

A Brief Analysis on the Narrative Art of *Pulp Fiction*

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Abstract

Pulp Fiction by Quentin Tarantino was made in 1994. With its novel and unique method and structure of narration, the film won many international awards including the Academy Award, the Golden Globe Award and the Golden Palm. The film adopted a seemingly messy but orderly form of expression, showing black violence, vulgar, marginal and other narrative elements, as well as subverting the traditional narrative perspective and space, creating a brand new visual experience for the audience. Today, China's movie market is very prosperous, China has become the second largest movie market after the United States, and has the largest movie audience in the world. However, the overall level of Chinese film industry is low. This paper analyzes the non-linear narrative structure and omniscient narrative perspective of *Pulp Fiction*, thus exploring the feelings it brought to the audience through its unique narrative method. By doing so, this paper hopes to provide some reference for the development of Chinese narrative film.

Keywords: *Pulp Fiction*, form of narration, time and space of narration

1. Introduction

Pulp Fiction, which was made in 1994, is one of the most famous narrative films in American film history. Director Quentin Tarantino has brought *Pulp Fiction* to critical acclaim by employing novel narrative approaches and forms of artistic expression. Since its release, the film has won many prestigious international awards such as the Academy Award for the Best Film, the Golden Globe Award and the Golden Palm. Since its release, the film has been praised by many filmmakers. Its novel and unique method and perspective of narration have made *Pulp Fiction* one of the most representative masterpieces in the history of American narrative films. It adopted a very novel and eye-catching post-modern, non-linear narrative and spatial narrative time and space, so that its dramatic tension and characters are incisively and vividly shown. Quentin Tarantino is also appreciated by many for *Pulp Fiction*. *Pulp Fiction* has brought the audience a brand new experience of film narrative techniques and created a new way of narrative film expression. It has both vulgar humor and black violence, bringing new feelings and experiences to the audience.

2. Nonlinear Narrative Structure

Films with non-linear narration originated from European and American modernist literature. There are important differences between them and the usual films with linear narration. They have important innovation in narrative structure, and the proper use of a variety of narrative skills, making them popular. Some of their common narrative structure, including flashback, segmented narrative, repeated narrative, circular narrative, etc. are seen in these films.

Pulp Fiction uses a unique non-linear narrative structure. *Pulp Fiction*'s narrative is different from that of many movies made before it. In the past, most films were linear in their narrative mode, which required the consistency of the time of narrative and the narrative behavior to be established in films. *Pulp Fiction* pioneered narrative films, overturning traditional techniques of film storytelling. It used a reconstructive montage to restructure the time and space of the film. Unlike most traditional narrative films, *Pulp Fiction* is split into

several different prologues, but different stories re closely connected in their development. This is a slightly messy and novel artistic expression technique, making the complexity of the film and the messy feeling very distinct, creating vivid characters. The beginning, middle, and ending parts of the film are not like those of conventional films. The film unfolds through three separates but closely linked stories: “Vincent and Martha’s Wife”, “The Golden Watch” and “Bonnie’s Situation”. These three stories seem unrelated, but they are closely linked, which all reflect the director’s superb techniques and level of artistic expression.

The film can be divided into three stories, and eight paragraphs. In the narrative of the entire film, it does not follow the traditional order, but adopts the technique of flashback and the structure of circular narrative. In the film, there is no distinction of beginning and ending between paragraphs, forming a complementary structure, so that the beginning and the end of the film echo each other. In the film, the director scrambled a series of stories arranged in a sequence on the timeline to form a loop of time. After an arbitrary starting point is chosen, events begin to be narrated sequentially on this loop. Through circular narrative, the director implied the cycle of repeated violence stories. In the real world, plots similar to those in the film are also constantly happening. Immediately after the opening overture, the film enters a “fake flashback” structure. The film deliberately downplayed the tragic fate of the characters, seeing it as the basic trend of the development of things. The director finally expressed his thoughts on life and choices in life through Vincent’s death. Through the messy and orderly form of expression and the changeable plot, the movie makes the audience get rid of the habitual expectation in film watching, thus leading the audience to have a profound reflection.

3. Gamified Narrative

Gamified narrative is one of the narrative methods often used in comedy and science fiction films. Its collage, lack of logic, hyperlink characteristics have led to a new cultural form in the film-making art. For example, *Ready Player One*, a science fiction film, used the method of gamified storytelling, using repetitive, intertextual techniques for story-telling. The film mimicked classic movie plots and moments in a gamified manner. The technology combining the virtual and the real makes the combination of game space and real space, showing a new characteristic of film narrative.

Pulp Fiction also used the method of gamified narrative. *Pulp Fiction* is a classic crime film, but it presents a very different form of expression from the traditional crime films. The violence in the film is not bloody, but rather humorous and grey. This makes it different from traditional crime films with heavy or bloody themes. For example, in one episode of the film, when dealing with an unintentional witness, the director expressed the psychological activities of some characters through their facial expressions or language changes. The film has set a darkly humorous tone of narrative from the beginning. What is impressive is that there is a scene in the film where the robber couple had a very funny conversation. The plot shifts very tightly. The heist happens without warning as the audience slowly gravitate toward some gallows humor. Different from the elaborate and progressive conspiracies of classic crime films, these reflect the director’s careful elaboration of the film’s narrative and storyline, and also reveal the director’s anti-rational proposition. In addition, Vincent, as a character involved in three stories, is an important thread in the plot of the film. In the third story, however, Butch killed him with a gun as soon as he appears. Vincent’s unexpected death is extremely random and sudden, which fully reflects the gamified narrative concept of the film (Wang Lina, 2017).

4. The Omniscient Perspective

The omniscient perspective is a common narrative method in fictions. In the process of narrative from the omniscient perspective, the author seems to be in the perspective of “God”, omniscient and omnipotent. The characters, the stories, the settings are all under the author’s control. The author knows everything, and occasionally comments on people and events, leading the audience to all parts of the work. Although this perspective gives readers and the audience a sense of being on the scene, it also widens the distance between the author and the audience, reducing the authenticity and credibility of the works.

As we all know, the narrative perspective of a film is the soul of a film. A novel and unique narrative perspective can help a film bring a new experience to the audience. *Pulp Fiction* used the omniscient perspective in its narrative, and the director used the omniscient perspective in this depiction of the film and the characters. The film mainly used an unfocused, back-of-view approach. In this narrative perspective, the narrator of the film is more important than the characters in the film, and the narrator plays an omnipotent role in the film. Through the narration of the narrator, the audience can learn about other things happening at the same time while watching the film. In the same space and time, another closely related story is happening. In this way, the audience can make certain inferences and predictions about the development of the plot. The audience can make predictions based on the development of the narrative plot, rather than judging by their viewing habits as in traditional narrative films. The director develops the story with an omniscient perspective from an independent but critical position, requiring the audience to use their own judgment and imagination to collect and summarize the information of the subsequent plot development through anticipation and their viewing experience. The film

used an extra-story mode of heterosexual narrative, which is told from an omniscient perspective through a non-dramatic narrator. This approach makes the plot of the story more compelling, draws the audience's attention step by step and invites the audience to reflect on the profound philosophy underlying the film.

The narrative text of the film is also different from the traditional films. Different from traditional narrative films, the narrator's voice does not appear in the film. Instead, the switch between different scenes has been realized through a series of texts and pictures. In the narrative process of the film, there are no elements such as voiceovers that can reveal the identity of the narrator. Through some simple texts and pictures, the film explains three different stories in segments, showing a unique and novel way of narration, and well conveying the information related to the plot to the audience.

Some scholars have used the Internet term "port" to describe the shift in perspective between time and space in *Pulp Fiction*. The plot and overall layout of the film seem messy, but the characters and story are very distinct and thought-provoking. Quentin Tarantino is an artist, and the way he uses perspective in his films gives the audience an unparalleled experience. He can decide what happens at what time and space in the film, and what happens to which characters at what random time. As a viewer, maybe we only focus on how the film makes us feel when we watch it. However, the director is like a wise man who controls the whole situation and brings us new experience and reflection from an all-knowing perspective.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, *Pulp Fiction* is one of the classic representative works of American narrative films. The film adopted a seemingly messy but orderly form of expression, showing black violence, vulgar, marginal and other narrative elements, as well as subverting the traditional narrative perspective and space, creating a brand new visual experience for the audience. In *Pulp Fiction*, the director broke the norms of modern aesthetics and presented the work with unique and novel methods, structures and perspectives of narrative. The film goes straight to the viewers' inner world, arouses a resonance in them and satisfies their visual needs, and the plot design has also brought surprises to the viewers. Chinese films should also learn the narrative art of *Pulp Fiction* and change the overall low level of Chinese films.

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