

"Return to Dust": Local Poetic Flavour and Contemporary Ideal Significance of the Love Between Poet and Maiden

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Abstract: With the core of "poetry", the art film "Return to Dust" evokes the spiritual resonance between film and individuals. This paper investigates the motive of the encounter between Lao Si and Gui Ying, proposes the multiple possibilities behind the film's multiple narratives, and experiences the director's creation intention of shaping the "specimen" of countryside under the premise of recognizing the poetic reality. By analyzing the detailed and true depictions in the film, we can extract that the character archetypes of Lao Si and Gui Ying are poets and maiden, which shows the rich meaning in their love beyond universal love. By analyzing the huge gap between the hopeful direction of the story and the desperate ending, and to understand the significance of the director's "local" practice of recording history based on his native land and his pastoral ideal in the current era.

Keywords: Poetic Flavour; The Poet; The Maiden; Home Village; Pastoral Ideal

Introduction

In 2022, the film industry declined under the epidemic environment. The art film "Return to Dust" with the appearance of a dark horse, received unexpected attendance and box office. With the core of "poetry", the film evokes the spiritual resonance between film and individual, and embodies the characteristics of nature to the greatest extent, but at the same time, the film also shows the poetry produced by the burst of inner vitality. The audience's emotions are pulled by the pair of counteracting forces created by the film. This pair of forces, on one side is a huge aesthetic, on the other side is a deep depression. The more beautiful, the more depressing. Therefore, when the viewer approaches, feels and analyzes the film from the perspective of reading poetry, they can not simply use city and township, good and evil, true and false, the concept of binary opposition to judge it good or bad, should pay more attention to whether it opens the paralyzed senses of the viewer fed by the short video, and whether it can make the viewer think more when he sinks into the trivial of life again.

1. Consider multiple possibilities in multiple narratives: blind date, trading, destiny

In village of Gansu Province, Ma youtie (iron), the fourth son in the family, has three older brothers. The parents, the eldest brother and the second brother have passed away. Lao Si plays the role of a permanent worker in the third brother's house. He doesn't feel the warmth of family and is not treated as family.

Cao Guiying was in an even worse situation. Her parents died as well. She grew up in the home of her brother and sister-in-law. She was abused all the year round, suffering from disease, urinary incontinence, unstable footwall, and unable to give birth.

On a cold snowy day, Lao Si and Gui Ying met for the first time. The motive of the story is the Lao Si's nephew to get married, the elder bachelor uncle is the "short board" for the nephew to talk about marriage. The brother and sister-in-law are eager to get rid of this "short board" and set their eyes on Guiying, who is also regarded as a "encumbrance" by his family. And so, two people who have never been seen, let alone played the leading role, became heroes and heroines for the first

time.

In a few words, the two people did not make a clear statement, the marriage is made up in the arrangement of relatives. Such a blind date, a bit like a business, and perhaps a sense of destiny to meet. The multiple narrative meanings provide the audience with multiple perspectives to interpret the story development motivation.

Fortunately, the story of their marriage seems to be turning out for the best. From sending hot water, buying coats, to planting crops, building houses, two closed souls gradually open up in mutual respect and love. The previously hopeless life began to be hopeful with mutual support and companionship. When Lao Si gently put the Gui Ying on the donkey cart, even attracted the envy of the villager, "You see Lao Si loves his wife so much." But the next dialogue is "Why don't you marry him?" A realistic blade pierces into the poetic countryside picture. Harmonious feelings and rich material life, are the people's yearning and pursuit. They are not fish and bear's paws, but sometimes it is difficult to have both. Most "ordinary" people in the village no doubt prefer comfort and wealth as the standard of a good life. Lao Si and Gui Ying practice the logic of life of a few people.

The two weak people persistently use the traditional social ethics to draw a line with the outside world, protect the dignity of the two-person unit, strictly abide by their duties and faith, and their moral beliefs are meticulous and orderly. But once back in their humble home, the "bitter mandarin duck" are immersed in the quiet years after hard work without reservation. They are like "specimen" of agricultural civilization preserved on the screen, condenses all the virtues of agricultural utopia. However, we have to wonder how Lao Si and Gui Ying, who grew up bullied, could shield or digest negative energy and build such a complete and sound spirit. Why is it that the evil deeds of uncaring relatives throwing away the "encumbrance", to facilitate the meeting of two kind hearts? If the ending of the story is like a fairy tale, and Lao Si and Gui Ying live happily ever after, can they always stick to the countryside, will it always be so lovely?

Under the impact of modern forces, this "specimen" is as fragile as the agricultural civilization that has gone away. It exists in the collaged art fragments, which itself has a certain degree of distortion. This anamorphic filter is a petri dish of poetic flavour and a bridge through logic and reason to realize the artistic truth that the director wants to convey. Facing the impermanence of life, Lao Si and Guiying rise in the face of difficulties, are persistent and tenacious, like sun chasing Kuafu and fire stealing Prometheus, with scarce, sincere and noble qualities.

2. Extract character prototype from detailed records: poets and maidens, creatures enlightened by nature

With dark face and dusty and bent body, the director focuses on the native land, and on the basis of personal experience, portrays the image of the bottom peasants in the rural areas of Northwest China as truthfully as possible. Plowing, sowing, cutting wheat, grinding flour, and building walls and roof, showing the details of labor in every detail. These rural landscapes, which are neither vast nor magnificent, make the survival scenery of the lower class people in the west emerge from the historical surface of the image narrative. The calm and restrained onlooker's perspective makes the film resemble an agricultural documentary.

After a year of hard farming and deducting various debts, the only remaining 2,400 yuan was less than a month's income of urban migrant worker. The hard-built house was bulldozed and replaced with 15,000 yuan, less than the house prices of one square meter in a big city. This is an algorithm out of interest. However, the significance of primitive labor for Lao Si and Gui Ying cannot be quantified in this way. They have revived, survived, practiced, awakened love and completed love in their daily labor.

In modern society, people seldom care about where the cloth to make clothes comes from, how the food to eat is grown, and how the concrete to build houses is connected to the mountains and rivers. Instead, they are bound by the house prices, brands and shelf life, and the direct experience of life is replaced by more precise time and more virtual space. When modern logic was busy demolishing, building factories, conquering and transforming nature, Lao Si and Gui Ying could only labor. Their logic was to blend into nature, rely on nature, and even be enlightened by nature. This makes Li Ruijun's local movies

have philosophical significance.

Seeing the withered wheat seedlings, Lao Si said, "Just throw away the withered ones. Everyone has his life, so does the wheat, which also has its life." When the bun fell into the soil, Lao Si said, "What is not the first born in the soil, the soil does not dislike us, so why do we dislike the soil?" In the ruins of demolition, Lao Si picked up a destroyed swallow nest and re-placed it under the eaves of the new house... In Lao Si's eyes, all creatures created by nature are all equal. Poetic flavour and philosophy from time to time show that Lao Si is not only a farmer, but also a poet.

Lao Si is not young and Gui Ying is infertile. Their feelings are less physical participation than ordinary love, and go straight to the spiritual level. Compared with ordinary women, Gui Ying is more like a naive, pure, and stubborn maiden. She gave the opportunity to be a "mother" to the electric baby chicken. The night artificial chicken nest issued light, flashing her endless hope for a better life. In the face of the madman who was shouted at by everyone in the village, Gui Ying gave him a bun. When she saw Lao Si planted the wheat flowers on her wrist, she was sure that these were the signs that they would never be separated... Under the untidy and disheveled appearance, Guiying has the pure soul.

The love between Lao Si and Gui Ying is the poet's and maiden's love. It is exiled in the mainstream vision, deeply rooted in the dust of pure love.

3. Perpetuating the agrarian Ideal from disappointed hope: Documenting the universal truth in the flood of times

When Lao Si and Guiying's life is on the right track, Guiying died in a joke like accident. Without hope, there is no despair. When Gui Ying passed away, the only photo she left was her wedding photo, which changed from happy photo to posthumous photograph. Life, like a photograph, changes from colorful to black and white. How could Lao Si easily return to his original life after such a profound love and loss? At the end of the film, Lao Si paid off all debts and favors, owed nothing and went on his own journey return to dust. The character goes to death, which is a tragedy, but also the truth of the impermanence of life. What is valuable is that because of the Lao Si didn't forget, their momentary love gained eternal significance.

The film opens with a wall of wheat grass and earth, and ends with the earth wall being torn down. Generations of farmers and livestock in Northwest China were born and died in houses and pens surrounded by earth walls. Compared with their grandparents, Lao Si and Guiying are likely to be the last generation of "leftovers" from the agrarian era. The agricultural countryside is gone forever. Because of poetic remembrance, it also has eternal significance.

Before "Return to Dust", director Li Ruijun also shot "The Old Donkey", "River Road", "Fly With The Crane" and other works. "Return to Dust" and his other films together constitute the history of contemporary Chinese land and village written by images. The invariable northwest land, invariable innocence and invariable loss are constantly repeated in his films. In addition to the documentary style, the film also uses the local dialect as the dialogue without exception, and selects the local people as the main actors. Native people, native language, native life, so that the film reflects a strong "from the land" root. Li Ruijun grew up in the countryside of Gaotai County, Zhangye City, Gansu Province, and then walked away step by step and came back again and again, showing a strong "locality". Through the images, he entrusted the ideal location of farming and pastoral, built a more universal reality, recorded a more marginal history, and retained the spiritual strength of his homeland as a rock. Fortunately, Li Ruijun, a young villager, has created a "big world" in his works by making images of her hometown's "small land". His film works have been shortlisted in Venice, Berlin, Tokyo and other important international film festivals for many times, inspiring a huge mind and deep heritage of an ancient land that is easy to be ignored.

But the reality is: In the past decade, Gansu, the province with the most serious population loss in China. People miss it but spare no effort to stay away from it. In a country with a population of 1.4 billion, there are 600 million people living in the endless gap of prosperity, and their monthly income is only about 1,000 yuan... Under such time dimension measuring Li Ruijun image, has the strong sense of times, "for me, I need to strive for a discourse space for this land and its people and things. They should not be submerged in times of flood, I have the obligation to record and render their life." Where is the

ideal home?What is eternal truth, goodness and beauty?A movie is not the answer, but it may be a key to open an incision, so that viewer can pick up more permanent power and be brave to find the answer with action.

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