

Metaphors in Disney Animated Film Zootopia

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Abstract: The film "Zootopia" is well received by the audience for its plots and connotation. The film takes dreams and beliefs as the core ideas. It is not just to describe a "crazy" animal society, but to map the real human society. It also reveals the social and cultural phenomena in the United States through various metaphors. Through the analysis of the metaphors, this article intends to have a deeper understanding of American social culture.

Keywords: Zootopia; Metaphor; American culture

The film Zootopia is a 3D animation produced by Disney Pictures. It is co-directed by Ritchie Moore, Byrne Howard and Gerald Bush. After its publicity in 2016, there is a strong reputation of almost "zero negative reviews". In this film, young people see lovely fairy tales, while adults see political satire and prejudice. There are full of metaphors needs to be explored, and metaphor is a powerful tool for us to explore, describe, understand and explain it.

1. Research of Metaphor

The study of metaphor can be traced back to the ancient Greek era. The word "metaphor" comes from Greek, "meta" means "across", and "phor" or "sphere" means "carry". Therefore, "metaphor" originally means a movement of "from here to there", a kind of transformation.

Lakoff and Johnson^[1] believed that metaphor is pervasive in daily life, not only in language, but also in our thought and behavior. The daily conceptual system we use to think and act is also metaphorical in nature. Their definition of metaphor is that the nature of metaphor is to understand and experience a certain kind of things through another kind of things.

According to this definition, metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, because language is only a part of human cognitive activities. Painting, music, movie, sculpture as well as architecture are the products of people's cognitive activities. Paintings can be used as metaphors, and their designs, from the simplest to the most complex, contain different meaning. All kinds of lines, shapes and patterns express our inner thoughts and feelings, and give substance to our beliefs, doubts, hopes, needs and ideals. Design is also a kind of communication, which is to create a style and express a kind of thought or emotion. Similarly, animated film, which creates the virtual experiences with causality, is also a metaphor of human inner world. It represents the reality of human soul life: dreams, hallucinations, anxiety, pain and so on.

2. Metaphors of Animal Images

"Zootopia" is the combination of "zoo" and "Utopia". "Utopia" originally means "no place" or "good place", which was originally proposed by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. Thomas Moore, the founder of utopian socialism, wrote in his famous book Utopia, an ideal society where property is shared, everyone is equal, and everyone can live according to their own ideas. In other words, this is a paradise without oppression. "Zootopia" in the film also follows this design: all animals live together regardless of race, carnivores and herbivores play together, and each animal can live in an ideal way. However, under the appearance of "Utopia", the undercurrent surged in this place, and the racial concept still firmly imprisoned the animals.

2.1 The Rabbit Judy

The rabbit Judy is the first protagonist of the film. She comes from a small rural town. Her parents are farmers and live a stable life by planting carrots. She also has hundreds of brothers and sisters, which is a metaphor for the reproductive ability of rabbits. In Zootopia, everyone thinks that rabbits, a weak creature, should plant carrots at their own cost. However, Judy wants to be a policewoman. For this reason, she bears the opposition from others. These unfair treatments come from the same question: Are people what they should be? Should rabbits grow carrots and lions become rulers? This reminds us of the stable "hereditary system" in society. People's identity and status depend on "blood relationship". Is there DNA of "planting carrots" in the blood of rabbits? The answer is No. In Judy's dream seeking road, there is a discussion on human society: Everyone on the dream seeking road like Judy should never give in.

2.2 The Fox Nick

In his childhood, Nick believed that being kind to others would also bring back happiness to him, but he was inexplicably beaten and humiliated by a group of herbivores, so he developed the label that others put on him, and became an opportunistic philistine. Before meeting Judy, he was a little gangster who resold food and evaded taxes. "Deterioration can protect yourself" was a hint to himself. Compared with Judy, Nick's growth seems to be more sad, but Judy's accompany has gradually brought him back to his true self, a kind-hearted man and eager for justice. The film gently tells us that the innocence and beauty hidden in Nick did not die with childhood. Exaggerated dreams and even fantasies, like the sleeping beauty in the story, will open her bright eyes when the prince comes.

2.3 The Fennec Fox Finnick

The appearance of Finnick and Nick is quite different. Finnick looks weaker and more deceptive, so they are matched by father

and son and cheated together, using Finnick's petite body and cute appearance to gain others' sympathy. From the perspective of sound design, the images of Finnick and Nick are quite different. After the fraud, Finnick returned to his original rough voice, which formed a strong contrast with his lovely appearance^[2]. It's a vivid image of a bad person in life. Sometimes evildoers seem very fragile, but they use others' sympathy or kindness to cheat people and do bad things.

2.4 The Superstar Gazelle

The prototype is from the famous singer Shakira. Gazelle appeals to everyone to remain rational under the crisis of the animal city. At the end of the film, a concert was held in the peaceful city. Gazelle sang "try everything", which just fits the theme of the film: we should give everyone a chance to realize themselves and give each species a chance to coexist peacefully. DNA is not an insurmountable difference. The only way is to remove stereotype is to try hard and not give up communication^[3].

The film takes the concert as the last means to eliminate the rift between animals, which actually expresses the change of "soft culture" to "hard world". The scene reminds us of the 1960s, American society was unstable with racial conflicts, the feminist movement and the Vietnam War. When the public was confused about the future, John Lennon, intervened in the mainstream culture as a spokesman for pacifism. His "give peace a chance" was regarded as an anti-war hymn.

3. Metaphors of American Culture

3.1 Metaphor of American Dream

Utopia is a perfect ideal country, while Zootopia seems to be an ideal city for animals to coexist harmoniously. In this place, "everyone can be everything", which is the expression of the "American Dream". In Zootopia, Judy is a typical representative pursuing the "American Dream". She crosses the barriers of gender, occupation and race, and solves difficult cases with her own efforts, gains the friendship of Nick, and achieves her goal.

3.2 Metaphor of Government

When Judy walked into the Transportation Bureau to check the license plate number, there was a group of listless staff sitting in the hall. A sloth named "lightning" was responsible for checking the license plate. The name lightning formed a huge contrast with the behavior of sloths. "Lightning" moves very slowly. It takes many times to say a license plate number before hitting the keyboard. When others talk about interesting anecdotes, he shows greater interest. This scene of the Transportation Bureau is a metaphor for the current situation of the government's low efficiency and improper employment. At the end of the film, the animal driving a sports car racing is the very slow "lightning" at work, which is an irony in humor.

3.3 Metaphors of Race and Gender Discrimination

When Judy said her dream of becoming a policewoman, what she got was not appreciation, but advice from her parents, because no rabbit has ever been a policewoman or policeman. Rabbits are too weak, too petite and only strong male animals are qualified to be policemen. Nick was also labeled as cunning since childhood, which made him feel inferior to others. In the workplace, this kind of consciousness and prejudice may also occur. Women in the workplace are considered as weak and obedient, Men are not treated equally due to from ethnic minority immigrant families.

3.4 Metaphor of Feminism

The two main female characters in the film, Judy and the deputy mayor Bellwether, represent two kinds of women in the workplace. Judy is optimistic and cheerful, with a simple mind and firm goals. And her idea of becoming a policeman didn't get any support from the beginning, because the police station is a male dominated society. When Judy graduated with excellent grades and was assigned to the police station, she was surrounded by all kinds of strong male animals. However, it is such a weak woman who has solved major cases and reached an achievement that other male animal policemen cannot achieve. Judy's success showed that in a patriarchal society, female can still achieve a career and surpass male as long as they work hard enough.

Another female role, deputy mayor of sheep, represents another kind of women. They swallow their anger and achieve their goals through scheming and means. The sheep has been working as a secretary under mayor lion. She has been enduring the obscenity of the mayor. And she has been playing the role of harmless to humans and animals, but she has endured long-term oppression and anger in her heart, and finally vented her dissatisfaction by plotting an earth shattering crime^[4]. Although the sheep is a villain, she represents the situation of many women in the workplace.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, "Zootopia" is a vivid and interesting animated film with ups and downs of story. What children see is a dreamland with cute animals, while what adults see is a realistic world full of cultural metaphors. It directly reflects the social or historical reality of the United States, social problems such as gender discrimination, occupational discrimination, racial discrimination and so on. At the same time, we can also find that under a series of problems and contradictions, people are seeking solutions and working for a better tomorrow. With a strong political color, the film takes peace as the main line, hoping that mankind can coexist peacefully and jointly create a harmonious utopia for everyone.

References:

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