

Research on the Narrative Art and Social Value of *Zootopia* in the Film and Television Animation

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Abstract

Zootopia is a 3D animation film produced by Walt Disney Pictures co-directed by Rich Moore, Byron Howard and Jared Bush. Once it was on, it became popular in the global cinemas, and became the typical film with high box-office receipts and good reputation in 2016. It was also very popular on the streets and lanes. We can see its great artistic achievements. The film tells the story about a city in the modern civilization world where only vegetarian and carnivorous animals of different kinds live in peace. Judy, a young female rabbit in the town with feminine appearance fulfills her dream of going to the big city to seek for dreams as a policewoman in her childhood. And then she becomes the partner of Nick Wilde who does not look harmonious, and uncovers a major case in the animal world. The story is simple and clear. Through a series of bizarre and hard growing experience, she declares her success to “the animal world”. This paper studies the narrative art and the social value of success of the *Zootopia*.

Keywords

View on Right, Animation, Social Value, Audio and Visual Art

1. Introduction

The modern mammal metropolis of *Zootopia* is a city like no other. Comprised of habitat neighborhoods like ritzy Sahara Square and frigid Tundra town, it’s a melting pot where animals from every environment live together—a place where no matter what you are, from the biggest elephant to the smallest shrew, you can be anything. But when optimistic Officer Judy Hopps arrives, she discovers that being the first bunny on a police force of big, tough animals isn’t so easy. Determined to prove herself, she jumps at the opportunity to crack a case,

even if it means partnering with a fast-talking, scam-artist fox, Nick Wilde, to solve the mystery. In this paper, through *Zootopia* unexpected narrative technique and values of teaching through lively activities, different significances for different audiences and rethinking about the view on right of animals to discuss its narration in the film and television animation art and social values.

2. Unexpected Narrative Technique

The world of *Zootopia* is big enough. Some parts are bright, and some are dark. Humor and social reason are contained. It looks at the dark and serious with shining eyes, finds the right balance between brightness and darkness, and provides the group education with a narrative technique with appropriate scale. It is interesting and rational. It moves people by feeling, finally returns to the brightness, and makes more beautiful and comprehensive explanation of the current films with the label of happiness of reunion. The unexpectedly narrative technique attracts the attention of the audiences, resulting in success in production, audio-visual and box office. For example, fennec fox Finnick who looks like a child but is actually an adult, Leodore Lionheart who is the mastermind of missing animal case, Dawn Bellwether who looks weak but is actually the murderer, bradypod Flash who is the driver driving a car at top speed and speaking and doing things slowly, a little shrew who is the gang boss with several white bear bodyguards and other roles greatly challenge the audiences' cognition when watching the film. The huge contrast between the normal logic and facts brings audiences unexpected audio-visual feeling when watching the film. Such narrative technique makes the film wonderful and also brings great humorous effect. The story is funny, which makes the film more popular.

The big and small theme of *Zootopia* with no sign of human maps the human society. Even there is clever arrangement in the city building. There are all kinds of beautiful scenery, including the tropical rain forests with twisted roots and gnarled branches, the snowy and icy Tundratown, the desolate desert and the busy city. Its animation creation is very detailed and sophisticated. The dramatic structure of *Zootopia* is relatively conservative. There are always smart details, but the topic layers are clear and rigorous at any time. The title *Zootopia* is the combination of Zoo and Utopia. Race, class, prejudice and treatment of the ideal and reality of animal members living in the Zootopiatown are skillfully and smoothly arranged. In the *Zootopia* built by skillful craftsmen, elephant, giraffe, hippo, rabbit and other animals have lifelike size, which brings the audiences to the dream in reality. Their dressing, language, tax system and office mode are like those of human beings. Bank hamsters walking out of Lehman Brothers queue up, turn in order, and hold an ice-cream stick in hands of each of them, which satirizes following blindly in the reality. The fighting history of woman in the workplace or the fighting history of the youth from the small in the big city is the cross section of modern society. Judy Hopps aspires to be a policeman since she was young. Although people around her say it is impossible, Judy always struggles for her dream. Finally she graduates from police training school, enters the city *Zootopia*, and becomes a policewoman. Everything goes wrong in the workplace, and parents don't understand her. Nick Wilde is accused of being foxy since he was young Nick. He is cynical and becomes foxier and foxier. Although he looks foxy, he is actually a warm boy who can leave the world and go into the world, talk glibly and be a hero. To make the film more interesting, there are a lot of places paying respect to other films; in addition to the leading role, the cute leopard eating doughnut and smiling is also very popular among the audiences. In *Zootopia* bradypod, the staff of vehicle administration office, serving as the laughing point, is really funny.

3. Values of Teaching through Lively Activities

1) Smile to the prejudice and be willing to fight

In the nearly perfect Zootopiatown, "equality" is just ideal, and "prejudice" is the norm and reality. Because of people's prejudices, all people including parents think that Judy cannot become a good police. However, Judy Hopps chooses to ignore the prejudice and bravely chase her dream, and finally becomes a real police recognized by all people (Shen, 2016).

2) Everyone has infinite possibility

In the prejudice of all people, Judy Hopps graduates from the police training school in the first place, and becomes a famous "police officer" uncovering a big case from a traffic police; "gentle" and "incompetent" Dawn Bellwether also (negatively) makes his efforts to successfully become "mayor"; the small "Mr. Big" shrew becomes the "godfather" of gang with a group of white bear bodyguards. *Zootopiatown* tells the audiences that "everyone has infinite possibility".

3) Know everyone in a correct and comprehensive way

Zootopiat is full of interesting irony. The big elephant loves yoga; police officer cheetah has a lovely “maiden’s heart”; yak with remarkable memory envies the memory of elephant; master of car racing is a bradypod speaking and doing things slowly... *Zootopiat* tells the audiences to know everyone in a correct and comprehensive way.

4) Ready to help others

In the rodent town, Judy helps to stop doughnuts, saves Mr. Big’s daughter, and gets the “help” for herself. Judy helps Nick and his son to buy the elephant popsicle and meets them (although it is fraud)... *Zootopiat* tells the audiences to be ready to help others and let the world filled with love.

5) Enter the field after preparation

After the missing animal case is uncovered, without any exercise, Judy Hopps says nothing but nonsense in the reception and makes the city fall into chaos. Nick Wilde leaves, carnivores are discriminated, and innocent people are involved *Zootopiat* tells the audiences not to be anxious to show yourself and enter the field after preparation.

6) Have the courage to admit and undertake

Due to the error of Judy on the press conference, many animals suffer unfair treatment. In the chaotic *Zootopiat*, no one accuses her, but Judy’s world is almost dark. Judy resigns to go home and tries to escape. Until Judy has the courage to face and makes up for the mistake, brightness and power return to her (Zi, 2016). *Zootopiat* tells the audiences to have the courage to admit and undertake.

7) Take by strategy

After his conspiracy is brought to light, the mayor sheep tries to kill the “rabbit”. At the moment of crisis, Nick and Judy have a big show together. They first change the bullets, secretly record, finally master sufficient evidence, and win with a shot. *Zootopiat* tells audiences to take by strategy.

4. Different Significances for Different Audiences

The plot of *Zootopia* is good to see and hear. The painting style is colorful and interesting. The animation production is careful. And then we often see such scene. Two young parents with their child go to cinema to watch *Zootopia* together. Adults focus on the plot and animations, and kids focus on animation and animals, so *Zootopia* team achieves many things at one stroke. *Zootopia* constructs a grand utopian world of animals. Different audiences can see different conception (Yan, 2016). For example, people caring about current affairs can see racial discrimination and political situations; kids loving animals can see lovely habits of animals after personification; teenagers realize that they should never stop to see pursue the dream; adults can think about racial integration and cultural diversity; and teenagers can see love. Therefore, *Zootopia* is an animation film suitable for both young and old.

The interracial love of Nick Wilde and Judy Hopps becomes a major highlight of the film. They have positive, friendly and humorous relationship. The advantages of the fox and the rabbit are different. One is sly, and the other one is clever. “Clever bunny!” “Dumb fox!” In such humorous dialogue, the two appreciate advantages of each other, and the prejudice is reviewed. They do not give up easily, and they have sense of responsibility and the ability to repair their relationship. After the press conference, Nick leaves angrily because of Judy’s comments on the nature of carnivores. Judy realizes her mistake, tries her best to look for Nick, and sincerely apologize to him. Nick generously accepts. They are reconciled and embrace each other; they are not girly-girly or depressive, and they express their feelings frankly. I believe that many audiences are impressed by Nick’s “You know You love me” and Judy’s “Yes, I do” in the police car; they are not blinded by the rationality, and consciously promote their own lives. After confirming their relationship, the fox and the rabbit are not addicted to the sweet new relationship, but make efforts to maintain stability of *Zootopia* as a police officer. They have a clear picture of their target process, learn from the advantages of each other, and move forward and encourage each other in the coming days.

5. Rethinking about the View on Right of Animals

As a good animation film, *Zootopia* is interesting and humorous, but it also makes people think. In the grand and prosperous *Zootopia*, the microcosm of the human society is everywhere, including racial prejudice and prejudice to the history (Zhong, 2016). The elephant is not willing to sell the fox popsicle, the little rabbit cannot be a

good policewoman and can only give a ticket, the lion should be the mayor, herbivores with the largest number cannot get to the top of right...Clever bunny and dumb fox tell us: “Life’s a little bit messy. We all make mistakes. No matter what type of animal you are, change starts with you.” *Zootopiat* constructs an animal metropolis against the common sense in the view of the human. The weak rabbit can be a police woman; sly fox can be a good citizen; and docile sheep becomes a murderer. This plot design challenging human cognition actually conveys the anti-discrimination view on rights. Same to human, all animals are equal. They need to be respected and protected, and they shall have the right of equal treatment.

The animal world in the film is after all utopia, but it can cause reflection of human. Do we regard and treat animals properly? For the extreme maintenance of “human” rights and the long-time ignoring of “beast” right, it is difficult for people to accept the concept of animal “right” in law, and seldom consider the “equality” animals in the sense of law and life. In this world dominated by humans, from “cat abuse” and “dog abuse” to “taking bile of a living bear”, all kinds of animal abuse events occur frequently, serious eroding our human nature. In *Zootopia*, the animal world simulating human rules, dominated by the value of the ecological balance, always reminds us of how to get along with animals (Yan, 2016). In 1822, the first “Act against Cruelty to Animals” was issued in UK. Since then, more than 100 countries including France, Ireland and Germany issued Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Legislation of animal protection in China is relatively lagging. After two revisions, Wild Animal Conservation Law of 1988 is still only the “unequal” animal protection law only protecting rare animals. It is difficult for domestic animals, husbandry animals and experimental animals to enjoy the favor of the legislation. Due to the lack of legal protection and backward cognition, the cruel behavior of human beings cannot be prohibited. All the teeth of tigers were pulled out, sulfuric acid was splashed on the face of black bear, vocal cords of tens of thousands of pet dogs were brutally cut... *Zootopia* tells us that animals should not be discriminated. On the National People’s Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference in China this year, Tengger, member of the national committee of CPPCC, proposed to advance *Act against Cruelty to Animals of the People’s Republic of China*. We should seek for more equal legislation, formulate the complete animal protection law, and protect all the animals from abuse. The most precious ability of human is reflection. Reflection gives birth to civilization gene of human. In this sense, *Zootopia* is not an interesting film on the level of perception. Its theme design contains the movie creator’s reflection of the traditional view on animals and rights of human based on rational standpoint. With the help of the film art, it arouses the audiences to maintain the ability of reflection (Qiu & Huang, 2016). There are not only humans in the world, and we should learn to live together with other species and treat them equally.

6. Conclusion

Zootopia uses the animation production art in film and television production. This art technique gives filmmakers a larger dreaming space. If film is dreaming art, animation film is dream in the dream. They can freely imagine according to their ideas. In *Zootopia* various gorgeous and rich scenarios appear. All kinds of animals live in different regions in the land of idyllic beauty; even lion and sheep, rabbit and fox and other rivals can become good partners; and leopard, rhinoceros, elephant, rabbit and other animals all can work at the same police station. The impossible things in real life are expressed in the form of animation, and there is nothing wrong. Hollywood creation attitude and method rich in scientific spirit are worth thinking deeply by domestic movie practitioners.

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