

## On the narrative strategy of the animated film "Zootopia"

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**Abstract:** The development of narrative art and narrative skills often reflects the course of film development from an important aspect. This way of thinking determines the external form and narrative features of animated films to a certain extent. Obviously, animated films pay more attention to the cultural connotation of human commonness in their ideological appeal, because as the main audience of animated films, their ideology shows less differences and more universality compared with the adult world. The success of the animated film "Zootopia" can be interpreted from many aspects. From the standpoint of children's appreciators, its rich and profound growth implication is worth exploring with care. This paper attempts to use narratology theory to analyze the narrative strategy of the film from different aspects in order to provide reference for the development of Chinese animation industry.

### 1. Introduction

"Zootopia" is a 3D cartoon produced by Disney Pictures in the United States. "Zootopia" tells the story of Judy Rabbit and Nick, a fox friend, who meet each other and fight against the dark forces of the city together, and finally maintain the peace of the animal city. The petite and lovely rabbit image and its persistent spirit of never giving up their dreams soon led the children audience to realize their role recognition. In the specific situation of watching movies, they "adopted the role goal, understood the event scenes related to the goal, and experienced the feeling brought by the connection between the event and the goal" [1]. Combined with narratology theory, this paper takes "Zootopia" as the research object, and tries to analyze its narrative strategy in the process of communication and the ideological implication behind it.

### 2. Imagination and narration

Any artistic creation needs imagination, including movies. For animated films, imagination has its own different characteristics from conventional story films. In a sense, the imagination of animated films is closer to children's non-logical, unconventional, nonlinear thinking, or can be said to be anti-adult normal logic thinking. This way of thinking determines the external form and narrative features of animated films to a certain extent.

In the course of more than one century's development, narrative has become one of its basic core categories, whether it is animated film or story film or documentary film. In today's society, where the characteristics of film as a cultural industry can be more publicized, "narrative film is at least dominant in consumption" [2]. The development of narrative art and narrative skills often reflects the development of movies from an important aspect.

Narrative issues and ideological issues presented by movies as the embodiment of cultural soft power deserve to be discussed together from two aspects of creation and research. As cultural products, movies inevitably have the problem of appealing for values. In the film, the expression of values and the pursuit of ideology are presented through shadow narration, which is the key to distinguish the film from other artistic and cultural forms at the noumenon level [3]. Of course, their presentation modes in different film types or forms have both common characteristics and different characteristics. To some extent, finding the differences may be one of the important ways to solve the problems that have plagued Chinese movies for a long time from the perspective of image narration.

### 3. An overview of zootopia

The film tells the story of Judy Rabbit, who worked hard to fulfill her childhood dream and become an animal policeman in an animal city where all animals coexist peacefully. Figure 1 below shows the poster of "Zootopia".



Figure 1 "Zootopia" poster

The film tells about a modern animal city, where every animal has its own residence, such as the Sahara Square with desert climate, the glacier town that is cold all the year round, etc. It is like a melting pot, where animals coexist peacefully—elephants and mice can make a name for themselves as long as they work hard. Judy Rabbit dreamed of becoming a police officer in an animal city from an early age. Although everyone around her thought that rabbits could not become police officers, through her own efforts, she became the first rabbit police officer. In order to prove herself, she is determined to solve a mysterious case. On the way to the truth, Judy forced Nick, a fox who made a living by kidnapping in the animal city, to help herself, but found that there was a huge conspiracy behind this case, and they had to work together to try to uncover the truth hidden behind this huge conspiracy.

### 4. An analysis of the narrative strategy of "Zootopia"

Narration is "to describe a series of facts or times in detail and to determine and arrange the relationship between them. Generally speaking, this term is only used for fictional works, ancient epics, legends and modern long and short stories. As an excellent animation, "Zootopia" has a superb narrative art, and a multi-dimensional narrative analysis of it will help us to understand the artistic features of this film in more detail.

#### 4.1. Narrative focus

##### (1) The hero's problem

In "Zootopia", the protagonist Judy Rabbit is faced with the problem of pursuing dreams but encountering many obstacles. She dreamed of becoming a policeman since she was a child, but almost all the animals around her thought that rabbits were too weak to be policemen out of prejudice. Director Buffalo even questioned her ability many times and wanted to dismiss her. But Judy made great efforts to become a real policeman by solving cases. Judy, the hero, goes to the big city alone to find her dream, which is a journey of finding herself and finding the answer. There will be ridicule and obstacles on the way, but as long as you don't give up, you can find the best answer.

##### (2) Plot

The plot is the change and process of things, which is related to "how to tell" and "what to tell". At the beginning of the film, the hero Judy Rabbit's dream was elicited, and then the scene was changed to Judy's job in Animal City Police Station. The climax part showed how Judy joined hands with Fox Nick to solve the case, and the animal city ended up singing and dancing. The whole story goes forward layer by layer, and elements such as action, suspense, politics and crime

come on stage in turn. Each part has carefully prepared "episodes" to enrich the interpretation of the story.

### (3)Theme

Disney animation is used to discussing life propositions, such as ideal and reality, confidence and courage, kindness and harvest. Of course, "Zootopia" can be said to be a dream-chasing story, which contains many positive energy elements such as affection, friendship, trust, growth and courage to try. But hidden in the framework of the classic story of "Girls in Small Towns Go to Cities to Realize Their Dreams", in fact, heavy topics such as racial discrimination, prejudice and labels are the focus of the film discussion. "Zootopia" is trying to express its views as much as possible. However, the higher-minded theme clearly distinguishes "Zootopia" from the previous animation, which makes this animation more interpretable and worth watching repeatedly.

## 4.2. Simple and simple story structure

"Zootopia" tells the story of Judy Rabbit struggling to realize her dream in the animal city. In a modern animal city, each animal performs its own duties and leads a regular life. Judy was inspired to become an animal policeman since she was a child. Although everyone around her questioned her, she became the best police school graduate through her own efforts.

### (1)Narrative from the third person perspective

The story is narrated from a restricted third-person perspective, which is attached to the character Judy Rabbit in the film. By choosing the perspective of the characters in the story, the receiver can only know what the characters have experienced and what they are doing, but can't predict the following story. This forces the audience to follow the protagonist Judy Rabbit to uncover the truth of the case step by step, keep a high degree of enthusiasm and pay attention to the trend of the story.

### (2)Linear narration

In the narrative structure, this film uses the sequential linear narrative structure fairly. The advantage of this classic narrative structure is that it can lay out the stories clearly and completely, which is convenient for the audience to accept and understand. Considering that the main audience of animated films is children, it is difficult for the younger audience to accept and understand because of its complicated narrative structure. However, "Zootopia", with its simple structure, tells us a fascinating story by virtue of its profound conception and ingenious details.

### (3)Innovation of narrative mode

Different from the love mode of Disney classic princess series stories, the film adopts the hero mode, and the event follows the process of "birth, frustration, regeneration and meritorious service". However, the innovation of the story lies in setting the truth of the case revealed for the first time as false truth, enriching the content of the story through the process of seeking the truth again, and repeatedly splicing the steps of frustration, regeneration and meritorious service, making the story full of twists and turns, which is memorable. Although "Zootopia" is not the first story of Disney's success using hero mode, compared with "The Lion King" in the same mode, the story structure of "Zootopia" is more modern.

## 4.3. Metaphorical symbol

Metaphor maps the similarities in social culture with familiar concepts and images [4-5]. Cartoons mostly reflect the problems in real life through the behavior and language of cartoon characters, and "Zootopia" is no exception.

The film always conveys to the audience the information of how harmonious and inclusive the animal city world is and how peaceful and beautiful animal life is, which is exactly the strong desire of Americans to live and work in peace and contentment. With the symbol image of "animal city", it cleverly constructs the national imagination of Americans. After all, American mythology is out of reach, and the political metaphors in the film bring people's good wishes back to reality. Judy Rabbit, as a herbivore, which is the representative of vulnerable groups, suffers from social prejudice and racial discrimination all the time.

For example, the traditional idea that "rabbits are not suitable for police" is deeply rooted. Judy, who had a dream, refused to admit defeat, and finally became a policeman with her own efforts.

However, she was still looked down upon by Director Cow of the police station, and deliberately assigned the simple task of punishing illegal vehicles, which is a great prejudice brought by the secular world. For another example, the expressions of "foxes are liars", "herbivores are weak" and "carnivores are strong" in the film reflect the racial discrimination in real life.

#### **4.4. Pursuit of Belief in Roles**

"Zootopia" ends with Judy revealing the origin of "midnight howl" and re-establishing the harmony of animal city. The final scene of the film is the carnival scene of animals, which reflects the romantic and beautiful wish of the creator, "Justice trumps evil, and true love transcends the gap between species". In this series of action functions, Judy changed from weak hesitation at the beginning to strong firmness later. In this way, the hero's screen dream and the audience's life dream have a wonderful coincidence, and the protagonist's ideological calling function has been well realized.

In the film, Judy has been focused on the "glory" under the flash three times. For the first time, she was awarded the badge by the mayor of Lion as the first graduate of the police school; The second time was to uncover the "truth" of the mayor of lion hiding crazy animals and accept an interview with reporters; The third time, as a winner and guide, he spoke to the new police officer when he joined the job. Judy's growth and success have proved the power of faith and the values that everyone's kindness and sincerity will make the world a better place. Such values are jointly established by the author and the reader, which not only contains today's moral ethics, but also the part that the culture paid attention to in the past, and also contains various wishes for reality and future [6], so it can be recognized and accepted by a wider audience including children viewers.

#### **4.5. Modernization of creative thinking**

Disney animation is mostly that the hero himself is not perfect, and after suffering and growing up, he finally realizes his dream and achieves his goal. The character itself has many limitations and shortcomings. This setting is more acceptable to adults, and the audience can find their own shadow in the animation. This animation seems to tell the story of a rabbit becoming a policeman. In fact, it is very realistic in plot design. The rabbit chasing thieves to save people is for the interlocking of the story. When chasing thieves, she saved Princess Pelican. Originally, she completed the police mission, and after catching thieves, she completed the task. But the rabbit wanted to be a policeman not only superficially, but hoped that citizens would be happy. All accidental actions may be indifferent when they happen, but in the future, it is those accidental actions that have become the decisive force for the trend of life, which implies the relationship between accident and necessity in life.

"Zootopia" is a modern fable that reflects the shadow of the human world. Animal groups in animal towns have prejudice against other groups. The prejudice of two protagonists and two animals has become the crowning touch of the content of the film, and the prejudice of modern society has caused the audience to think in a clever way.

### **5. Conclusions**

To sum up, the film "Zootopia" shows that in a city composed of various animals, all members live in harmony under the city rules. Judy Rabbit struggled hard to realize the "police dream", and after experiencing the rough, she finally realized her dream and gained friendship. "Zootopia" has opened up a large space for us to grow and explain with exquisite artistic conception. Do not avoid the harsh reality of society, and promote the development of social cognition and self-cognition of growth subjects; Make the subject appreciate the generation of real "intersubjectivity" in complex and pluralistic interpersonal communication; This requires animators not only to create animation works that suit children's interests, but also to be favored by adults. Nowadays, animated film is no longer a carrier of "naivety", but a dynamic image transmission mode in the adult world. Therefore, cartoons need to dig deeper connotations to achieve the perfect integration of art and thought.

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