

*A Study on the Emotional Expression in Animated Short Films *Father and Daughter**

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Abstract: In 2001, Michael Dudok de Wit's animated short film *Father and Daughter* won the 73rd Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film, telling the story of a daughter who spends her life waiting for her father to return. Although this short film adopts a minimalist style, it has triggered people's thinking about love and life. This paper probed into the emotional expression of *Father and Daughter* from the perspective of the shot, narrative strategy, connotation symbolism as well as the use of light and shadow.

1. Introduction

Animated short film is animation with a strong sense of individual expression, innovation and character, which normally lasts from 30 seconds to 45 minutes [1]. The subject of this paper is the 73rd Oscar Academy Award for Animated Short Film- *Father and Daughter*. The 8-minute animated short film tells the story of a father and his daughter riding their bicycles to the lake one evening, and the father hugged his daughter before boarding the boat. After that, the father did not come back. From then on, no matter it was windy or raining, the daughter always rode her bicycle to the lake and waited for her father to come back. As time goes by, the daughter has become a woman, a mother. Nevertheless, she still rode to the lakeside with her husband and children, until she slowly grew old, pushing her bicycle to the lake, walking into the dry lake, and seeing her father's boat. She lay in the boat as if she had become young again and she joyfully ran to her father and hugged him tightly. Some scholars believe that *Father and Daughter* tells the story of a daughter's longing and waiting for her father [2]. This paper believes that *Father and Daughter* is also an exploration of growth and death. The entire animated short film does not set lines, Michael Dudok de Wit adopts a calm narrative, simple shots, music, and changes in light and shadow to awaken people's sense of affection and resonate with the audience.

Studies of the Academy Award for animated short film have fixed its attention on the following. *The Academy Award for Animated Short Film analysis* [3], *The Academy Award for Animated Short Film behind-the-scenes's handbook* and *The Animated Short Film Creation* [4], a generalized study of the Academy Award for animated short Film, providing a reference for the selection of the research object of this paper. *The Academy Award for Animated Short Film behind-the-scenes's handbook* summarized the artistic characteristics of Michael Dudok de Wit, which documented the production

of *Father and Daughter*, and an interview with Michael Dudok de Wit [5]. In *Interview with Michael Dudok de Wit, award-winning animator, director, and illustrator (The Red Turtle, Father and Daughter)*, a compendium of Michael Dudok de Wit's inspiration and compositional techniques in creating *Father and Daughter* are summarized [6]. Those provide the basis for this paper's detailed understanding of the inspiration, creation process of *Father and Daughter*. Combining the above-mentioned materials, the paper explored the emotional expression of *Father and Daughter* in terms of shot, narrative strategy, connotation symbolism, and changes of light and shadow.

2. Analysis on the emotional expression of Father and Daughter

The elements of emotional expression in animated short films include theme and connotation, narrative structure, light and shadow, color, sound, stylistic design, and shot elements[7]. The narrative structure, connotation symbolism, light and shadow, and the use of camera elements in the animated short film *Father and Daughter* have artistic features.

2.1 The use of lens language

The shot is one of the expressive languages of animation. On the basis of the distance between the camera and the subject as well as the proportion of the characters in the picture and the position of the body structure they are in, the shots are divided into close-up shots, close shots, mid shots, full shots, and long shots [8]. In terms of different shooting angles, shots are divided into eye-level shots, high-angle shots, and low-angle shots [9]. An animated short film is a combination of multitudinous fixed and moving shots. A fixed shot is still and is often adopted to describe the details and environment in an animated short film. The moving shots include dolly shots, panning shots, following shots and crane shots. [10]

The shots narrative of *Father and Daughter* is tremendously detailed. This short film adopts long shots, full shots, and fixed shots, which can be classified as 87 long shots, 74 fixed shots, 16 moving shots, 8 dolly shots, 93 objective shots, and 6 point-of-view shots, 81 eye-level shots, 15 high-angle shots, 3 low-angle shots.

In the first part of this film, the theme is Leaving, which is composed of 18 shots. First is a close-up shot depicting the clouds, followed by a long shot of the distant horizon, and a road with no end in sight which in the middle of a wide parcel of plain, the father and daughter riding on the road. Soon afterwards, there is a close-up shot of the bicycle wheels spinning in the sunset. This is followed by a low-angle and full shot of a father and daughter riding through the shadows of the trees in the setting sun. It is followed by a deep long shot of the daughter riding up a steep hill with father, the only time the steep hill is portrayed with a full shot in the film, which is followed by a side, eye-level, and long shot of the father and daughter riding beside the lake at sunset, followed closely by a full shot of them stopping by a large tree. As the camera pushes closer, father and daughter hug and said goodbye, then father walks down the shore. Subsequently, a close shot of the lake where the father runs towards the shore and picks up his daughter, followed by a long shot depicting the father rowing away in his boat, which is followed by close-ups and dolly shots of large trees and birds. Soon afterwards, a long shot depicting the calm lake, followed by a full shot of the daughter riding away. Finally, there is a high-angle, full shot of the figure in the setting sun's afterglow.[11]

The theme of the second part of the animated short film is Waiting. The second part begins with a close-up shot of a bicycle wheel, which serves as a transition to the animated short film. The second and third shots are full, side, and panning shots which depict the daughter riding around a lake for waiting, which is followed by a close-up shot of the leaves, expressing the change of weather and time. Soon afterwards, an eye-level, close shot of the daughter riding difficulty in the wind. Subsequently, a high-angle, full shot of the grass highlights the inclement weather, which is followed

by a close shot of the daughter pushing her bicycle up a steep hill. Then comes an eye-level, full shot showing her difficult ride. After that, there is a close-up shot of the gushing lake and a fixed, full shot of the daughter waiting and comes to lake again. Subsequently, a scenery shot showing the sky is adopted to complete the transition. Soon afterwards, Respectively long shot, close shot, and following shot are adopted to depict the daughter riding to the lake on a rainy day. After that, a fixed, full shot is adopted to depict the daughter still waiting for her father again and again. Subsequently, alternating between long shots, full shots, and following shots depicts the little girl riding with her companion. The sunny weather is accounted for using close-up shots of the sky and trees. Subsequently, an eye-level, full shot, and a high-angle, long shot are adopted to depict the bicycle ride. Then, a fixed, high-angle, close shot is adopted to depict the daughter stopping riding and looking out of the lake. After that, a high-angle, full shot of companions calling out to her. Michael Dudok de Wit adopts a long, fixed shot to depict companions waiting for the little girl. The second part of the animated short film ends with a close shot of the little girl and a close-up shot of the bicycle wheels. The close-up shot of the bicycle serves as a transition and signifies that the little girl will move to a new stage.

The animated short film begins the third part - Growing Up - with close-up shots and panning shots of the flying wild geese. Michael Dudok de Wit adopts eye-level shot, long shot, close shot and full shot to depict the daughter's boyfriend carrying the girl and riding beside the lake. The sky is depicted using panning and long shots. And using close-up shots to depict a full moon in the sky, highlighting the daughter's longing for her father, then using high-angle and close-up shot to depict the swaying lights on the ground.

The theme of the fourth part of the short film is Living. First, there is a full shot of trees, with a longitudinal shot accounting for the weather, which is followed by an eye-level, close shot depicting the daughter riding with her husband and children. Subsequently, there is a close-up shot of the wind blowing the leaves of the trees. Soon afterwards, the ride is depicted in turn using an eye-level, close shot, and a long shot. Subsequently, a close, low-angle shot depicting the husband and child playing at the lake, interspersed with close-up shots of birds. Next, an eye-level, fixed, close shot depicting the daughter looking out over the lake, which is followed by a close-up shot of the wind blowing the leaves and three fixed, scenery shots depicting the changes of seasons. As time goes by, missing by the lake has become her part of life. Subsequently, a full shot of a waterfowl and a close-up shot of a wheel complete the film's transition, signaling the daughter's passage into old age. Michael Dudok de Wit still adopts eye-level shots and full shots to depict the old daughter's ride. And the use of long shot and close-up shot depicts the lake, sky, and waterfowl as seen by the old daughter.

The reunion theme of *Father and Daughter* begins with a panning shot of a flock of birds flying by. The shot pans with the flock of birds and a fixed, full shot depict the daughter pushing her bicycle around the lake, which is followed by a panning, close-up shot of the wheels. After that, there is a fixed, full shot depicting the scene where the old woman is unable to pick up the fallen bicycle. Subsequently, a close, dolly shot is used in turn to depict the old woman walking down the hill and toward the dried-up lake. Close-up shots of birds and reeds are then given to highlight the fact that the lake has become dry, suggesting a change promptly. Subsequently, a fixed, full shot depicts the daughter discovering her father's boat. Michael Dudok de Wit uses a full, dolly shot depicting the old woman lying down slowly in the boat. A full, fixed, high-angle shot is then adopted to depict the daughter waking up. A long, panning shot is adopted to depict the daughter running in the direction of her father. Finally, a long, panning, high-level shot is adopted to depict the father and daughter embracing.

To sum up, the use of shots in *Fathers and Daughter* has the following characteristics:

- (1) Dudok de Wit adopts longitudinal, long, or scenery shots to refer to the plot and changes in space, depicting the scenes in which the story takes place.
- (2) Close-up shots of the lake, leaves and grass, and wheels are adopted to illustrate the weather,

changes promptly and the daughter's growth stages, which also play a role in transitions. At the same time, it contrasts with the distant characters, adding to the richness of the shot.

(3) Dudok de Wit uses close, eye-level, and fixed shots to portray emotions. Especially when the daughter is looking out over the lake waiting for her father, Dudok de Wit repeatedly adopts fixed, eye-level shots to exhibit the daughter's determined and stubborn character. Instead of using close-up shots to exhibit the daughter's emotions, Dudok de Wit relies on the movement of the characters to suggest the feelings of missing the father. The use of the shot in the film is from the daughter's viewpoint. The long-distance gaze created by the long shots creates a fixed, persistent, and calm viewpoint. It highlights the daughter's stubborn determination to wait for her father's return.

(4) Among multitudinous fixed shots, *Father and Daughter* also intersperses the use of moving shots, which lessens the dullness triggered by repetitive scenes and makes the constantly repetitive plot less monotonous. *Father and Daughter* adopts simple shots to shift the audience's emotions from anticipation, anxiety and depression to calmness, tranquility and satisfaction.

2.2 Narrative structure

Narrative structure refers to the sequence and style of the story. [12] Through the above discussion, it can be seen that in terms of story narrative style, the *Father and Daughter* adopt a classical narrative mode, a linear narrative style, and the animated short film revolves around the daughter who spends her life waiting and missing her father [13]. Aside from that, Michael Dudok de Wit sets up suspense and combines poetic narrative structure. Why did the father hug his daughter twice with completely different emotions? The question of "Will the father ever come back?" was gradually expanded with the repetition of many episodes. The audience's suppressed and sad emotions are completely aroused when the lake has become dry and the aged daughter finds her father's boat. But the original sad parting is arranged by Michael Dudok de Wit with a surrealistic ending. It reveals the psychological process of people from ignorance, and fear until they face death with ease. As a consequence, *Father and Daughter* has the narrative structure characteristic of poeticization of narrative structure and an open ending.

2.3 The use of symbols in *Father and Daughter*

In this section, this paper probes deep into the connotations of the wheel, the bicycle, and the steep slope.

There are five close-ups of rolling wheels in *Father and Daughter*. The close-up shots highlight a certain part of the object, which not only gives rise to a strong and clear visual image on the screen, but also exhibits the aesthetic effect of highlighting, emphasizing, and suggesting [14]. The bicycle has a profound significance for this animated short film. First, the speed of wheel rotation represents the daughter in different stages of her life. In the first part of the animated short film, the daughter's small wheel follows her father's big wheel. The rapid rotation of the wheel not only reflects the daughter's light-hearted mood but also symbolizes the daughter's dynamic stage of life. The spinning of the wheel in the shade means that the daughter will enter the stage of adulthood. In her old age, the slow rotation of the wheel signifies that the daughter's life is coming to an end. As a result, the bicycle represents the daughter herself.

Secondly, the wheel and the bicycle represent the cycle of life. At different times in the daughter's riding, she meets cyclists of different ages. When she was a girl, she rode on the road and meets lots of women strangers, while when she was getting old, the passers-by were young girls, which is Dudok de Wit's use of contrast in the same image to tell the cycle of humans life from youth to aging and from old age to childhood. As in English, the 'cycle' of bike and 'cycle' of life are the same word. All the characters in the film, passersby, husband, and children, all pass by bicycle instead of walking.

Just as people's journey, and life experience, is measured by the wheels of the bicycle in this film. Every turn of the wheel is the record of our life. (Figure 1)The wheel which finally appeared not only represents that time is still rolling forward, but also represents that the love between father and daughter will not disappear as time goes by, but become eternal in the cycle of seasons.

There are four close-up shots of the steep slope in the film. The steep slopes represent the difficulties encountered by the daughter. The posture of the daughter's bicycle climbing and the storms she encounters symbolize the daughter's state of life at different times. The first time is when the daughter rides up the steep slope easily accompanied by her father, revealing her simple, happy state of life. The second time is when the daughter is alone and struggles to climb the steep slope on her bicycle. The third time is when the daughter pushes her bicycle up the steep slope against the wind, shaking her body. The second and third appearances of the steep slope imply that the daughter's life became difficult without her father's company. The fourth time is when the daughter and her companions climbed the steep slope by bicycle, Yingzeng believes that the companions rode up the steep slope easily but the daughter was the last to do so, suggesting that the daughter's life was more difficult compared to her peers [15]. Nevertheless, combined with the fact that there was no steep slope in the animation clips later, this paper believes that the fourth time climbing the steep slope means that the daughter has grown up. Although she does not have the support of her father, she grows up as happily as her peers. In this case, the theme of the short film has changed from separation to growth.



Figure 1: The wheel at the end of the film

2.4 Transition settings and the use of light and shadow

Dewitt once said, "In my paintings, I prefer simplicity and elegance. In my pictures, I am particularly sensitive to atmosphere, light and shadow and space, and it has become my preference to make extensive use of light and shadow techniques." In *Father and Daughter*, the shadows occupy almost the internal volume of the father and daughter's bodies. Dudok de Wit adopts shadows to complete the details of clothes, faces and other contours, and although he does not meticulously portray the facing expressions of the father and daughter, he adopts the interweaving of light and shadow to mirror the subtle expressions and morphological features. For instance, in the first part of the animated short film, the length of the father's shadow suggests a change promptly. When the father and daughter are separated, black is used to show the girl's figure outline, while the father who walks off the bank is blank under the light source. When the girl embraces her father, the change between black and white is formed, and the light and shadow form a strong contrast. The reflection of the daughter is repeatedly projected on the translucent lake in the animated short film. The reflection can add a sense of symmetry to the image and clarify the direction of the light source and emphasize the subject of the figure.

Father and Daughter is mainly in black, white and gray tones, but interspersed with russet and light and shadow effects, not only to exhibit the different scenes of the daughter's life stage, highlighting the character's thoughts and emotions, but also to use the changes in light and shadow to complete the film's transitions. For instance, in the short film of 4 minutes 15 seconds, a bright moon in the sky, and a wavering light on the ground indicates that the daughter came to the lake

alone(Figure 1), Dudok de Wit adopts a bright moon (light) to highlight the silence of the dark night, while the swaying light in the dark night not only shows the daughter's behavior but also her hope and pursuit of light. Dudok de Wit uses lights to complete the transition of the short film, reducing the boredom resulted from the repetition of the short film. The lights also indicate that the daughter is about to start a new life, which facilitates the development of the short film.

As the daughter grows older, Dudok de Wit lessens the use of black and large shadows, such as the daughter wearing blue after starting a family, breaking the low, depressing feeling of the scene, and expressing the daughter's learning to grow up from the shadow of not having a father with her. At the end of the short film, the background of the old woman slowly walking down the lake embankment is blank. When the old woman walks into the dry lake, her figure becomes smaller and smaller, turning into a dot, and the old woman's shadow (black) is tightly arranged into a black curve, which is like her growing footsteps. The use of blank and light makes this curve so lonely and expresses the loneliness of the old woman. When the daughter finds her father's boat surrounded by a circle of reeds, there is plenty of light and blank used at this point. Aside from that ,the road, the old woman, and the boat have shadows under the light. The use of light, blank and russet adds warmth and emotion to the whole short film. In the combination of light and shadow, the wheel of the daughter's life rotates again.

3. Conclusion

The animation of *Father and Daughter*, not only expresses the deep affection between family, but also discusses life, death, and personal growth. The multiple-lens language, the symbol design and the transition setting all reflect the artistic level of the director. The silhouette style relies on the use of light and shadow to present the effect of simplicity and elegance. An excellent work must be the perfect combination of the idea, design and technology. It not only causes the audience to think but also allows us to see the complex design and thinking under the skin of simplicity.

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