

Exploring the Relationship Between Narrative Language and the Development of Illustration Art

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ABSTRACT

As far as the transformation of realism into technique - thus, the trajectory of art entered modernism, and in modernist painting, what is depicted in the picture is no longer the character image, but the painting itself. The language of illustration art originated from the narrative language of text and has shown a trend of breaking away from textual narrative. On the one hand, the dominant position between textual narrative and image narrative has shifted; On the other hand, with the elimination of narrative language, the edge between illustration and general painting creation gradually blurs. Nevertheless, as an independent art category, illustration still cannot abandon its own language - narrative. With the continuous emergence of new elements such as painting concepts and techniques, as well as the diverse exchange of cultural perspectives, the new narrative language has brought new ways of painting writing, and illustration art has become vibrant. This article explores the critical point between illustration and painting from a narrative perspective, which has positive significance in clarifying the concept and language of illustration art, and helps to propose theoretical ideas for the future development direction of illustration art.

Keywords: *Narration, Transboundary, Trends.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Svetlana Alpers compared the 17th century Italian artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio with the 19th century French painter Gustave Courbet Jean Desire Gustave Courbet in her article "Depicting or Narrating - A Question of Realistic Representation", attempting to demonstrate similarities in the choices made by 17th and 19th century realistic art: emphasizing the descriptive aspect of the picture while ignoring or shelving narrative behavior.[1] Similarly, in the development process of illustration art, "narrative" exhibits almost the same trajectory - shelving or blurring narrative to pursue the aesthetic diversity brought by images. The continuous elimination of narrative boundaries seems to indicate that illustration will move towards an art form that is indistinguishable from painting.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMAGE NARRATIVE AND TEXT NARRATIVE

E.H.Gombrich described in his art history work "The Story of Art" as follows: Pope Gregory the Great, who lived at the end of the sixth century AD... 'Painting can do for the illiterate what writing does for those who can read', he said.[2] This example demonstrates the consistency between image and text in terms of narrative function, that is, the visual interpretation of text narrative, where illustrations replace text to enable readers to accurately understand the intention of the text. At this point, images are only the externalization and extension of the text content. Taking this as an example, it can be seen that the insurmountable boundary of illustration narrative is its textual content. In other words, illustrations cannot be used without the intention of the text.

However, the actual situation is not entirely the case. Extensive examination of the relationship between text and image narration in illustrations

reveals that the correspondence between images and texts is sometimes not consistent, especially in literary illustrations and even in some serious science popularization illustrations. The success or failure of narrative often does not depend on whether its realistic techniques are superb, but on whether the ideas it carries out are clever, whether the content it expresses can be accepted by people, and whether it is rich. In other words, a complete narrative is not the fundamental purpose of realistic painting, but only one of the reasons for receiving applause.[3] Just like narrative is to painting, illustrators seem never satisfied with the literal translation of the text in the "A to A" style. Illustrated works often contain the artist's subjective understanding of the text and the involuntary integration of personal artistic style. The artists' performance in image creation after interpreting texts is particularly evident in the field of literary illustration. Wu Guanzhong clearly integrated his unique style of painting language into the illustration creation of Shi Tiesheng's lyrical prose "Me and the Altar of Earth" ("Figure 1").



Figure 1 Shi Tiesheng's "Me and the Temple of Earth" by Wu Guanzhong, illustrated by Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House/2016-10.

Nevertheless, the illustrator still cannot break free from the narrative framework of the text. In fact, such illustrations, which appear to be full of painting freedom, are still a mutual match between images and text from the perspective of image narration. The illustrations created by Wu Guanzhong based on Shi Tiesheng's prose poetry will make readers feel more like "Shi Tiesheng", and even enter Shi Tiesheng's world of writing art through Wu Guanzhong's works while ignoring Wu Guanzhong's painting art. But it cannot be denied that the creativity of artists has truly added a lot of color to the narrative of the text, and this added color is the beginning of the elimination of narrative boundaries.

3. THE ELIMINATION OF NARRATIVE BOUNDARIES IN IMAGES AND THE EXPANSION OF ILLUSTRATION CONCEPTS

From the perspective of the "universality" of the concept, today's understanding of illustration seems to be more inclusive. It is not easy for us to distinguish what is different between an illustration and a painting. From the perspective of artistic appreciation alone, there is even no essential difference between the two. An interesting illustration exhibition looks no different from a typical easel painting exhibition, with rich painting content, exquisite framing, and no difference from oil painting, sketching, watercolor, and so on. Indeed, there is no difference in the outcome of aesthetic pleasure obtained through the appreciation process of art. But in terms of the form and means of creation, they have essential differences - "illustration is an art that preserves the narrative traces of the text". With the development of culture and society, illustration art undertakes more textual narrative functions, which means that the narrative methods dominated by illustration images are more diverse.

The elimination of visual narrative language guides illustration towards pure painting art, which also means that visual creativity can be further liberated. The creators of literary illustrations seem to have created a blurry boundary between illustrations and pure artistic expression, or in other words, a blurred concept between illustrations and painting. From a narrative perspective, it can be observed that the correspondence between images and texts is not entirely "A to A", but often "A to A+" or even "A to X". (A refers to text X refers to pure painting, and the logic of "A to A" is the correspondence between text and image.) This provides us with some inspiration for exploring the "elimination of narrative boundaries" between illustrations and text: this logical relationship raises questions about how the change from A to X occurred? The viewpoint of this article is that the abandonment of textual narrative and the elimination of visual narrative boundaries are the fundamental reasons for illustrations to move towards painting art, as well as the inevitable trend for illustrations to develop into "illustration" art.[4] They are the foundation for the development of illustration concepts.

As mentioned earlier, in the creation of literary illustrations, the draftsman (artist) seems to have a desire to break through the source of the text. This

impulse for artistic creation is the nature (talent) of most artists, and their artistic impulse brings a broader space for illustration creation, which seems to be "breaking away from textual narrative". Literary illustrations have always been a profound inspiration for the development of images towards the direction of painting creation, and have also inspired many artists to showcase their artistic talents while achieving "text correspondence". Even in the serious creation of popular science illustrations, artists consciously showcase their exquisite creativity. ("Figure 2") Xiao Yong from Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts showcased wonderful visual effects in his illustration of Fabre's "Insect Chronicles" ("Figure 3"). From the images, not only are the biological forms of insects visible, but readers can also enjoy a pleasant aesthetic experience in the appreciation activities. Of course, Fabre's "Insect Chronicles", as a creative template, has a strong literary quality. French writer Hugo or Chinese writers Lu Xun(鲁迅) [5], Zhou Zuoren(周作人), and Ba Jin have praised his works generously. Taking the illustration exhibition of the National Art Exhibition as the research object, it can be found that the situation of breaking away from textual narrative gradually expands with the opening and diversification of cultural concepts. ("Figure 4")



Figure 2 Tagore, the original work of Wu Su's "Jitanjali".



Figure 3 Illustration exhibition of the 12th National Art Exhibition of Fabre, the original work of Xiao Yong's "Insect Chronicle".



Figure 4 Tian Jintai's "Three Bullets" at the 2nd National Art Exhibition by Xin Mang.

4. IMAGE LED NARRATIVE - ILLUSTRATION BECOMING A PREREQUISITE FOR INDEPENDENT ART

If the value of illustrations is reflected in their "service" function towards text or scripts, illustrations are not. Illustrations are not limited to the text nor have the sole mission of "serving the text", and their selection of creative themes is not limited to the textual content. When appreciating illustration art, people can interpret the description of the plot and the unfolding of dramatic conflicts from the screen, rather than through the text. From this, it can be seen that breaking free from the constraints of textual scripts and retaining narrative techniques is an artistic feature of illustration creation, while illustration retains the narrative

technique of illustration creation. Just like how printmaking is no longer constrained by tool attributes, "imprints" have become an important language in printmaking creation. The creation and appreciation of illustrations are based on "narrative". When appreciating an illustration work, people focus on its inherent language, which is the rich narrative language.

The value of illustration is no longer limited to the text like illustrations. Illustrations are originally subordinate to the text, with clear functions, and have a clear compliance relationship with the service object. This type of image has developed into an independent form of painting, which is the process from illustration to illustration. During this period, as a tool attribute, images carry out the "narrative" function of the story plot, and "narrative" has become the ontology language of illustration art. When appreciating illustration art, people discuss the painting forms above the story in its artistic language. This aesthetic activity represents the value and function of illustration aesthetics, and constitutes the aesthetic connotation of illustration art.

"The picture book" creation is another important inspiration for the development of illustration. At this stage, textual narrative shifts towards visual narrative, which still carries obvious traces of textual narrative and narrative logic. Even in terms of narrative techniques, the image language and text language appear to be identical. In illustration creation, narrative techniques often exhibit the characteristic of adhering to textual scripts, which is the unfolding and expression of text as the content. The situation of illustration creation is more diverse, drawing on the reproduction techniques of illustration creation and appearing rich in the scope of expression, even detached from textual scripts, but still retaining the creative traces of narrative techniques. However, in terms of the "universality" of the concept of illustration, today's understanding of illustration seems to be more diverse, and it is not easy to distinguish what is different between an illustration and a painting. Therefore, there are various interpretations of the definition of illustration, such as in the techniques of illustration creation, those based on digital technology are often defined as digital illustration, or different styles are used to distinguish illustration. There are also many problems with this category. If people look at it from the essence of art, illustrations made in any way or with any theme cannot be separated from painting art. Therefore, the concept of illustrations

that are detached from textual scripts has become blurred.

5. THE CRITICAL POINT OF ELIMINATING IMAGE NARRATION: THE PRESERVATION OF NARRATIVE LANGUAGE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NOUMENON LANGUAGE OF ILLUSTRATION ART

Whether from a literary or artistic perspective, the elimination of narrative language in illustration signifies the rise of illustration art, which is an inevitable result of multicultural development. The development of the ontology language of illustration art is a process of constantly breaking through the narrative bottom line and ultimately leading to the blurring of the boundary between illustration and painting. However, further disappearance of narrative boundaries will lead to the result that illustration is no different from general painting forms, which is not conducive to the development of illustration art. If the difference between illustration and painting cannot be clarified, it will lead to a blurred development of illustration art or illustration art.

Narration is a necessary path to explore the language and development of illustration art, and with the elimination of visual narrative language, modern illustration concepts are gradually established. The blurring of the boundary between the narrative language of illustration and painting creation does not mean the disappearance of image narration, but rather a kind of "elimination", which refers to the mutual crossing and borrowing of cultural types on both sides of the boundary. The elimination and preservation of boundaries is an inevitable topic of concern for cultural development, and the mutual reference between image narrative and painting art on narrative boundaries may be an inevitable trend for the future development of illustration art. Diversity is an inevitable choice for cultural development, and discussing how illustration art can develop cannot be separated from this premise. From the perspective of multiple narratives, illustration creators are also inclusive and rich, and can break through traditional narrative frameworks and fully draw on different artistic styles in illustration creation.

The manifestation of the artistic interest in illustration cannot be separated from its artistic

language - narrative. Preserving the form of "storytelling" is the difference between illustration and pure painting. Just like how printmaking transforms from a printing tool to a means of artistic creation, retaining printing marks as the language of painting. The gradual elimination of narrative language has liberated the creation of illustration, but as an independent language of illustration art from other art categories, narrative must be preserved. From text illustration to independent development, illustration retains the "image narrative" function of illustrations in text interpretation. Although the illustration techniques and themes are not limited to form, they revolve around "narrative". Regardless of the form of illustration, its content will always contain elements such as story plots or character situations. This is a trace that has been preserved since the evolution of illustration to illustration creation, forming an important feature of illustration that is independent of other art forms. This narrative scene consists of both fixed frames in a single frame and multiple frames that continue to unfold. It solves the whole or part of the story plot in one frame, or multiple frames with clues jointly unfold the story.

6. IMAGINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ILLUSTRATION ART WITHIN THE MAXIMUM MARGIN OF PRESERVING OR ELIMINATING NARRATIVE AS THE ONTOLOGY LANGUAGE OF ILLUSTRATION ART

After the invention of photography, the use of painting techniques has had a profound impact on the development of art history, both in terms of painting and the transformation of painting concepts. This issue is once again confirmed in the widespread use of digital technology today, as technological factors, as a factor of productivity, always follow the trend of artistic development. Taking commercial illustrations as an example, as product endorsements, illustrations require the display of "the product's own text". This kind of narrative usually contains two clues, one is the characteristics of the product itself, and the other is the brand culture represented by the product. Commercial illustrations, in order to achieve expressive effects or promote energy efficiency, use CG processing (computer graphics). The emergence of digital processing technology greatly satisfies the audience's imagination of products, even exceeding expectations. The application of

digital technology in the field of images is extremely widespread. Many commercial illustrators are also outstanding painting artists who can easily transition to commercial illustration creation based on their painting experience. The commercial illustrations of Lei Mengting, a teacher at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, are like this, with a strong personal artistic style. Looking back at her paintings, it is not difficult to find that this strong artistic style stems from her creative experience in the field of painting. ("Figure 5" and "Figure 6")



Figure 5 Lei Mengting's "Trendy Fashion Illustration" was published in the 135th issue of the 2011-2012 Fashion Trend Special Issue of VOGUE Clothing and Beauty.

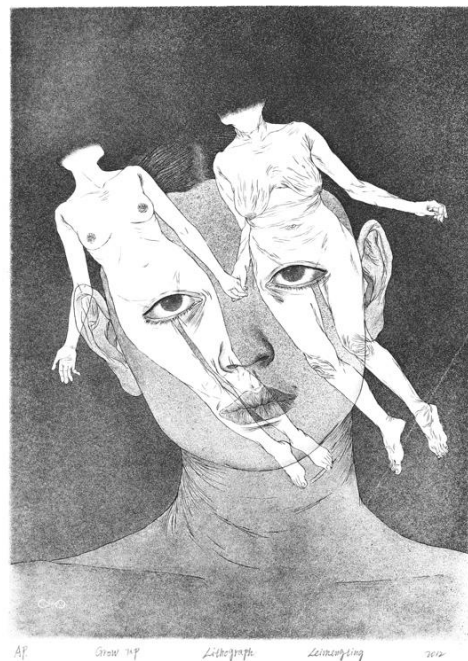


Figure 6 Lei Mengting's printmaking work "grow up" 29.7 * 40cm, 2012.

The elimination of narrative language means that images can gain more space for expression, and

the artistic interest of images can be fully demonstrated. Today's illustration art works, whether in terms of conceptual innovation or technological application, have become more proactive than before in the context of eliminating narrative boundaries, and their appearance is unprecedentedly rich and colorful. In the context of economic globalization, cultural diversity and the two-way dissemination of culture have led to various interpretations of the definition of illustration. Due to the wider use of paths, even all visual elements outside of text can be referred to as illustrations. Illustration is no longer limited by the content of books and texts like illustrations, but has gained a free and broad expression space and more flexible writing methods with the "diverse and cross disciplinary interaction of narrative". So much so that Ales Elyavitz wrote in "The Age of Images": "I never read, I just look at pictures." Illustration has expanded the perspective of cultural dissemination, allowing visual images to showcase their skills and fill every aspect of our daily lives, exerting a profound impact on people's lifestyles and aesthetic activities.

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