



The Childlike Innocence in Watercolor painting and Adult World —— Analysis of the Audiovisual Language and Narrative Strategy of “Ernest & Celestine”

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Abstract: French animated film “ Ernest & Celestine ” fits children's aesthetic taste in art style, and pays attention to children's cognitive characteristics in expressing narrative with rich spiritual connotation. Not naive, not dogmatic. This article will analyze the fairy tale and reality factors of the film from the perspective of audiovisual language and narrative strategy, and explain how it balances the innocence and the adult world.

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This animated film is mainly adapted from the series of animated picture books “ Ernest & Celestine ” created by the famous contemporary Belgian painter Gabriel Vinson^[1]. The main content of the story is that Celestine, who is a mouse from the country of mouse and a bear Ernest breaks traditional preconceptions, which is a friendship story of acquaintance and sympathy. It is an exquisite hand-painted animation film with a fresh and natural art style, full of the director's imagination^[2]. Its seemingly transparent narrative hides a complex core that only can be understood by adults--the ubiquitous conflict between the mouse country and the bear country is the reflection of human society. The fairy tales and reality in the film form a delicate balance in the fusion, allowing children to feel a little bit of the cool breeze from the adult world in advance.

1. Warm fairy tale

In line with the laws of children's physical and mental development, universal psychology characteristics and intellectual development levels are necessary conditions for children's animation creation work.^[3] Therefore, innocent fairy in line with the cognitive characteristics of children, which is the main form of the creation in children's books, films and other television works. “Ernest & Celestine” reasonably anthropomorphizes bear and mouse, and is appropriately “childish” in terms of audiovisual language and narrative strategies, demonstrating its purely romantic childlike innocence.

1.1 Fresh art style

The film continues the hand-painted watercolor style of the picture book works, and integrates “Ernest

& Celestine” series of stories into an elegant, simple and pure animation^[4]. The director attaches great importance to conveying information through lines, conveying the character's delicate psychological feelings with simple brushstrokes, inadvertently creating a simple and comfortable movie-watching mood for the audience.

1.1.1 Rustic lines

Most of the beauty of animation comes from lines. Lines are an indispensable basic element of animation. The flexible use of lines will greatly improve the effect of animation^[5]. The unique texture produced by the movement of the lines allows the animated characters to be perfectly presented. With lines, creators can implicitly convey their thoughts and emotions to the audience^[6].

In the film, the director continued the art style of the original picture book, using slightly rough brushstrokes to depict the scenes and characters, without any cumbersome feeling, and in line with children's aesthetics. Lines filled with thick strokes of pure innocence texture. The outline of the lines appropriately reflects the intermittent, which completely outlines the character shape between virtual and reality, while breaking the closure, showing a lively and dynamic feeling. In the stroke processing of characters and scenes, closed lines are abandoned, but the natural fusion of color blocks is used on a large scale, which is like the mutual penetration of watercolors on the canvas. The whole picture style is natural and poetic. Both children and adults can appreciate and understand this unique art style. (As shown in Figure 1).



Figure 1: A screenshot of the movie "Ernest & Celestine"

1.1.2 Mild colors

The colors in the cartoon are not completely consistent with the real world, but re-created by the artist to better express emotions and deepen the audience's understanding of the plot^[7]. Toddlers have an innate sensitivity to colors; bright and changeable colors will bring great temptation to them^[8]. "Ernest & Celestine" solidifies colors and emotions, which is conducive to children's establishment of visual and narrative psychological connections in their childhood.

In the animation, "cold and warm colors" can bring the audience different picture temperature and sensory recognition, and the colors in the animation are given a variety of meanings^[9]. There are a large number of images with cool tones as the main theme in the film, such as the dental clinic of mouse country, which gives people an invisible pressure, so that children can intuitively feel that when Celestine has not collected enough teeth and was reprimanded by the dentist, her sadness and helplessness of the time (as shown in Figure 2). After Ernest and Celestine were discovered by the police, the depressed dark clouds made people feel the depression and anxiety of being hunted down. Similarly, the warm-toned scenes in the film also makes people a relax ease. At the end of the film, the spring outside the window, the pale-yellow interior decoration and colorful paintbrushes show that Ernest & Celestine living a happy life together, which let the children feel the love and courage contained in the story. (As shown in Figure 3)



Figure 2: A screenshot of the movie "Ernest & Celestine"



Figure 3: A screenshot of the movie "Ernest & Celestine"

1.1.3 A amiable image

The Character Design in the animated profoundly affects the quality of the animation^[10]. The animated characters make a difference to young children audience, which is a self-evident fact. Animated characters are the soul of cartoons. Good animated character design can promote the sensory growth and cognitive development of young children, which can also improve interpersonal communication and aesthetic appeal in a subtle way^[11].

Character design of the film shows solicitude for young children which reflects in two aspects. First, the line must be simplified as far as possible. Simple and intuitive lines are close to the child strokes. Role modeling are also sketched by curved lines, avoiding

the use of sharp angular. The graphics make the character more inclusive visually. Let the audience consume the least energy to achieve the goal to obtain a great sense of pleasure^[12]. Complex realistic modeling has been simplified to a certain extent, which enhances the children audience's understanding of the role. Second, the proportion of the role is more like children. The proportion of Celestine's head to body is 3:1, her facial features are very concentrated. What's more, her eye area accounts for more than half of the face. With a short eye distance, she has the similar proportion of face and body with children. In this way, the setting effect of age reduction is brought to the characters, and the distance between children and characters is shortened so that it's easier for children audience to fall in love with the cute mouse character. (As shown in Figure 4)



Figure 4: A screenshot of the movie “Ernest & Celestine”

1.2 Unique way of expression

1.2.1 Scene

Animation scene design is the active area of character modeling^[13]. The design of animation scenes can fully strengthen the expression of emotions, emphasizing the rich feelings and emotional vision brought by its subjective will, symbolic meaning and its form and color^[14]. The director carries the narrative with imaginative scenes. Take the rat country as an example: as Celestine returns to the mouse country after getting teeth from the candy store, the audience is presented with a scene of a busy city: everyone living here is mouse, some Wearing police uniforms and holding batons on patrol, some whizzing past by bicycle, some rowing a boat, some sitting by the river

to watch the scenery. Then, Celestine gets on a small “elevador” and walked to the “clinic.” A mouse crossing the street is chased by all.” People's stereotype of mice is that they are dirty, wretched, and unpleasant images that appear in the sewers. But in the film by a rich imagination depict anthropomorphic city, let moviegoers find that the cartoon mice are like humankind. they have their own little world, and have a variety of social division of labor, which can shorten the distance between children's movie viewers and the role, break the stereotype, and strengthen the sense of substitution.

1.2.2 Narrative

Narrative is the foundation and core of an animated film, which is determined by the unique thought and artistic expression of animation^[15]. In this animation, the unique narrative method is full of the artist's romantic feelings. Ernest and Celestine use music and painting to express the scene of time passing from winter to spring: In the melodious violin sound, the gray canvas is outlined with a stretched blue line, like a distant mountain in winter. It slowly jumps and flows, sometimes like a slowly flowing stream, sometimes like a bare tree branch. Suddenly the color turned into a lively fruit green, and the dazzling color blocks begin to leap and dance with the brisk music, blooming like fireworks. In the end, the splendid colors fill the whole picture like splashes of ink, gradually depicting the small house of Ernest on the hillside in spring. In this way, colorful lines change with light and shadow, deep and shallow. The lines come and go, driving the space frame to move continuously, making the picture vibrant and full of movement. The soothing and refreshing colors, such as lake blue, white tea and fruit green also melted the frozen corner of the audience's heart like the beauty of spring. This way of expression is full of artistic sense. It takes the change of color and the flow of music as an entry point, which is more in line with the cognitive characteristics of children, and is full of innocence and romance.

2. Moderate Criticism of Reality

2.1 The ubiquitous plot conflict

Conflict is the most indispensable way of plot expression in animation. Whether it is the conflicting objective and external storylines, or the contradictions and changes in the characters themselves, it may cause the ups and downs of the spiritual and psychological feelings of the audience, thereby promoting the integrity of the story narration^[16]. The racial discrimination of bear and rat always runs through the film. From the bedtime story told by the grandmother in the orphanage at the beginning of the film, to the

little mouse sneaking to the candy bear to steal teeth and being chased, bringing the bear into the country of rats, and finally being on trial and other main plots. All of these shows the biggest background of the whole film, which is laid out and emphasized everywhere: the contradiction and opposition between the bear country and the mouse country. On the one hand, these plot conflicts not only promote the development of the story, but also implicitly allude to the reality of class antagonism all the time, making children realize that even the fairy tale world is not beautiful everywhere, but also has prejudices and differences.

2.2 Diverse character details

In the narration of the storyline of the animated film, the supporting role plays an important role that cannot be underestimated. They are deeply involved in the plot of the story, which can greatly enhance the narrative tension and detail expressiveness of the story^[17]. A bear who runs a candy store has set a rule for his children that no sugar is allowed, because eating too much will lead to tooth decay. Bears who run a candy store do not allow their children to eat sweets, because eating sweets will get worms. But his wife runs a dental clinic, and boast of his son triumphantly to creating wealth. In court, a lady bear shook her head and said that she was not frightened, but she had to scream in shock at the suggestion of others. The director cleverly took the not-so-harmonious parts of these fairy tale worlds in a single stroke, which would not destroy the overall fairy tale style of the film, but also invisibly deepened the theme of the film. Maybe children only think this is a little funny clip, but in the eyes of adult audiences, it contains a different kind of connotation.

2.3 Fairy tales blend with reality

In the film, the bear and the mouse are representatives of two opposing classes: the bear represents the upper class, and they occupy the most superior social resources: the infinite living space of the earth and the world; the mouse can only live a sneaky life in the dark underground, their tool for creating living space and social wealth is teeth of bears. The two classes are incompatible. In the bear world, "A rat crossing the street is chased by all." Is undoubtedly, while mice believe that "bears are evil creatures." Although the two protagonists in the film come from opposing classes, they have surprising similarities in some respects: they are both marginalized people in their respective societies, and both have rebellious souls pursuing freedom. As a result, due to a series of coincidences, they became best friends, from being hostile to cooperating, and finally they gradually discovered what they had in

common while getting along, and finally they became friends who shared happiness and sorrow.

At the end of the film, Ernest and Celestine were held for trial, and the courts of the bear country and the rat country both caught fire. Everyone escaped in time, but the judges and defendants who blindly believed in the law and authority were engulfed by the raging fire. People in the bear country and the mouse country began to understand that blindly pursuing and echoing authority, while ignoring the hidden unfreedom and inequality, are the most dangerous factors in a society. At the end of the film, Ernest and Celestine rescued the judges of the bear country and the mouse country respectively, and hugged each other tightly against a solid background. In the hearts of the children, the two protagonists of the story have the best ending. They broke through many obstacles and even broke the solidified social strata, just to be with each other.

Therefore, whether adults or children, have access to their own fun in the film "Ernest & Celestine". In the eyes of children, it is a warm and fresh fairy tale. The naive bear and the quirky little mouse have experienced many twists and turns and finally live a happy life together. As for the adult who has been out of the fairy tale world for many years, those little details behind the beautiful and cheerful story also caused fascination and contemplation. On weekend nights, the whole family enjoys watching a family movie and spends an unforgettable parent-child time. This is the most wonderful meaning of "Ernest & Celestine".

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