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The Return of Family Ethics under the Shell of Cult Movies: Analysis of the Works Directed by Julia Ducournau—"Eat Raw" and "Titanium"

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Abstract

In the face of the development of new media and the awakening of the audience's awareness of mass art participation, mainstream films with family ethics as the core must seek new ways to tell stories, and renew the narrative mode of cult films, as the genre form of the film at the beginning of its birth, provide comfort to countless audiences who are shackled by the mainstream context and have no place to vent their emotions. The combination of the two has burst into a new audio-visual language and narrative style, which has become the navigation for the new generation of directors to break through the minority and gain mainstream recognition. Through the analysis of the works of director Julia Ducournau, "Eat Raw" and "Titanium", it is demonstrated that evil code movies may have become a film element combined with the mainstream family ethics to form a positive output and expression form.

Keywords

Film ethics, cult film, family ethics

1. Research background

In Julia Ducournau's films, there are many "shocking" segments: cannibalism, people and cars, and relatives. Under these bloody, stimulating and anti-mainstream contents, it has proved the evil code characteristics of director Julia's films. Scholars Patrick Kent and Mike Katovich regard the evil code film as the identity expression of a small audience. "The evil code film has the following elements: (1) placing the typical characters in an atypical situation; (2) questioning and subverting the traditional hegemonic structure; (3) reflecting the huge social pressure; (4) providing some solution to the social pressure; (5) providing a rebellious role that can make the audience produce narcissism and sympathy" (Ernest Mathijs & Xavier Mendik, 2020). Director Julia's two main works, "Eat Raw" (2016) and "Titanium" (2021) have been nominated by the Cool Palm Award, and the main characters in her films are also in line with the character characteristics of the evil film. However, under the cover of the evil code of the director's film, we can see the return of family ethics in the mainstream sense. The evil code and the mainstream conflict with each other, but the director is born in her own work as a bright and dark. Although the form and content of the film are out of the mainstream, the director herself said in the interview that her work is "non mainstream" and "anti type", but its core is still the mainstream family narrative as the final foothold. By analyzing the combination mechanism of the characteristics of evil code and the mainstream family narrative in his works, it can be seen as a proof that "evil code" has turned into a widely used strategy and means in the development of the film and entered the mainstream culture (Li Wensi, 2020).

2. Narrative mode and ethical rules

2.1 From separation from family to seeking family protection: the growth path of the protagonist of evil code

Whether it is "Eat Raw" or "Titanium", the protagonists have two very typical characters of evil code: first, they have no sense of conventional human relations; second, extreme solutions to pressure and environmental changes. In "Eat Raw", the heroine Justin was subjected to the pressure from the old students, the strict hierarchy of the school, and the tension between her family and her sister in the same school. The desire to eat raw hidden in her genes also awakened, and became her main way to relieve these pressures. Mencius, the Chinese philosopher, said that "food and sex are the same as sex". Just as Freud, the western psychologist believed that the first desire stage of infant development is also the appetite stage, the director completely magnified this "hobby" with sexual power and the symbol of sexual desire. Similarly, the power of taking Libido as the leading actor's action element has been further developed in "Titanium", and only after that, did the heroine Alexia and the car have a shocking interaction. It can be seen that the director's portrayal of the leading role in the film is a simplified method that is consistent with the "evil code": replacing the secular desire of the general public with the basic physiological desire. Neither Justin's cannibalism nor Alexia's lust for people and cars has any complicated reason, just because of the driving force of libido, which also provides a reasonable explanation for their series of actions in disregard of human relations and laws.

This simple action element makes the protagonists of Julia's films both sexually active and ignorant. They indulge their own desires, and Justin can't help tasting it when he finds her sister's broken finger; Alexia hates human being's infatuation with metal, resists being close to people and killing people constantly, and even sets fire to his family and kills his father and mother when fleeing his family. Morality and law are meaningless to them. But unlike the ending of the classic evil code movie, the extreme protagonist escaped all the mainstream rules and was exiled by family, society and human relations. In both "Eat Raw" and "Titanium", director Julia takes "Return to Family" as the main character's comfort after extreme escape. In "Eat Raw", when Justin could not control her desire to eat human flesh, her father opened his clothes to reveal his gnawed body, suggesting that Justin's desire to eat human flesh was not a reflection of stress after facing pressure, but the awakening of family genetic genes; In "Ti", Alexia fled and burned her original family. In order to escape the punishment of the law, she pretended to be the son of an old firefighter and entered a new family, and finally became a mother, completing the sublimation of her family role. The heroines in the two films were forced or actively left their original families, but finally were saved and reborn in the family.

To sum up, the protagonists in director Julia's works have strong typical characteristics of evil code films, but the plot point of the film is always inseparable from the discussion of family significance. This combination of evil code and mainstream has enriched the diversity of mainstream film culture. The common expression of the return of family ethics in movies is to take the family as the unit to compile a single individual. The individual is a lonely, waiting "rescued" object. With the recognition, support and compromise of the family, the individual becomes a member of the family unit and becomes three-dimensional and complete. It is not difficult to find that whether Justin is helpless to get the genetic influence from the family, or Alexia is lucky to escape the legal sanction by being sheltered by the new family, they are far away from the "threat" of social rules to themselves because of their return to the family, and the core is still the maintenance and reaffirmation of family ethics.

2.2 From killing them to becoming them: the overthrow and reconstruction of parents' image

In most audiences' perception, father and mother are necessary members of a complete family, and a complete family needs the maintenance of father and mother. However, with the development of post-modernism culture, the meaning of family integrity has also changed. The contradiction between parents and the contradiction between parents and the next generation has been emphasized and repeated on the screen, and the meaning of family integrity has been constantly diluted. In the film of evil code, the family, as an important symbol of the mainstream ethics, is also inevitably "deconstructed". In "Rosemary's Baby" (1968), which is known as the originator of the evil code film, the protagonist's family has become the source of her tragic fate. The husband who has the marriage vow sacrificed her to Satan for his own selfish desire and gave birth to a child; In "Born to Kill" (1994), the heroine Meredith was sexually harassed by her biological father. Her biological mother turned a blind eye to her father's beha-

vior. Meredith burned the whole family before leaving home; In "Harlow and Maude" (1971), Harlow, who was born in the upper-class society, was always affected by the oppressive and serious atmosphere of the original family, and used playing dead as a means to exchange for the sincere concern of his family In the evil code movie, "family" is a drag, which is the root cause of the protagonist's strange personality and behavior. Like a tradition, evil code and family are always on the opposite side. As a product of the integration of minority culture and film art, the evil film has been serving a small number of fanatical audiences, representing the aesthetic orientation of a small number of audiences (most of them are young people), and expressing human's love for wonders and horror. The family ethics represents the traditional, mainstream and maintenance of stable social structure. If it was not for the integration of the commercialized tradition of film and modern media, we might hardly see such a combination of elements. In order to seek an upward breakthrough, evil code films must actively accept the inclusion of mainstream culture and make themselves the mouthpiece for enriching the expression and transmission of mainstream culture.

As director Julia said, "My film does not belong to any type." So although her works have the characteristics of evil code films, they are trying to cause discussion and promote the establishment of new norms in society. It is not only the family that has become an important plot point and intention symbol in the plot setting of the protagonist, but also the image of "father and mother" that conforms to the characteristics of the evil code film has been overthrown and reshaped. In "Titanium", the heroine Alexia implanted titanium alloy in her body because of her father's "mistake" when she was a child. Since then, she has become infatuated with metal and has a lust for metal. Because of the lack of human nature, Alexia killed people quickly and ruthlessly. An important turning point in the play is that Alexia became pregnant after she had sex with a car and dragged her pregnant body to pretend to be the son of an old firefighter who had been missing for many years. She passively (in order to escape the punishment of the law) entered a new family and filled the vacancy of "son". The old fireman in the film is played by Vincent Linton, a famous French actor. The old fireman he plays has both the authority of the system chief and the love of his father. He firmly believes that Alexia is his son who has been separated for many years. He can't help crying on the night of taking Alexia back. This kind of firm love, even in the face of Alexia giving birth at last, he calmly completed the delivery work and held the half-human and half-metal baby in his arms. At this point, the father and mother of the original family were overthrown, and the father who hugged the newborn and Alexia who just gave birth became the new "father and mother".

The image of parents who were deconstructed and defiled in the evil code films in the early stage was reshaped as the evil code and the mainstream moved from opposition to integration. Through the reconstruction of the image of father and mother, it emphasizes the compassion and heroism of father's love and mother's love. The father image, which symbolizes authority, is simplified into two sides, one side is serious, the other side is kind, the former is external, the latter is internal; The image of mother, which symbolizes great feelings, has become the image of the protagonist's transformation and further growth. The heroine who has been endowed with motherhood has become an important member of the new family, from a lost dog to a "mother". The importance of family in both films has completed the ethical return by strengthening the halo of parents' roles. Parents are saviors and new identities. Their existence is family and shelter.

2.3 From evil code element to self evil code: the way out for the new generation of directors

Taking narrative form as the core of the ethical orientation of film performance is the research object of film ethics. The narrative motif of early films is not only to continue traditional ethical customs, but also to break traditional ethics and innovate ideas (Lv Weiyi, 2020). The use of atypical plots to interpret traditional ethics does increase the possibility of presenting the diversity of film culture. For the evil code film, the protagonist's destruction in indulgence is the standard narrative form, which is determined by the "birth" of the evil code film. The golden age of the evil code film is in the American society under the double prohibition of the Hayes Code and the prohibition of alcohol. The desire of young people to vent nowhere can be dispelled by the continuous broadcast of small cost films, bloody films and head films at midnight. With the continuous development of the times, the integration and innovation of the commercial value and artistic value of the evil code film has become a sensational element, but the well-produced and talented American "art" film, that is, "blockbuster evil code film" (Li Wensi, 2020). The work of director Julia presents another new form of this blockbuster evil code film, and uses "evil code" as a strategy and means to enter the mainstream culture.

Trevor pointed out: "There are two kinds of directors. When the film is conceived and filmed, some directors will think of the public in their hearts, while others will not consider the public at all. For the former, film is a per-

forming art, while for the latter, film is a personal adventure" (David Bordwell & Christine Thompson, 2014). The director Julia belongs to the author of the evil code with clear self-consciousness. As early as 2011, she began to cooperate with the actress Garrance Marilier in the short film "Young Girls Grow up" (2011), and the role name is Justin. She is the same person as the actor in "Eat Raw" and "Titanium", even the role name is the same. In Julia's works, she has a preference for themes such as showing the growth of teenagers and awakening of consciousness. Another work, "Taste of Ink" (2016), which was released in the same year as "Eat Raw", tells the story of a taboo love between a mother's death, a father's remarriage, and a son's love for his stepmother. Different from movies with similar plots, they focus on and criticize ethics, and then propose solutions. The director Julia's works do not focus on ethics, but use the mainstream characteristics of family ethics to make up for the qualification of her works to enter the mainstream film. The use of evil code as the embodiment of personal style and the combination of it with the mainstream family ethics will prevent the works from falling into the "silent" spiral of individualistic style and minority films. Compared with other directors who have the characteristics of evil code, we can see that the director Julia is very clever. She quickly explored her own style and has the uniqueness of audio-visual language, while those shocking plots and ways of expression are the simplest and easily accepted family ethics. The combination of the two is not to say how pioneering it is, but it makes the work have both innovative audio-visual and straightforward core, which can make the audience feel excited while not difficult to understand the intention of the film and produce insecurity.

Looking back at the award-winning films of the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, we can see this commonality. The Parasite, directed by Feng Junhao in 2019, adheres to the director's consistent exploration of the above ground and underground space and integrates the core of class contradictions; In 2018, the director of "The Thief Family", directed by Shizhiyuhe, is still willing to discuss whether there is an inevitable relationship between blood and family; In 2017, "Square" directed by Ruben Ostrand explored the survival rule of modern society under the pretext of intellectual dilemma. For the Cannes Film Festival, which was suspended for two years due to the epidemic, the award of "Titanium" was expected. With a highly allegorical structure, the plot is full of thrilling changes, and various metaphors, hints and subcultural elements greatly stimulate the audience's senses. Director Xie Fei called it "Cannes Evil Code", and commented on Douban that "the intuitive feeling from theory to vision is so dirty that people can hardly see it." However, the award of "Titanium" proves that director Julia has completed her own adventure and become a quite self-conscious evil code writer.

3. Conclusion

Up to now, "evil code" has not been the exclusive of a group of fanatical audiences, a group movie watching full of ceremonies or a midnight movie theater. With the blending of the old and new media and the participation of the audience, it broke through the traditional boundary, and began to merge and split with other styles of culture, and was included in the mainstream culture "as an important means of film production, publicity, dissemination and acceptance" (Li Wensi, 2020). Now we see "Eat Raw" and "Titanium" is the product of director Julia's combination of "evil code" style and mainstream ethics. The combination of self-evil code style and traditional ethics culture has made this female director. The use of evil code elements by the new generation of directors has become the main way for them to develop their personal style and innovate the film narrative.

The combination of new and old elements will also drive the development and promotion of the old elements, and the film ethics has also been reaffirmed and returned in the renewal of various image narrative forms. Although the discussion of family ethics in mainstream films has never stopped, it has finally fallen into the dilemma of platitudes, and the inclusion and integration of subculture and minority culture in mainstream films has made it possible to explore family ethics in films. In another way of telling, the truth is the same. The good or bad story is not determined by the way of telling, but whether the narrator can achieve the goal of telling the story. The director Julia completed her own style exploration in a short time and gained the recognition of the mainstream, which is also a successful example of the new generation of directors. The evil code in the form of his works and the traditional return to the core of his works will serve as a new narrative paradigm for more new directors to learn from.

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