Reflection and Revelation of the Time Travel Theme in Different Media

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Abstract. Since the beginning of this century, the mainland art circles have set off a “time travel” wave across the network, printing, film, television, games and other media. It has been a part of both the Chinese classical literature and the world since 1960s. The time travel online novels are the pioneers of “time travel” in China, and demonstrate some features, showing the youth of network literature, historical consumerism, martial arts complex, media interactivity and so on. By reflecting the “time travel” theme in our country, we know that it breaks through the traditional narrative skill about time, and escapes from reality by personal fantasy and limits of the theme of the palace fighting. By means of relying on the story, returning to reality, breaking the theme can we give the topic a better future.

Introduction

Since the beginning of this century, the mainland art circles have set off a “time travel” wave. All artistic medias that contemporary young people like, such as network, books, television, animation and computer game, loved to use the theme of “time travel”. Over the past ten years, the theme has been widely used and its freshness is reducing. It is a good time for us to reflect on this upsurge when “time travel” starts to drop. The past, present and future are the basis of the time travel artistic works. This article will trace back through their past, present and future, and efforts will be made to let all media grasp the theme or open a new beneficial theme in China.

The Past: “Time Travel” Narrative Element from Ancient Times to the Present

The “time travel” theme did not appear in this century, and its history was rather long. Its application was not limited to a country or nation, but used all over the world. At present, we will focus more attention on Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland. In fact, from a broader perspective, it not only had own historical origin in China, but also in the world.

The stories about time travel have a long history in Chinese arts. In A Story on the Pillow, a legend of Tang Dynasty, Lu Sheng dreams that he owns enormous wealth, and then he awakes from his dream and returns to the reality. This story is similar to the plot of the time travel novels. There is a story called The Solution of the Demon Pool, the ancient figure Chi You fights with Guan Gong in the Yuan Dynasty. In The Journey to the West, a novel of the Qin Dynasty, Sun Wukong interrogates Qin Hui, a figure in the Song Dynasty. These stories show that this element was applied very early. Today, the phenomenon is seen as a development of the classical literature.

Before the twentieth century, the narrative of time travel was only occasional. But since the beginning of 1960s, the frequency of these works has significantly increased in many countries over the world, and appears in comics, movies, TV series and games. In 1965, Japanese writer Yasutaka Tsutsui published The Girl Who Leapt Through Time, and it was adapted for movies in 1983. In 1968, Arthur C Clarke, a famous British science fiction writer, published 2001: A Space Odyssey. Three other stories were published in 1982, 1987 and 1997. In 1976, Richard Matheson, a famous American novelist and screenwriter, created the time travel novel Back in Time, and the novel was rearranged into a film Somewhere in Time in 1980.
The theme was used mainly in science fiction movies in the United States from 1968 to 1999. Representative works were quite much including 2001: A Space Odyssey, 2010: A Space Odyssey, Nuclear Aircraft Carrier, Terminator 1, Terminator 2, Back To The Future trilogy, Demolition Man, Contact, Timeline and so on.

Unlike the United States, the time travel works in Japan were mainly comic and derived works. In 1976, Crest of The Royal Family started an important precedent in Japan and even in the world. From then to 1997, Japanese created a large number of cartoons, such as Mirage Anime, From Afar, Miyuki-Chan in Wonderland V, Red River, Inuyasha and so on. Most of these famous cartoons have been adapted for movies.

In Hong Kong, there were also a lot of such works. Compared with the United States and Japan, it started much later, but the works were diversified. In novels, Li Bihua created Qin Terracotta in 1980s, and Huang Yi created A Step into The Past in 1990s. In this period, the time travel movies were Fight and Love with a Terracotta Warrior, A Chinese Odyssey, Beyond Time Space Want Love and so on. TV plays were also involved into the theme, such as City Swordsman, Cherished Moments, Past Friends, etc.

In addition to these countries and regions, the theme also appeared in the works of Taiwan, Norway, France, Germany occasionally. Thus, the time travel theme has begun to warm up in the whole world since the 1960s, and by the end of twentieth century, it has become a hot topic. The United States, Japan and Hong Kong were leaders in this area.

In the twenty-first century, the “time travel” continued to boom. Most works were still produced in the United States, Japan and Hong Kong. The works in Taiwan increased slightly, and Korea, Germany, Britain, Czech Republic and other countries joined in the camp. In the United States launched many similar films, such as The One, Terminator 3, Timeline, Retrograde, Terminator 2018 and so on. In Japan, the theme still flourished in the field of comics, such as Kyou Kara Ma Ou, Ren doctor, Amakusa X and so on. Many cartoons and novels were adapted into animations, such as Inuyasha, Munto OVA, Tsubasa, The Girl Who Leapt Through Time. In this period, the quantity of Japanese films and TV plays increase. Metro Ni Notte, Operation Love and Ren Doctor were classic works.

In twenty-first century, the time travel them appeared mainly in TV plays in Hong Kong. From 2001 to 2007, time travel plays were A Step into the Past, The Love of Time and Space and so on. The works of time travel film were reducing. The representatives were Second Time Around, Secret That Cannot Be Told (cooperated with Taiwan).

In this period, South Korean’s films began to use the theme. Since 2000, The Lake House and Love for Thousand Years have been regarded as the pioneers in South Korea. In 2012, Korea’s “time travel” plays flourished, and five such plays were simultaneously on TV—Ren Doctor, Rooftop Prince and Queen In-Hyun’s Man.

In this period, there appeared a lot of time travel novels on the Chinese mainland internet. Popular network novels attracted the traditional publishing industry. Returning to the Qing Dynasty in a Dream and Starlity by Each Step were published.

The time travel novels in the mainland of China have their roots in the classical Chinese literature. They are a response and magnification of the hot theme of cross media in the whole world. In addition to the traditional inheritance and influence in the world, the phenomenon has its social and cultural reasons, and shows diverse characteristics. Here we will analyze these characteristics.

Nowadays: Diversity of the Time Travel Fictions

Since the rise of time travel fictions, many scholars have analyzed it from different aspects. This paper analyses the reasons of the rise and the diversified characteristics of Chinese time travel fictions from the perspective of the social culture. Time travel fictions play an important role in the Chinese time travel fever. They also influence the types of time travel works.
Young Readers and Young Protagonists in the Network Literature

The network literature shows the “Youth” trend in the process of development, which provides the basis for the boom of time travel fictions. This trend is reflected in two aspects, the young readers and the vernal diction of works.

On the one hand, the readers are mainly netizens who are under 35 years old. The age structure presents that readers are mostly young. The reading demand of the massive readership promotes the development of time travel fictions objectively. On the other hand, the protagonists in these novels are mostly young. The youth literature of time travel fictions just satisfies young readers. Because most protagonists in time travel fictions are teenagers who construct a fantasy Utopia for the young readers, the young readers can get great joy and satisfaction in the process of reading time travel fictions.

Historical Consumerism

One of the features of time travel fictions is the imitation of history. The authors of time travel fictions use the historical period that is well-known but not quite familiar as the setting and make up a specific plot in the historical framework. This kind of novel turns true history into a historical situation that readers can imagine, and an aesthetic space that is distant from the reality.

Martial Arts Complex

Hong Kong writer Huang Yi created A Step into the Past, which was regarded as the first true time travel novel. It tells us the core spirit of martial arts under the “time travel” coat, which connects time travel novels and martial arts novels closely. Martial arts novels are the most popular types in the latter half of the twentieth century. Time travel novels are deeply affected by the martial arts novels, which embodies in many aspects, such as creation technique, spiritual connotation, creation impetus and so on.

Medias’ Interaction

The interaction between the media and the TV plays adapted from time travel novels also contributes to the boom of time travel novels. From the "online" to "offline", the time travel novels become the most popular works in bookstore and on the screen. At the same time, paper media, film and television make time travel novels more popular. In the business activities, time travel novels complete the two-way interaction between publication and film adaptation.

The Future: Reflections and Revelations about the Time Travel Theme

About the future of time travel theme, we wonder how long they can last to be popular. After 2011, the time travel fever really cools, but this does not mean that the theme will disappear. It takes a long time for the theme to become unpopular. In such cases, we should think over the phenomenon.

Reflections of the Time Travel Theme

Breakthrough in the Traditional Narrative Techniques. The time travel technique is one of the most wonderful narrative skills. It breaks the straightness of traditional time narration and makes the narration diversified. Having developed for a long time, the time travel narrative skill has been fixed as a basic way of time narration, so it will not disappear, and in the future it will enrich the diversity of the story time.

Personal Fantasy Escaping from the Reality. The two essential characteristics of “time travel” novels are escaping from reality and personal fantasy. In Chinese time travel works, the protagonist is often in the depths of the plight of reality. He (she) would not like to face the familial, social or emotional confusions and simply circumvent these problems by time travel. Bernard Bosanquet said:“The imaginary world of art, like the real world, has the power to form habits through examples.”Time travel works make readers easy to indulge in the virtual world and difficult to integrate into the real life.
The Theme of Palace Politics Struggle. Compared with the novels of time travel in the west, Chinese time travel works pay little attention to the fate of human society and the circumstances. The history of the Qing Dynasty and the Warring States Time are expressed repeatedly in time travel works.

Enlightenments of the Time Travel Works

Depending on the Story

Artistic Work cannot highlight its value only by means of relying on the narrative skill of time travel. What makes successful works? Huang Yi gives us enlightenments, and he said: “In A step into the past, time travel isn't the most important element. It is just a means of making a situation. The real attraction of the novel is history.” So time travel can only give a novel a framework, the real decision of good works is its wonderful story.

Returning to the Reality

Time travel doesn't mean that people must escape from the reality. People can reflect reality during the process of returning to the past and looking forward to the future. It lets people pay more attention on the affection by returning to the past to save the family and find true love. Travel to the future can make us reflect on the human environment, science and technology, politics, economy and anthropocentrism. If people escape from the realistic world blindly by time travel, to describe one day-dream, the value of time travel will only remain at a low level to satisfy people’s sensual entertainment.

Breaking through the Theme

In China, the main themes of popular time travel works are Palace politics struggle, commercial war and love. For the whole Asia, the subject of time travel works should have a major breakthrough, and we should think about problems of human civilization deeply. Only by means of breaking through the current pattern and innovating in the above several aspects can the time travel works enter into a new level in our country.

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