. This paper will start from the details of visual elements and symbolic character image processing, with the help of visual symbols, and visual metaphor theory as the theoretical basis, from the colour of the clothes, the symbolism of the birdman, the old industrial style of the moving castle, the insect structure of the airship and so on, in-depth and simple to explore *Howl's Moving Castle's* classic visual symbols for the role of the character shaping and the development of the plot, and then to explore the role of the modern visual communication of the Rhetoric.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concepts in Brief: Symbols and Metaphors

In general, symbols and metaphors are actually special ways of representing what is being expressed, commonly known as hints. A "sign" is first and foremost a symbol used to refer to and

represent something else. A symbol is a vehicle that carries a message from both sides of a communication. The word "metaphor" is of Greek origin and means "to transfer" or "to transmit". "Metaphor" secretly sends ironic meaning, and it also refers to the meaning of the words and rhetorical device metaphor.

One of these two techniques gives connotation to the appearance and the other gives meaning to the connotation. In visual thinking, symbols, and metaphors, as important techniques of visual thinking, enrich the connotations of artworks [1].

2.2. The Use of Miyazaki's Metaphorical Techniques

In Miyazaki Hayao's works, symbols and metaphors are consistent visual expression techniques. Among them, the most classic one is *Spirited Away*, which won the Golden Bear at the 52nd Berlin International Film Festival in 2002 and the Best Animated Feature at the 75th Academy Awards in 2003. Once the film was released, it triggered the study of visual metaphors in animation in the academic world. *Spirited Away* uses a large number of metaphors to reflect the reality of today's society and contains deep humanistic emotions and ideal aspirations [2]. Whether from the scene, or characters, the aspect of metaphor gives a set of visual communication paradigms.

Howl's Moving Castle also continues its usual visual language of expression, giving full play to the techniques of "exaggeration", "distortion", "transcendence" and so on, it creates unique characters and scenes that go beyond the mode of realistic reproduction, fully engage the senses of the "eye", and tells unforgettable stories through "seeing" [1].

2.3. Theoretical Framework: Visual Rhetoric

Visual rhetoric consists of both physical objects and theory. Visual rhetoric refers first and foremost to visible, tangible physical objects. It is the various rhetorical devices employed by practitioners of visual rhetoric that convey certain meanings through actual objects. Secondly, it refers to the meanings and laws that are formed for physical objects in conjunction with life experiences.

Visual rhetoric focuses on the "rhetorical feedback" and "aesthetic feedback" of the viewer, and through the assessment of visual rhetoric, we can broaden our horizons and recognise the importance of visual rhetoric. It is worth noting that the criteria for evaluation are relative, and there is no permanent and mythical system for evaluating visual rhetoric. People are complex, society is complex, and all the external elements will have an impact on the production and assessment [3]. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the assessment with examples in order to draw conclusions.

3. Analysis of *Howl's Moving Castle*

3.1. Character Analysis

3.1.1. Feminist Characterisation - Sophie

Sophie is an 18-year-old girl whose coming-of-age story has feminist overtones, and the film highlights the awakening of women's sense of independence through the symbolic presentation of visual elements. The film opens with a contrast of colours that clearly illustrate the distinctiveness of Sophie's character. The dresses are dark green, dark purple, and navy blue. Most of the time Sophie wears dark dresses, which are old-fashioned in style and colour, in contrast to the colourful women around her, and she has a strong sense of inferiority. In the old world, Sophie is an individual with no sense of self-determination, and as the eldest daughter, she rightly runs around for her family's hat shop. Instead of thinking about herself and her future, she lets others decide her life until she meets Howl [4]. A magical curse has transformed her into a 90-year-old "shrivelled" woman. Sophie keeps emphasising that she is "unattractive", but the curse will only be lifted when, like Howl, she is able to adapt to her own circumstances - not as a hat maker or cleaning lady living quietly in someone else's world, but as an independent and confident woman who breaks out of her safe comfort zone to help others and herself, free from dependence. dependence and become an independent and confident

woman - the spell is only lifted [5]. As an old woman, she instead abandons her inherent family values and the demands of others and returns more to herself [6]. Later in the film, when she returns to her youth, Sophie wears pink and soft yellow dresses, and the colours of the clothes in the film serve as visual metaphorical symbols witnessing female growth.

3.1.2. Counterpoint to Sophie's Image - Witch of the Waste Land

The earlier Witch of the Waste Land figure is delusional in her desire to achieve control of the world by her own personal will. The change in appearance of Sophie and the Witch of the Waste Land is also a strong contrast, as Sophie was originally young but became old, while the Witch of the Waste Land was actually old but appeared young in her appearance. This montage of characterisation highlights the contrast between good and evil in the pair [7]. The Witch of the Waste Land's heavy make-up and rich, mysterious dark purple mink coat, as well as her bright red manicure and exaggeratedly gaudy jewellery, all reveal a desire to control the world. The Golem's footmen all wear tall hats and clown-like attire. This selfishness also leads to counterproductive consequences, as she eventually becomes a lump of curdled granny who loses her spells. Her make-up is no longer flamboyant, and she returns to her original childlike stage under Sophie's care and is eventually called upon by Sophie to return her "heart", thus realising the overlap of their female consciousness.

3.1.3. Femininity in the New Age - Sophie's Mother

In the novel, the image of Sophie's mother in the film is actually Sophie's stepmother, but this does not affect the characterisation. In fact, the mother of Sophie is similar to Daisy, the heroine of *The Great Gatsby*. As a young widow, Sophie's mother, with her husband dead and herself in the prime of her life, her three daughters have become the biggest obstacle preventing her from pursuing those materialistic enjoyments, sending them away far away and indifferent. The only two appearances of Sophie's mother in the film are portrayed in flamboyant clothing, heavy make-up and dust. In the scene where she betrays her daughter for her fortune, the mother's yellow dress, delicate gloves, pink lips, and purple beret. At that time in Japan, and even in today's society, this is not the traditional image of a mother, which also reflects Miyazaki Hayao in the process of film and television adaptation of the female character portrayal of "anti-traditional", this bold attempt is also a major highlight of the film.

3.1.4. From Boy to Man - Howl

Howl is initially portrayed as an evil, heart-eating, malevolent sorcerer, until Sophie comes into Howl's life. In fact, he himself uses nicknames and disguises so as to escape reality and be an independent "free man". He doesn't want to join either camp, does not want to grow up, and does not want to face reality and responsibility. This vision is different from selfishness; he just does not want to be used. Several symbols and motifs in the story signal Howl's growth. Howl's delicate, soft features and beckoning robes, blonde hair reveal frivolity, and a strong childlike concern for appearance. Then maturity is marked by a short, dark haircut and a less flamboyant white shirt and trousers, implying that he has shed his asylum-seeking disguise [8]. Howl's bird-man form is actually a human variation of the bird. This "metamorphosis" is a metaphor for the change of living conditions and the alienation of human beings. In addition to the alienation of man and bird, there are other forms of alienation in *Howl's Moving Castle*, for example, this "metamorphosis" destroys the original natural integrity of life, forming phenomena such as war trauma, the spiritual imprint of the times, which also achieves the closed loop of the hidden line of war in *Howl's Moving Castle*.

3.2. Symbolic Analysis

3.2.1. The Moving Castles and Escape

Castle is a kind of defensive building, its owner usually hides in it deep and simple, not only can hide themselves but also against the enemy. In the film, this moving castle is Howl's lonely heart [9]. Moving Castle is a product of industrial ruin processing. *Howl's Moving Castle* is to express the industrial revolution through the moving castle. At that time, the vigorous promotion of

mechanisation turned steel into a new raw material, plus the use of new energy sources such as coal, electricity, oil, steam engines, and internal combustion engines, which made the use of science in life more extensive. Due to this historical background, the castle in the animation always carries the special style of a steel factory at the end of the 19th century. Its body is piled up with steel, but it looks like a huge metal monster [1]. This post-modern industrial style contrasts with the European classicism of the entire worldview, but it is such a monster that is the habitat where Howl can return to peace. Through the castle, it is possible to teleport to various places to get away from the war and reap a sliver of peace. However, as the film develops, the destruction of the war causes Howl to gradually lose control of his illusions, and the castle becomes more dilapidated and collapses. When in Sophie's careful care, Howl gradually has a direction and rebuilds the castle, symbolising Howl's triumphant rise beyond the war [8]. In addition, the moving castle leads to some of the natural environment that is not impregnated by human beings, while the invading enemy symbolises serious ecological problems. With the expansion of mankind's rampant ambition and the development of technological means, mankind has started to infringe upon nature without any scruples, which seriously threatens the ecological balance [9].

3.2.2. Anti-war Consciousness in Airship Gaming

Airships, as symbols of war, appear several times in the film. Consistent with the principle of the Tiger Moth that appeared in *Castle in the Sky*, the flying machine driven by the pilot in the opening scene of *Howl's Moving Castle* is based on experiments of bionic flight technology of insects, and the wings flapping up and down rapidly on both sides are its biggest feature. As the film progresses and the war situation becomes more tense, a larger flying machine appears at the back. This kind of flying machine is also a simulation of small insects, but unlike the former, the latter airship is more of a "monster" in the sense of industrialisation [10]. The dorsal fins and wings gave the airships the potential to engage in a three-way battle between land, sea and air, and the weapons evolved as the war evolved. Later blimps developed a robot-like "gripper", more massive and more oppressive, highlighting the horror of war. It is worth mentioning that there is no straightforward description of the war scenes in this film. After the Iraq War, Hayao Miyazaki decided to de-visualise the war [11]. However, the game between Howl and the blimp in the flowers clearly proves the opposing positions of the two.

3.2.3. False "Greenhouse Gardens"

Mrs Saliman appears as the villainous character in a sunny greenhouse covered in greenery and fountains. In the huge greenhouse, there is only Mrs Saliman's ornate chair and cloned servants. The garden of this "beautiful" giant greenhouse is covered with transparent glass, and the sunlight pours in, making it look extremely beautiful. Green plants and blue skies create a healing landscape through the glass. Inside the garden, there were green trees, grasses, and some even had pink buds. However, this huge "garden" is not a so-called utopia of peace, but rather Saliman's manipulation of the war and the deprivation of hostile sorcerers, a centre of evil decision-making that leads the people into war [5]. This contrast highlights the irony of the behaviour of the war decision-makers who are in a position of superiority, as well as the implication that self-serving leaders will eventually be overthrown and gain evil consequences. *Howl's Moving Castle*, on the other hand, is cluttered and dilapidated but retains a utopian-like nature.

4. Conclusion

Symbols and metaphors are essential means of visual rhetoric, which can skilfully shape the characters through details and make the characters more vivid and full, and also can quickly clarify the plot and promote the development of the plot. Through research, this paper starts from the visual expression of *Howl's Moving Castle* and analyses the symbolic way of thinking of visual communication from the way of metaphoric rhetoric and so on combined with the character shaping, plot development, story background, and so on. In the exploration, it is found that the visual

representation of *Howl's Moving Castle* is the opposite of the spiritual kernel intended to be expressed, giving the viewer an extremely strong impact through the means of reverse exaggeration. For example, the dilapidated and ugly moving castle, the blimp that covers the sky, and the thick black smoke, these products of the war make the life of the town chaotic, which confirms the cruelty of the war from the opposite side, and thus expresses the longing for peace. This reverse nature of visual expression is also an important visual feature of this film. Different visual expressions are fused together to form an exemplary model of symbolic expression.

In sensory aesthetics, vision is undoubtedly the largest sensory system and the aesthetic experience of vision is incomparable. Through the symbolic transformation of vision, the ordinary perceptual experience of the public is exaggerated and shaped to form an artistic visual experience and given a clear meaning.

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