

Warm and Realistic, Romantic Yet Cruel ——On the Master of Cinema Giuseppe Tornatore

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Abstract: The famous director Giuseppe Tornatore was born in beautiful Sicily, Italy, and has a high reputation among international film directors as the inheritor of Italian neorealism. His Time Trilogy is the foundation of his position in the film industry, Cinema Paradiso, The Beautiful Legend of Sicily, and The Legend of 1900, all of which have a strong romantic style. With his warm and realistic approach, Tonatore's romantic yet cruel stories have touched countless audiences. In a sense, every work of a writer or a director has autobiographical overtones in it. Many of his works are strongly biographical, and the documentary style in his films is his way of asserting himself. This article will take his films as an entry point to explore the artistic approach and ideological qualities of Tonatore's cinema.

Keywords: Tonatore Time Trilogy; Italian neorealism romanticism

I. Growth environment of personalized style

1.1 Memories of Sicily

Many directors have a hometown complex, and Tonatore has taken it to the extreme. Tonatore spent his childhood and youth in Sicily, and this has left an indelible mark on his memory. Like Toto in Cinema Paradiso, Tonatore grew up obsessed with going to the movies. Movies were the only form of entertainment in a town with little material at the time, and the small theater held the laughter and common memories of several generations of villagers. So he brought his own story and the movie and the simple people of the town to the screen. He may also be like Renaldo in "The Beautiful Legend of Sicily" who rode his newly acquired bicycle through the narrow alleyways and open squares with joy, and ran down the hot stone steps with his bicycle in his hand. These memorable images evolved into scenes of the film's rich life: sun-drenched alleys between stone houses, men wearing bowler hats greeting each other in the hot square, women in the attic, and vendors hawking their wares.

1.2 Reflections on The Trauma of War

Tornatore was born in the 1960s, when the trauma of the war was still fresh in Italy's mind. War is a recurrent element in Tornatore's films, and he has never stopped crusading and thinking about it. The rather epic story of "Ba'aria" spans from the 1930s to the 1960s, telling the changes in the lives of three generations of a family, and deeply engraving the marks of the times in the fate of the characters in a rich Sicilian visual world. The film reflects the changes that Italy went through during and after the two world wars, and the fate of ordinary people who were floating in the midst of the turbulent political changes. In "The Beautiful Legend of Sicily", Malena's husband, Nino, died at the front and her father was killed by the bombing. In order to survive, Malena, who had no one to turn to, had to submit herself to a number of lustful men, including Germans. After the Germans left, the jealous women shaved Malena's hair and stripped her naked for public display. Even the isolated 1900 in "The Legend of 1900" had to face the effects of the war and was questioned by his friends: "Do you play the piano all the time? Even in the middle of the war? Even when no one is dancing? Even when the bombs are falling?"

1.3 The heritage of Italian neorealist cinema

In 1945, with the end of World War II and the end of fascist rule in Italy, a group of filmmakers who had been excluded from the studio system gradually united and became the artistic backbone of Italian neorealism. The pioneer Rossellini defined the neorealist movement in one short sentence: "It is cinema itself". Italian neorealism was characterized by live action, long and deep shots, the use of non-professional actors and the use of dialects. These elements were inherited by Tornatore and are evident in his work. In his films, Tonatore emphasizes regional culture and realistic style, specifically, he uses a lot of live-action shooting and the construction and reproduction of exterior scenes to create a realistic film space. The piazza is an important place for public activities in Sicilian towns, and Tonatore's use of overhead camera positions, long shots and depth-of-field shots, and extensive use of medium panoramas, successfully creates it and paves the way for the subsequent plot, reflecting Bazan's view of "the unity of space in photography".

2. Personalized Style - The Interweaving of Romance and Reality

Although his works are mostly based on realistic issues, they are also characterized by romanticism. The rich nostalgic atmosphere

and beautiful love stories make his films interesting to watch while feeling life and reflecting realistic problems. The rhythm of his narrative is soothing and charming, as in the opening shot of *Cinema Paradiso*, which shows a blue sea, a white screen window, and a simple plant on the windowsill. The screen is slowly fluttering with the wind, and the camera slowly pulls back with the same soft rhythm of music, immediately bringing the audience into the lyrical world of the movie. In the opening credits of “The Beautiful Legend of Sicily”, two long top-down shots truly and completely recreate the life of the city and the background of the time, as the narrator recalls “I was only 13 years old when I first met her. I still remember it clearly, despite my failing memory. That was the year Mussolini went to war with the British and the French, and I got my first bicycle in life.” A sense of melancholy and a sense of the times come to the fore. Tonatore’s fondness for time captures the memories and poetry that remain within him and lives on in film with texture and color.

Tonatore’s expression of the love story in the film is more delicate and sensitive like a poet. He tells the story mostly from the male perspective, with the heroine suddenly bursting into the hero’s line of sight or camera shots, and the off-screen audience is set to feel the hero’s heart pounding when he first meets the heroine from the first perspective. In “*Cinema Paradiso*”, Toto accidentally recorded a glowing Elena while filming material, and he instantly fell in love and waited under her window for 99 days. In “The Legend of 1900”, 1900 accidentally looked out of the window while recording a piano piece and met a pair of blue eyes. His eyes chased the beautiful girl and time seemed to freeze as the notes for her flowed naturally on the black and white keys. And in “The Beautiful Legend of Sicily”, the swaying older sister on the shore is like a tornado sweeping over 13-year-old Renaldo. Tonatore tells mostly about love without signs, idealized love, romantic love that has nothing to do with reality. But while he shows us the beauty of love, he eventually draws a sorry end with the cruelty of reality. This reflects another side of his calm and rational approach to love.

3. Iconic Lens Language

Tonatore did not come from a professional background, but he started working as a photographer at an early age. Later he worked as a documentary director and won a prize for a feature-length documentary at the Satzeno Film Festival in Italy in 1982. The camera language that Tonatore learned from these experiences, and how to capture people’s real life scenes and gestures, were accumulated for his subsequent film works.

(1) A Well-balanced Shot Composition

The director’s mastery of film rhythm is the key to evaluating a film, and Tonatore’s familiarity with the use of long and short shots, the pushing and shifting of large panoramic views and the cross-cutting of local close-ups, formed his unique film language, making the film rhythm relaxed. In “The Beautiful Legend of Sicily,” Tonatore uses a long motion shot to show how rumors about Malena are circulating in the town. The camera first pans across to the right with several soldiers sitting in a military car talking frivolously about her, and after the car passing a shoe repair stand, the camera pans to two shoemakers who are discussing the resignation of Malena’s father because of her. A cobbler gets up and walks across the street to put the shoes into a basket draped from the upper floor, and the camera rises to the second floor as the basket is lifted, the basket transition space appearing real and natural. The woman pulling up the basket shouts insults at the woman on the opposite floor to Malena, and the camera pans across to the left with her line of sight, then drops to the various people on the ground, lining up and talking. At the end of the long shot, it cuts to a close-up of Malena’s hand trying to open the door with the key, her father changed the lock because of the scandal, and the closed door symbolizes the breakup of their relationship. The motion long shot expands the spatial capacity of the shot, while Tonatore’s subtle scene scheduling allows the long shot to flow naturally, showing the consistency and integrity of time and space.

(2) Prying Perspective

Tonatore’s signature camera language is also the prying eye that appears in almost every one of his films. Voyeurism, one of the sexual instincts of man, is to secretly watch others to obtain erotic pleasure and satisfaction of desire. In “The Beautiful Legend of Sicily”, Renaldo chases Malena like a shadow, because of the age difference he is always peeping in the dark, and the film shows the sensuality of Malena’s body from his point of view in many places, the dim lighting creates a viewing environment that meets the desire of male voyeurism. The childlike and innocent 1900 stares at Padoan through the one-way mirror of the cabin, and the viewer shares his point of sight, becoming the subject of the gaze.

In this sense, the voyeuristic element of the cinema mechanism is easily identifiable: the audience sits in a dark environment and feels safe from voyeurism because they do not know each other, the projector projects a single light source, the screen is a rectangular bright two-dimensional plane where other people’s stories are played out, and the audience stares long and silently. The viewer will identify with the protagonist, and on the other hand, the audience’s desires are projected on the screen and satisfied.

4. Conclusion

Tonatore’s films have a core of concern for serious real-life issues, or show the baptism of life and contemplate the existence of human beings, but they are expressed in a romantic or witty way. While most of his films are set in Sicily, full of poetry and delicate emotions, he is also able to experiment with suspense films that are very different from his previous style. While skillfully using realistic techniques such as long shots, live action and non-professional actors, he is also able to edit quickly, use psychological montage to express fantasy and use a star cast. The seemingly contradictory polarities can always be harmoniously blended under his camera.