

Analysis of Tragic Characters in Films from the Perspective of Psychoanalysis: a Case Study of Youth and the Joker

Li Anran

School of Humanities, Tiangong University, Tianjin 300387, China

Keywords: Freud, The triple personality theory, Oedipus plot, The collective

Abstract: The two leading characters in *Youth* and *The Joker* seem to have opposite life but lead to the tragic end of the same path. From The perspective of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, under the similar symbols, the excessive pursuit of “superego” personality and the difficulty in releasing childhood trauma, together with the collective and social mockery and pressure on their life tragedy, make them embark on a path of self-exile.

1. Introduction

In the second half of the last century, film theory developed into the modern film theory period, and psychoanalysis was widely used in the analysis of film texts. This paper aims to interpret the features of two characters in *Youth* and *The Joker* from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Although they have different circumstances and lives, both of them struggle in the ups and downs of human nature and are finally dragged into the abyss. Through the analysis of these two characters' personality characteristics, life circumstances and so on, we can reach the interpretation of their tragic life.

2. Tearing and Struggling: the Dislocation of Self-Personality Contradiction and “Oedipus Plot”

Freud distinct the personality from three ways in theory of Triple personality. As Yan Geling said, The closer we are to the perfect personality -- the ‘superego’, the farther we are from the 'ego' and the 'instinct'...”^[1] Liu Feng is a character in people's eyes who constantly pursues the “superego”. And he also command himself in such way, repressing his love and admiration for Lindingding, trying to use “superego” to overcome the impulse of consciousness containing the burning feelings, which build “perfect image” of breaking the common customs. The extreme repression and dislocation of “superego” to “ego” caused extreme pain in Liu Feng, and “panic” pushed him down the “altar”.

Arthur's three names symbolize his complex personality. His real name was Arthur, his mother called him “Happy” and he eventually became “*The Joker*”. Arthur -- his ego, represents a “child” with a serious mental illness. Arthur maintained a close, friendly attitude toward children, which also reflected the boy nature that always remained in his inner world. In the film, Arthur's several interactions with children were brutally interrupted by his parents, which also reflects Arthur's

growth process from one side. The rough treatment of adults has become an important reason for his “ego” personality defects. “Happy” is the superego image from his mother, but he not only failed to bring joy to the masses, but also took himself to the abyss of misery. In “Oedipus Plot”, it is believed that “Being jealous of father for loving mother” is a common psychological phenomenon and also one of the basic reasons for mental impulse. In Arthur's growth environment, the father image is absent and suffered abuse. This abnormal growth environment is the most important reason for Arthur later suffered mental torture. After killing his adoptive mother, all his inhibitions are released and his illusions are broken one by one. He begins to restore his true self -- “Joker”, a clown who has experienced the emotionlessness of the world and failure of chasing dream. Just like Arthur, Liu Feng was unceasing tearing and struggling in the personality disorder. The incompatibility between personalities and the uncertainty of inner world are the inner causes that lead to the formation of personality tragedy

3. Fracture and Alienation: the Causes of Tragic Fate in the Collective Level

The tragic formation of Liu Feng and Arthur are all related to a deformed era, in which the self-consciousness was destroyed in the collective consciousness. The story of *Youth* is set on the eve of major changes in China's economic system and social development. The society which is highly concentrated and repressive has reached its peak in strangling of human nature. Therefore, Liu Feng's personal behavior soon rose to the level of collective events and became the object of collective rejection for a time. The words “Authoritative words replaced the independent consciousness of each individual in the group” greatly explained the phenomenon.^[2] Liu Feng became the extremely vulgar rogue from a perfect image. He eventually left the army that brought him glory in self-imposed exile way. On the contrary, the extremely poor social and urban conditions in Arthur's society in *The Joker* are also external causes for the dramatic changes in the tragic life of the joker. The joker was put on a pedestal after his self-destruction, which is precisely caused by his presence activated the voice of the majority of the underclass and the long-time resentment and anger. The “joker” image has even become a symbol of resistance to authority, social injustice and hatred of the rich.

The film turns the mass demonstrations of the urban underclass into a “cult” of the clown's life. The violence was praised and death won the attention. This is undoubtedly caused by the abnormal development of the society. When the normal social order is difficult to maintain, the voices of the masses inside cannot be heard, and their demands cannot be satisfied, the counterculture becomes the only channel and way to vent. It is the breakdown of self-desire and the catalysis of social transformation that lead to the irreversible tragedy of Arthur's life.

4. Symbols and Metaphors: the Catalyst of Tragic Fate

In the process of forming the tragic fate of the two films, props symbols with rich semantics and emotional symbols are used. The use of “clown mask”, which appears many times in *The Joker*, is the externalization of the character's deformed emotional world by using the language of plastic arts. The mask, which hides the true face of a clown's heart, covers the pain and scars of his inner world. Moreover, “mask” is also the dominant expression of the repression of personality in the cruel social environment. In the film, the mask has become a necessary condition for survival. The mother uses the mask of maternal love to cover up her abuse of her son in his childhood, and uses the mask of infatuation to cover up her mental illness. The *youth* on the subway wear the mask of social elite to cover up the insult to women. The mayor wears the mask of civic responsibility to hide his pursuit of political achievement. The host wears the mask of happiness to cover up the shameless trample on the dreams and personality of others. The “Mask” is one of Arthur's tools to

make a living from the external level, using the mask to decorate his own image. From the perspective of connotation, the mask gradually evolved into a symbol of mass riot, and also a symbol of resisting the upper class, covering up the acts of unrest, and mutual identification among groups. Its appearance aroused the masses' desire for disorder.

Similarly, although Liu Feng has no formal skin mask in *Youth*, he wears a heavy spiritual mask to cover up his legitimate desires and passionate pursuit of emotion in essence. It is not until this mask is brutally torn apart by Lin Dingding that Liu Feng reveals his bloody desire. In addition, to the use of masks, similar symbols of mass media, television and tape recorder, appear in both films. In *The Joker*, every appearance of television is closely related to the plot. "People's material consumption will be suppressed, while their spiritual consumption will be inflated."^[3] Mass entertainment occupies an increasing proportion in life, maintaining the mental state of the people at the bottom of the society, which has a narcotic effect like "daydreaming". The recurring "live show" in the film also carries the significance of the transformation of Arthur's destiny from its important spiritual pillar to its destruction platform. The same is true of the radio in *Youth*. On the one hand, eavesdrop love songs implied the changes of social background and customs. And it was the "decadent music" that drove Liu Feng go to the tragedy. In the era of confinement and repression, the radio playing love songs was undoubtedly the inducement for disharmonious notes and indulgence.

The emotional symbol "love but cannot own" also appears in the two films. The lack of love leads to the emotional changes of the two characters. When Arthur's fantasy was broken and warmth disappeared, he went to the dark side of life. Liu Feng failed to own his love, so he lost the original dignity and pride. But like his broken arm, this "emotional stain" will never come back even though he went to the wars. All kinds of symbols in the film become the catalyst of the tragic fate of the two leading characters, implying that the cause of their tragedy is both the tragic fate and the helpless social tragedy.

5. Conclusion

The tragic life of Liu Feng and Arthur is not only the result of the irreconcilable personality, but also the result of the negative interaction between the whole collective and the society. They all wanted to face life with kindness, but they went to the depths of tragedy. Through the analysis of the causes of the tragic characters in these two films, the good, evil and helplessness behind human nature are revealed gradually.

References

- [1] Bao Enqi, Zhang Fugui. *The spiritual background of youth world -- A review of Fanghua from the perspective of Freud's psychoanalysis* [J]. *Huazhong Academic*, 2018,0 (02)
- [2] Sheng Shichao. *On the character image of "Liu Feng" in the novel Fanghua from the perspective of psychoanalysis* [J]. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2019(07)
- [3] Cao Feipeng. *Not just dreaming-An analysis of the development factors of American film industry during the economic depression* [J]. *Jiannan Literature (Classic Teaching Garden)*, 2013(08)