

Auspicious As You Like It: A Mirror of Family Ethics in a Nested Structure

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Abstract

"Auspicious As You Like It" is a New Year's Eve movie directed by Dapeng in 2021. Before this film, audiences still had the impression of Dapeng's works as comedies like "Pancake Man" and "Sewing Machine Band", but "Auspicious As You Like It" has completely overturned modern audiences' perception of his directorial works. The main reason why this literary film has left a deep impression on many people is that it uses a large number of nested narrative structures, combining drama and documentary, and cleverly exploiting the duality between real and fictional images, combining truth and fiction. This narrative structure and artistic form enriches the way of domestic film art creation at this stage and provides valuable experience for China's current film art creation.

Keywords

Auspicious As You Like It; Dapeng; nested structure; family ethics mirroring.

This time, Dapeng changes his comedy style and focuses his camera on his hometown of Northeast China, making a cleverly structured literary film. The intention of "Auspicious As You Like It" is simple: the director, Dapeng, returned to his hometown in Northeast China and wanted to make a literary film about how a family celebrates the New Year. As a result, something unexpected happened on the eve of the shooting, namely the sudden death of his grandmother. This led to the last reunion of the family who had gathered for the film. The director's conception of the film was very clever from the beginning, no script, no actors, it depends on what God gives. Both the film style and the narrative structure are based on the realistic development of events, directly restoring the most realistic Chinese large families and showing the northeastern customs and people.

1. Nested Narrative Structure: Family Relationships Reviewed and Reflected

The nested structure is common in literary works, such as *One Thousand and One Nights* and *The Decameron*, but in film and television works, the nested structure takes the form of a "film within a film", represented by works such as *Don't Stop the Camera* and *Long Live the Director*.

The structure of "Auspiciousness" is a double-layered structure embedded in the main body, which Dapeng divided into two parts, one is "Auspiciousness" and the other is "Ruyi". In other words, "Auspicious" and "Ruyi" can be used as each other's inside and outside, when the two are connected, the method of breaking the fourth wall is adopted, from the film to the screening scene of "Auspicious", which is just the right sequence. If "Auspicious" is a gesture of

examination in which Dapeng actively explores family relationships in Chinese society today, then in "As You Like It", Dapeng puts himself in the middle of it and becomes an experiencer and participant of the whole event. The first "Auspicious" is more like a short story, very much in the tone commonly used in college short stories. It combines the remote and distant mountains, the rolling snow village, the main character with Alzheimer's disease, and a child who suddenly returns home after ten years. The combination of these elements is the standard configuration of a literary and artistic film. But what is unexpected is that the entire plot does not go in the direction one would normally expect, ending with a group scene of a New Year's Eve dinner about the future support of Wang Jixiang, the foolish third uncle. At the same time, the family's thoughts on the issue of support revolve around Wang's auspiciousness, and the scene is once anxious, and the New Year's Eve dinner ends with the emotional departure of his sister-in-law, who has been taking care of the old man for years.

The greatest drama in this part of "Auspicious" is that one's subjective desire for "all things auspicious" should be good, but the reality is always contrary to one's wishes. Before his dementia, Wang had a rich life experience, not only as a righteous and enthusiastic person, but also as the deputy head of the community security section of the oilfield high school, and he had taken great pains to move his two nieces' hometown accounts from the rural government of his home county to the city. Even after his illness, he still visited his sick mother every day, and everyone remembered his goodness, but when their mother died, Wang's home became the biggest problem.

If the first part of the film, "Auspicious", can be defined as part of a drama, then "Ru Yi" is a pure documentary that corroborates the reality of "Auspicious", but also allows people to enter the family from another perspective.

It is a mistake to think that "As You Like It" is a behind-the-scenes look at "Auspicious". It makes the image of each character in the film more three-dimensional and richer, and makes the audience think, analyze the emotions of the characters and reflect on the relationship between the family in the midst of reality and fiction.

2. Real and fictional: a true account of real emotions

Ruyi" and "Auspicious" present a subtle sense of symmetry. The smoothness of "Auspicious" and the swaying of "Ruyi" present a strong contrast. A large number of interviews are interspersed in "Auspicious", allowing the characters to express their emotions directly to the camera, so that the audience can have a more intuitive feeling of the characters' thoughts, while the smooth running of the camera adds a sense of "fiction" to the film. The footage shown in "Lucky" is made more realistic by the handheld camera, but the director does not include any character interviews here, deliberately distancing the audience from the characters.

In other words, what the audience wants to feel from "Auspicious" is just an immersive illusion, while what they want to find in "Ru Yi" is a reality in a picture frame. The moral of the film is also reflected in the film, which was recorded by Dapeng with a camera when he returned home in 2008. At that time, Wang was still very healthy and rosy-cheeked, and the youthful Dapeng said boastfully to the Spring Festival couplets, which a Beijinger had brought home himself. When grandma pointed to a new Spring Festival couplet and said loudly, this is the best in Beijing. As the camera slowly draws closer to it, the Chinese New Year couplet written by the grandmother is "Ru Yi", and that is the end of the film.

Through "Auspicious", one can find a microcosm of the Chinese family and the untold regrets and helplessness that lie beneath the complex surface of "kinship".

The issue of support is also an important element in the story of "Auspicious", and one can even find some of the cracks and brokenness in the relationship between Wang and his siblings through their conversations with friends. The two parts before and after "Auspicious" and "Ru Yi" together form the complete film "Auspicious and Ru Yi". Throughout the film, whether it is the loss or gain of a loved one or the traditional sense of people getting together or falling apart, there is no doubt that the directors have objectively and rationally re-examined family affection in the current era. In many cases, there is nothing one can do about the indifference of relatives and the alienation of families. But it is hard to say who caused this situation, and when you look into it, it seems that all the people in it have something to do with this situation.

3. The concept of real film: building a bridge between drama and documentary

Godard once said that any great historical fictional documentary film is as biased towards historical documentary as any great historical documentary literature photography is biased towards documentary historical fiction. So, some fictional films even additionally introduce some documentary photographic writing methods or photographic concepts, such as "Gonzo". In this film, the director did not set up any fixed plot, but only put the actor playing Liu Lu in the family recorded by the camera, in order to find a sense of interplay between reality and art. The writer-director has said that he wanted to use the actor as a kind of moderator to ask questions to one of the people being recorded, and to provoke active participation and discussion from other relatives. This is in line with the concept of reality film in documentaries, that is, the creators actively participate in social life, and use interviews and other social figures to communicate with each other, in order to explore the reality and restore the original truth through artistic means.

In fact, the film uses its own unique method to build a natural and smooth bridge between documentary and drama, regardless of whether the narrative method is virtual characters or organizational filming. But its artistic focus is still documentary. All the historical backgrounds, characters, events, and conflicts in the film are naturally present and occur naturally.

Director Dapeng repeatedly explained during the shooting on location: what can be shot, all depends on "God's will". In particular, he stressed that this kind of documentary film expression requires the filming team to do: "What happens in life is filmed", the purpose is to restore the most original, the most real life. Because of this, the creators actively explored and explored in depth to reveal the most essential grassroots life under the color of the film.

Through the analysis of this kind of documentary and fictional film, we found that the emotional performance in the film, no matter how good or bad it is, can move the heart and attract deep thoughts. It can be seen that the most moving part of the film comes from the realistic attributes of emotions, plot and characters. By reconstructing these real stories, the audience can deviate from the original story and plot expectations to a certain extent, which can greatly improve the audience's understanding of the film and lead to profound reflections and thoughts. The film also conveys a new perspective to the audience that art comes from life and that we should have the ability to find stories and tell them well.

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