Highlights in Art and Design
ISSN: 2957-8787 | Vol. 3, No. 2, 2023

Exploring the Essence of Art through Chinese Literary and Film Works

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Abstract: In recent years, there have been various opinions on the essence of art. However, people often tend to focus on exploring tangible forms of art such as painting, sculpture, and architecture. In reality, literature is also an integral part of artistic expression, and the artistic elements within literature are even more abstract. Exploring the essence of art through the realm of literature may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Keywords: Chinese Literary; Film Works; Essence of Art.

1. Literature is also a Form of Art

Art is not limited to external tangible forms such as painting, singing, or dancing. It encompasses a wide range of human activities, including both concrete and abstract expressions. Traditionally, painting has been considered the predominant form of art, but when it comes to influencing human emotions and experiences, literature holds a much greater impact. Although literature and art are distinct disciplines in the classification of academic subjects in China, their relationship is inseparable. A good piece of art relies on the supportive literary connotations behind it, while a good work of literature relies on the skillful application of artistic techniques. The quality of literary works depends on two aspects: the author's understanding of the objective world, which encompasses knowledge, and the author's adeptness in employing artistic techniques, which represents their artistic eloquence. Only when an author integrates their understanding of the objective truths, they have learned with skillful artistic techniques can they create high-level artistic works.

2. Exploring the Essence of Art

There is no universally agreed-upon definition for the essence of art, and concepts surrounding it have evolved over time. The three classic branches of visual art are painting, sculpture, and architecture. However, the essence of art lacks a specific and widely accepted definition. Art presents us with countless appearances, and we can explore the impact of art on our inner feelings by considering the sensations it evokes, guided by a human-centered approach. This is why I have chosen examples from literary and film works because, compared to purely tangible creations, literary and film works have a greater impact on our inner emotions. By examining the essence of art from this perspective, we have greater room to discuss how art influences us. Moreover, most people have encountered literary works and have experienced similar emotions when engaging with them. Therefore, using literary and film works as examples may be a better way to elucidate the essence of art while making it more accessible and understandable to others.

3. Common Artistic Techniques in Literary Works

3.1. Beautification in Literary Works

Both in literary and film works, the main characters are often portrayed as handsome, graceful, and attractive. Psychological studies have shown that in static environments, people's attention is more likely to be drawn to beautiful objects. Confucius once said, "I have not seen anyone who loves virtue as much as he loves beauty." Here, virtue refers to inner qualities, while beauty refers to physical appearance. Both inner qualities and physical appearance are sought after by people. However, people tend to be more sensitive to the pursuit of physical appearance compared to the pursuit of inner qualities. This indicates that the majority of people cannot surpass the influence of visual appearance on their inner selves, and the pursuit of beauty is a psychological appeal for most individuals. It is precisely due to this human inclination that art has a greater space to thrive. Throughout history, in literary works, numerous beautiful protagonists have been created, such as Nezha in "Fengshen Bang," Wang Yuyan in "The Return of the Condor Heroes," and Xiaolongnü in "The Legend of the Condor Heroes." These are all means of beautification in literary works. Not only are the character images beautified, but the environments they inhabit and the objects and props they interact with are also appropriately embellished. For example, in "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," the Green Dragon Crescent Blade wielded by Guan Yu is described in great detail, enhancing its aesthetic appeal. In ancient China, there was the concept of "artistic conception," where creating a beautiful artistic atmosphere can better attract readers and viewers, enhancing their enjoyment. Among these, the beautification of the inner thoughts and behaviors of the positive protagonists is often the focus of beautifying the work and highlighting its main theme.

3.2. Application of Artistic Techniques in Literary Works

If we only consider art as a discipline that pursues beauty, our understanding may be narrow. In reality, not all art is about pursuing beauty. There are various forms of absurd art, and this is particularly evident in literature. the creation of

literature places more emphasis on its communicability. To enhance the appeal of literary works, authors must elevate their artistic qualities. However, solely focusing on beautification in literary and film works may not generate lasting attraction and impact on readers, as the greatest allure of beauty exists primarily in the visual realm. Once translated into words, its appeal significantly diminishes. Additionally, while people enjoy appreciating beauty, they may not possess the ability to effectively articulate it. Therefore, establishing typical, humorous, and eccentric characters or plotlines can enhance the potential for readers to spread the work. In literary works, great efforts are made to shape typical characters by skillfully incorporating their distinctive traits into a scene, creating a humorous and witty representation. For example, the character Jiumozhi in "The Return of the Condor Heroes" is an antagonist, but his words and actions are comical, making him a classic figure in people's minds. Literary works also employ exaggerated techniques. In some literary works, authors depict characters as extremely cruel, causing them to be despised by others, thereby creating a sense of shock for readers. Alternatively, characters may be portrayed as exceptionally good, to the extent that they are incomprehensible. This amplifies the contrast between good and evil within human nature, intensifying the work's impact and stirring the hearts of readers and viewers. For example, the extreme ugliness of Huang Shiren in the play "The White-Haired Girl" instantly arouses intense emotions in the audience. From this perspective, art tends to pursue the extraordinary and the entertaining. Life is mundane, and only through moments of shock and varying circumstances can people experience inner change, thus captivating audiences and readers. As the saying goes, "No coincidences, no drama." To enhance the strangeness of a story, many literary works create numerous coincidences, stimulating readers' curiosity and prompting them to delve deeper into the plot. Some literary works may delve into fantasies because life is grounded in reality, yet people are filled with aspirations and fantasies. Therefore, literary works satisfy people's yearning for fantasies during the creative process, offering authors a sense of satisfaction during the reading experience. For example, enhancing a character's physical and intellectual abilities to fulfill people's fantasies and desires for superhuman capabilities.

3.3. Artistic Thinking in Literary Works

Merely relying on the author's artistic thinking and clever arrangement is not enough to showcase the artistic characteristics of literary works. Therefore, it is necessary to imbue each character in the work with expressive thinking to bring them to life. This enables the story's plot and main themes to be better expressed, providing audiences with a clearer understanding. When faced with conflicts and contradictions, it evokes stronger emotions in viewers. By incorporating expressive thinking into the characters, the eventual outcome of events can often be explained, allowing viewers to have a certain understanding of the characters' thinking process. We can see this in some literary works where the main villain possesses formidable martial arts skills and a large number of subordinates, yet is ultimately defeated by the protagonist. This is because the antagonist has been given expressive thinking by the author, showcasing their desire to display their martial arts prowess and intelligence, thus providing the protagonist with an opportunity to turn the tables and achieve victory. Additionally, expressive thinking is often different from the rational thinking that most people employ in their daily lives, and it may have logical inconsistencies. However, it is precisely this aspect that can create different dramatic effects, introducing strangeness into the plot and crafting classics. For example, in "Water Margin," expressive thinking is embedded in the character Wu Song, who manages to kill a tiger with his bare hands. This scene is more impressive than the segment where Li Kui uses a knife to kill a tiger, making it a memorable and classic moment. This type of thinking-guided plot can be both elegant and classic or humorous and amusing.

4. Conclusion

From the examples explored above, we can see that in the application of artistic techniques in literary and film works, there are several similar objectives pursued, such as beauty, amusement, humor, and strangeness. From this exploration, we can see that the criteria for evaluating art are not about success or failure, but rather about doing things well. For example, in engineering or product design, the focus is on completing a task, while artistic thinking aims to do the task well. Completion seeks the satisfaction of the observer, while doing things well seeks the dual satisfaction of the observer. The beauty, amusement, humor, and strangeness pursued in literary art are additional objectives in storytelling, which provide another layer of satisfaction for the author and cater to the preferences of the audience. Beauty can stimulate visual appeal; amusement can evoke the reader's sense of fun; humor can trigger laughter; and strangeness can pique curiosity. From this perspective, we can see that regardless of the form art takes, its purpose is to stimulate excitement at the sensory and psychological levels, induce a change in people's minds, and capture their attention. However, art not only pursues these aspects but also has deeper objectives, such as educational guidance or assisting our work purposes. We can use art to make the process more wonderful, but we should not lose sight of the main goal. It is essential to incorporate art into our daily lives in a meaningful way to enhance our lives. While art may take a prominent position in disciplines such as painting and sculpture, in the discussions above, art often occupies an additional position in literature, architecture, and other aspects of life. Life can go on without art, which is why art is often considered a secondary discipline. However, this does not diminish the value of art. After all, in today's era of peace and prosperity, people need art to make their lives more beautiful.

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