

The Influence of Social Culture and Ideology on the Change of Cultural Symbol: Casino Royale (2006)

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Abstract: Structuralism is a theory to research questions, it supposes that every subject or thing has an internal system, which is a whole composed of various elements of the thing in accordance with certain laws. It advocates observing and grasping things from the whole, and also the connection of various elements constituting the whole. From the perspective of structuralism, this paper starts from Umberto Eco's design of 'narrative machine', which includes the concept of 'dualistic opposites' and 'pre-planned sequence of actions'. Then it draws on the ideas of other cultural scholars, such as Denning, Bennett and Woollacott, so as to analysis Casino Royale, and find out the impact of current social culture and ideology on this typical traditional cultural symbol. Meanwhile, by analyzing the invariability and changes in this film, this paper tries to contribute a better and richer view and deepen the audiences' understanding on this issue.

1. Introduction

1.1 Structuralism

Structuralism is a new trend to know and research things, which has been popular in some areas of Humanities, such as Linguistics, Anthropology, Philosophy, Psychology and Literature, since the 1950s[1]. Structuralism is a theory to research questions, it supposes that every subject or thing has an internal system, which is a whole composed of various elements of the thing in accordance with certain laws. It advocates observing and grasping things from the whole, and also the connection of various elements constituting the whole. Structuralism provides an operable method for text analysis, which is to give a semantic interpretation of the system on the level of logic-semantic, and excavate the deep meaning of the text closely related to the structure of the work.

1.2 Casino Royale (2006)

Casino Royale (2006) is the 21st episode of the James Bond movies, the film was based on the very first Bond novel by Ian Fleming, published in 1953. It's also Daniel Craig's first film as the 6th James Bond. The movie mainly told the stories happened when Bond had just become agent 007, that he made a nefarious financier Le Chiffre who funded terrorists lost billions of dollars, by stopping a terrorist attack at an airport, then was sent to play in a high-stake card game at a casino royale in Montenegro to completely defeated him. During the mission, Bond fell in love with a

female agent, Vesper Lynd from the Treasury Department, but she turned out to be a double agent. In the end, she died tragically in front of Bond.

Daniel Craig as Bond was initially an underdog; However, after the release, the film was widely hailed as a successful transition and even the best James Bond film of all time.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research Backgrounds

The study of the James Bond novels by Umberto Eco (b. 1932), a renowned Italian semiotician, shows how the various methods of structuralism can be applied to a popular cultural form. He introduced the concept of the novel as a 'narrative machine', an immutable law that simultaneously guaranteed the novel's popularity success and its appeal to a more limited and literate audience. In the 007 novels and films, this 'narrative machine' manifests itself as a series of dualistic opposites (Bond and the villain or the Bond girl, liberalism and totalitarianism, etc.) and a fixed, pre-planned sequence of actions, detailed below:

- a. M moves and gives a task to Bond;
- b. Villain moves and appears to Bond;
- c. Bond moves and gives a first check to Villain or Villain gives first check to Bond;
- d. Woman moves and show herself to Bond;
- e. Bond takes Woman...;
- f. Villain captures Bond...;
- g. Villain tortures Bond...;
- h. Bond beats Villain...;
- i. Bond, convalescing, enjoys Woman, whom he then loses.

Another aspect of Eco's structuralism, one consistent with that of Levi-Strauss, concerns the universal character of structure which lies behind and explains the popularity of the Bond novels. Eco argues that the narrative structure of these novels represents a modern variation on the universal theme of the struggle between good and evil.

As Bennett and Woollacott argue, there are no fixed, universal and ahistorical codes; 'readings' of popular culture are always organized in historically specific contexts. Similarly, Denning argues that the emergence of codes associated with tourism and pornography in the 1960s was a crucial reference point for audience of both the novels and the films.

2.2 Research Methodology

From the perspective of structuralism, this paper starts from Umberto Eco's design of 'narrative machine', which includes the concept of 'dualistic opposites' and 'pre-planned sequence of actions'. Then it draws on the ideas of other cultural scholars, such as Denning, Bennett and Woollacott, so as to analysis Casino Royale, and find out the impact of current social culture and ideology on this typical traditional cultural symbol.

3. Research Significance

3.1 Theoretical Significance

Though Eco had made a thorough analysis on James Bond novels, his research contains no sense of history, little awareness of the society in which the James Bond novels were created and read and into which the films were made. However, texts or films never exist in extreme isolation. They only

become meaningful when they are placed in the social relationships that produce and consume them. It can also be concluded that the reader, the text, and the words read are mistaken for a means of analyzing popular culture. This paper intended to analyze the film *Casino Royale* based on the theories of many previous experts, and interprets the changes and invariability of 007 films in the new century combined with contemporary popular culture.

What's more, in the current Chinese paper network, the vast majority of papers studying 007 series pay more attention to its value in film art, but lack of analysis from the perspective of structuralism.

3.2 Practical Significance

As the first James Bond film after the replacement of the main character, *Casino Royale* has made many bold and innovative attempts than the previous series. In the current academic research on the 007 series, few articles have focused specifically on such a stylistic change. This article can help readers understand the film better from a more professional and detailed perspective. At the same time, as the first James Bond film officially introduced into Chinese mainland, *007 Casino Royale* is of great significance to China, its creators have also been to Beijing, Shanghai and other places to do publicity for the film, so its impact on the audience is different from the previous work. From this aspect, the research of this paper is also full of romantic feelings.

4. Case Study: a Structuralist Analysis of *Casino Royale*

4.1 The Basic Structure of *Casino Royale*

In chapter 2, I mentioned that Eco introduced the concept of the James Bond novels as a 'narrative machine', in which stays a fixed, pre-planned sequence of actions, and after every action I would give an overview of the corresponding movie plot to help the audience understand this film better, detailed below:

a. M moves and gives a task to Bond; (Different from any of the previous series, in the beginning Bond had an accident in the line of duty, which really embarrassed MI6, so M banned him from doing anything; However, Bond didn't take a rest, he stopped a terrorist financier so that guy had to participate in a bet, which was just the 'task' that M gives Bond in this film.)

b. Woman moves and show herself to Bond; (The agent from the Treasury Department, Vesper Lynd was sent by M to assist Bond in the mission. Here is a small adjustment to the ordinary order, which means that Bond girl shows herself earlier in this film, unlike those who were in the previous series.)

c. Villain moves and appears to Bond; (Le Chiffre, the terrorist financier, had his first conversation with Bond, in a threatening tone. Their silent fight started from the Texas poker table.)

d. Bond moves and gives a first check to Villain or Villain gives first check to Bond; (Bond was going to move to the villain's hotel room and give the villain a first check, while the terrorist who had been the villain's creditor was there too, and they had an encounter. Bond struggled to knock down the 2 enemies.)

e. Bond takes Woman...; (Bond took Vesper back to their room, she was frightened by the violence of the fight, sitting slumped in the bathroom, so he sat down with her to comfort her.)

f. Villain captures Bond...; (Le Chiffre was beaten by Bond in the card game, so he kidnapped Vesper, and use her as the bait to capture Bond when he drove to save her.)

g. Villain tortures Bond...; (To force Bond to say the password of his bank account, the villain tied Bond to a chair, totally naked, and hit him desperately with a whip.)

h. Bond beats Villain...; (Here is another innovative point, the man who killed the villain was

not James Bond, but a mysterious man who was even more powerful than the villain. Of course, there also follows a dramatic turn in the end.)

i. Bond, convalescing, enjoys Woman, whom he then loses. (After the villain was beaten, Bond went to recover in a nursing home, accompanied by Vesper, who fell deeply in love with him right then. However, when Bond decided to quit his job as an agent and go travelling the world with his love Vesper, the mysterious organization showed up and threatened Vesper to take away hundreds of millions of dollars. In the chase, Vesper unfortunately died from an accident, which broke Bond's heart.)

4.2 The Dualistic Opposites in Casino Royale

According to the 'narrative machine' concept, there's always a series of dualistic opposites in any James Bond novel or film. So here I would like to analysis those dualistic opposites presented in this very film particularly[2].

These oppositions, which are very similar to Levi-Strauss's binary oppositions, can be combined and recombined with each other, and are 'immediate and universal'. Their 'permutation and interaction' means that the combination, association and representation of each opposition can be varied, to some extent, from novel to novel, and film to film. None the less, they form an invariant structure of oppositions which defines the narratives and ensures the popularity of the novel.

The oppositions involve:

1) The relations between character in the films. In Casino Royale, they are: James Bond-Vesper Lynd, James Bond-Le Chiffre, James Bond-M, etc.

2) The relations between ideologies. For example, between liberalism and totalitarianism, or the 'free world' and the 'Soviet Union'. However, these examples only existed in the previous serial films. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, globalization developed rapidly, and ideological contradictions were no longer that acute, so this new James Bond film shifts the main conflict to another global concern: Terrorism. Interestingly, a line of M in the film implicitly expressed the helplessness of this old agent film facing the progress of time: 'God, I miss the Cold War.'

3) A large number of relations between distinct types of values. In this film they mainly manifested as cupidity-ideals (the cupidity of Le Chiffre vs the ideals of Bond), chance-planning (the chance of Bond vs the planning of M), trust-betrayal (the trust Bond had in Vesper vs Vesper's sudden betrayal), and love-death (the love between Bond and Vesper vs the death of Vesper).

4.3 The Invariability of Casino Royale

This Bond film has many of the same elements as its previous ones: a mature and attractive male agent from Britain; M who is always cautious but especially forgiving of Bond; a beautiful, sexy but dumb woman who has sex with Bond and then dies disastrously (though she only played for 10 minutes); and a cruel and unscrupulous evil villain.

All listed above are special codes of 007, which have successfully been formed since the first Bond novel published in 1953, they are the basis that assure the popularity of James Bond.

Eco's structuralism led him to argue that the reason why James Bond series have achieved such great achievements is that these codes construct a basic associative network to acquire something original and meaningful[3]; this structure of the novels and films place particular types of readers, masses and elites, in particular types of attraction, elemental primitivism and cultural sophistication. However, Eco was just partly right, for he ignored the audiences' changes in expectations, locations and values due to time flying.

4.4 The Changes in Casino Royale

With the progress of time, people's values are changing constantly. In such circumstances, the series will have to reinvent itself if it is to remain popular. After the replacement of a new protagonist and a new director, a lot of adjustments in the film's content form were also made in Casino Royale.

1) More visual stimulation. The film opens with a thrilling chase between Bond and the nimble terrorist[4]. What's more impressive about the new James Bond is his physical strength, rather than some of the tricks that his predecessors often used. During the chase, the terrorist flies over a wall and Bond crashes right through it.

2) The love scenes are more delicate and romantic. After a life-and-death battle with the killer at a hotel, the Bond girl was so shaken up that she sat naked under the bathroom tap. After 007 saw this, he did two actions which 007 had never done before. First, he untied his bow tie and sat down under the tap. Second, sit quietly beside her and suck her bloody finger. It's no wonder that female audiences have given Casino Royale a lot of praise for 007, the "dinosaur of the patriarchal era" who finally showed his kindness and sincerity in front of women[5,6].

3) Changes in signature style. In a film series that has lasted more than 50 years, 007 ditched his trademark suit for a soft, casual T-shirt, and his opponents went from cold-blooded Soviet spies or mad scientists to terrorists with punk hair and earrings[7]. Another underlying reason for 007's transformation in style is that audiences have seen too many spy films that sell themselves as 'real' and have become less enamored of the wondrous high-tech gadgets, so this time Bond mainly fights with only one gun and his fists.

5. Conclusion

In order to help readers better understand the external performance and internal logic of the film Casino Royale, this paper makes a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the film with the help of the viewpoints of several pop culture scholars and their structuralist cultural analysis model, and draws the following conclusions.

In terms of its basic nine-step plot structure and key dualistic characters, Casino Royale is largely a legacy of the James Bond series. Nevertheless, due to the progress of The Times (such as the drastic changes in the world political pattern) and the changes in people's aesthetic concepts (such as more pursuit of 'truth' and 'feminism'), the film has made many bold and innovative attempts to cater to the tastes of new century audiences and has achieved relatively considerable achievements.

However, there are still many shortcomings in this paper. Due to my experience, this paper only focuses on Casino Royale, an independent film, instead of analyzing and summarizing the whole 007 series. In addition, the application of structuralist analysis is not so professional.

Therefore, in the subsequent research, the author will attempt to conduct further investigation on the above issues and study the cultural influence of James Bond in a more in-depth and specific way.

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