

The Code Analysis of 'Post-Apocalyptic Era' Movies: Take *Mad Max: Fury Road* as an Example

Yuhao Liu

School of Journalism and Communication, China Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an
Shaanxi 710018, China

Abstract. In the 88th Academy Awards, directed by George Miller, a "wasteland" theme film "Mad Max 4: Fury Road" is the world's most recognized female theme film. 50% of film history is one of the films in the explosive stage. After it won the Oscar six awards, it has become a "wasteland" theme film's new benchmark. Through semiotics and the Bible, this paper deconstructs the image codes in movies. Based on the symbolic interactionism theory, this paper analyses the character behaviour, identity construction and prop application in the Christian symbol system and combs and deconstructs it, trying to explore the symbolic metaphors in movies and reflect on the artistic value and ideological connotation contained in movies.

Keywords: Wasteland; Symbol; Explosion; Mirror Suggestion.

1. Introduction

Mad Max: Fury Road is a legendary film directed by George Miller, whose images write about the "post-apocalyptic era" in Christian terms and construct a more stylized world of wasteland. The fourth film in the Mad Max franchise, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, is visually and graphically superior and has a deeper meaning than the previous three films. The central character of the story is Max, who is met and imprisoned by "Immortan Joe" and his "war boy" and then becomes Nax's "blood bag"(Jin Ming,2017)[1]. As the series progresses, Max is forced into the middle of a team led by a female officer, Furiosa, who is searching for a former oasis. Furthermore, Max has to choose to go with this team in an escape, and they face all kinds of dangers and hardships together. In these difficult circumstances, Max and Furiosa gradually establish a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation, and finally, through the cost of blood, seize the stronghold of the Immortan Joe and re-establish a new order. Based on the theory of symbolic interactionism and the Bible, this paper analyzes the image text and narrative text in the film and tries to explain the character's behaviour, identity construction and prop use in the Christian symbol system.

2. The Definition of Wasteland's Concept

The concept of WASTELAND was born in the late 1940s, the Cold War pattern caused by the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States. In 1945, with the United States dropping two atomic bombs on Japan, Emperor Showa issued the Edict of Armistice, announcing unconditional surrender and officially ending World War II. The people of all ethnic groups had not yet come out of the shadow of World War II. the Soviet Union and the United States launched an arms race with each other. They stored a large number of nuclear weapons, leading many countries to actively or passively join the "Cold War" game, so the people of all ethnic groups in the world became shrouded in the shadow of nuclear war. Under the anxiety of the general environment, many artists choose to magnify the despair and terror of nuclear war through their works to express peaceful anti-war. In these works of art, the future world often experiences a baptism of nuclear war, the collapse of civilization, the collapse of the rule of law, violence and barbarism become the beginning, and everyone can only look forward to self-preservation rather than security. With scarce resources and cruel fate, it has become a true portrayal of hell on earth.

In 1988, just before the end of the Cold War, Electronic Arts released a game called *Wasteland*, in which the term wasteland was first explicitly defined, and Interplay's Black Island studio released *Fallout*, the spiritual sequel to *Wasteland*. (Zhang Xiang,2019)[2] As *Fallout* spread throughout the gamer community, wasteland evolved from a temporary fad into a distinct cultural and artistic branch. Over the course of time, the wasteland scenario has typically followed the collapse of human civilization after a catastrophe, with the remaining survivors struggling to survive in a resource-poor environment. The disintegration of morality and law and the infinite amplification of human good and evil in a state of crisis become the signature elements of such Settings. In such works, the protagonist needs to find low-tech equipment from the remaining resources and overcome difficult challenges with his own ability and willpower.

It is common for people to confuse wasteland movies with disaster movies in science fiction. Science fiction films can be divided into two major eras, that is, the "age of Revelation" and "post-apocalyptic era", and the word "revelation" comes from the last book of the New Testament of the Bible, "Revelation", which mainly records the end of the earth and disaster judgment.

Early films related to the concept of wasteland include *Waterworld*, *Valley of Wind* and *Hokuto no Ken*, which all show motorcycle boys running around the desert fighting, and most of the related works were animated during this period. It wasn't until 1993 that Spielberg brought digital technology to the forefront of people's minds. Among the rising stars of "wasteland" concept works, "*Mad Max: Fury Road*" has become a new benchmark of "wasteland" works by overtaking the curve, "*Gunnm*" and "*Snowpiercer*" have also completed the transformation of the real-life version through digital technology, and the recent "*Subway: Leaving*" and "*Fallout 4*" have further promoted the "wasteland world" into the public eye. In contrast to disaster films such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Resident Evil*, *2012*, and *Independence Day*, although films often have a bleak and desperate atmosphere, they also emphasize individualism and the struggle for survival, often setting one or more heroes wandering in lonely Spaces. And fight other remnants of humans, wild animals, and possibly remaining monsters or aliens. However, the apocalyptic works mainly focus on the plot description before and during the disaster, the reflection on the causes of the disaster, and the reflection on the vitality and social resilience of human beings after the disaster. The "post-apocalyptic" wasteland works mainly visualized the process of building a new society after the disaster, reinterpreting human historical values, challenging conventional established social structures and concepts and emphasizing the freedom and dignity of individuals in this world.

3. The Symbolic Metaphor from the Bible

In film works, costume, makeup and prop design are particularly important, which can convey the relevant information about the characters in the film to the audience in the shortest time and affect the audience's cognition of the identity, status and personality of characters in the drama to a certain extent. As a symbol, it plays an important role in suggesting the subsequent plot development. According to the theory of symbolic interactionism, human beings are social animals with symbolic behaviour, and human symbolic activities are active processes and vitality of human culture creation. The study of symbolic behaviour is to reveal the nature of human beings and has great significance for understanding reality. (Mao Xiaoguang,2001)[3] In film and television works, costume design, as a special symbol, makes the characters in the film more vivid and lively so that the audience can more easily get the director's carefully arranged character clothing in a certain character characteristic hint. If the costume design in the film can accurately convey the theme of the film, the audience can have a good understanding of the inner world of a certain character created by the director, which is a successful symbolic interactionism. (Peng Yulong,2013)[4]

3.1. Bird

There are many images related to birds in the film, including the silver eagle medal, the eagle jumping off the cliff as it learns to fly, and the bird cage in the dark space, etc., and through various intentions, convey different metaphors and character qualities to the audience.

3.1.1. Silver Eagle Medal

The Silver Eagle Medal is one of the main MEDALS awarded by the United States military to individuals for outstanding service in the armed forces and was originally created during World War I. The eagle, a bird of prey in the Falcon family, represents positive qualities such as courage, strength and freedom, and the eagle on the medal in the film spreads its wings and prepares to fly, which symbolizes the spirit of courage and freedom. The background of the medal, consisting of stars and four weapons, expresses the honour and majesty of the recipient and represents their contribution to national security. In *Mad Max*, the Silver Eagle Medal represents the honour and respect of those in the army led by Immortal Joe, who has demonstrated courage and pseudo-freedom, as well as outstanding contributions to national security, which also implies Immortal Joe's deceptive control over the social order.

3.1.2. Eagle jump

Eagles of prey usually choose a higher position to jump off cliffs when learning to fly, and their very dangerous behaviour of actively jumping off cliffs gives people a symbol of courage, adventure and confidence. In this scene, the picture of Max jumping off the cliff suggests his determination and perseverance to realize his self-worth in the end, just as the eagle keeps trying and challenging in the process of learning to fly. Max, in the film, through continuous struggle, exploration and struggle, finally beats the Immortal Joe to build a new world with the *Furiosa*.

3.1.3. Birdhouses

A symbol of restraint and restriction. The cage imprisons the freedom of birds, making them unable to fly and explore freely. In the film, Max, the bird in the cage, is imprisoned and bound.

It is a symbol of cruelty and barbarism because it keeps the birds in a small space and does not give them enough living space and freedom. This implies the oppression of Joe in the living space of other poor people, reflecting the barbarism and cruelty headed by Joe.

The birdcage is also a symbol of people's efforts to control and dominate the natural world. It can be seen as a microcosm of human attempts to control the natural environment and ecosystem through a series of technological means and regulatory measures. In the film, the Immortal Joe's control of daily necessities such as water and breast milk in Fort Doom corresponds to this image.

3.2. Schlanger

The word "Schlange" dates back to the Old High German period (between about 750 and about 1050). In contemporary usage, the word "Schlangu" meant any movement involving reptiles, including the wriggling of snakes, centipedes, or maggots. Derived from the Old German "Slang" or the Old Norse "Slanga". In both languages, "Slang" or "Slanga" also means snake. Therefore, from the period of Old High German, it gradually became a word specifically referring to snakes. In late medieval German, the word evolved to refer to a reptile with a prominent waist and tail body, a meaning that has persisted to this day.

In the story of the Garden of Eden, the serpent seduced Eve into eating from the Tree of Good and Evil and then seduced Adam in the same way. Little is known about the subsequent story of God's curse. Through the analysis of the curse in the story of Eden, the picture in the film corresponds to the curse after God found Eve eating the good and evil fruits. With the development of the plot of the film, the symbolic meaning of the Schlanger symbol gradually became more and more obvious.

In Genesis 3:14, God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you more than any animal or beast; you will walk on your belly and eat dirt all your days." It is not difficult to imagine that this small lizard is depicted in the image of the ancient serpent, which is not yet cursed, that is, the symbol of evil, temptation, and the name of "Satan" and "the evil One", which alludes to the presence of evil forces in the world, and this force has always plagued human society in the post-apocalyptic era.

Genesis 3:15 says, "And I will make you and the woman enmity one another, and your seed and her seed enmity one another." The seed of the woman will crush your head, and you will break his heel. In the film, the two-headed lizard climbed up to Max's heel, and Max trampled the two-headed lizard to death and crushed the lizard's head with his teeth. The double-headed lizard is a dual hint, and one is to imply the existence of the Immortan Joe, who is the incarnation of Schlanger. The second is to imply the inevitability of the eventual war between Max and Immortan Joe, and Max will become Immortan Joe's biggest opponent.

In Genesis 3:16, God says to the woman, "I will greatly increase your pain in childbirth, and you will have many pains in childbirth, and your husband will rule over you." In the film, it corresponds to Joe's imprisoned wife and the death of his wife.

In Genesis 2:7, we find that "Adam was made of the dust of God, and was humble." But God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils, and he became a living being, glorious and honourable. In the film, Max's rise from the "dust" implies that Max's rise is like Adam's, and the turning point of its change comes from being buried deep in the dust.

But Adam rebelled against God's command and was cursed by God, and death came upon mankind. Man is made of "dust," and eventually, his body dies and returns to "dust." At the end of the film, Max finally returns to the crowd. People are made of dust, so Max's turning point comes from the dust in the physical sense and will eventually return to the dust (the crowd).

With regard to the symbolism and meaning of the Schlanger symbol, this biblically based interpretation makes the development and plot layout of the entire film form a perfect closed loop.

3.3. Bones

In the film, a large number of skull and bone symbols have rich symbolic significance. In this post-apocalyptic wasteland, skeletons and bones represent death, destruction and end. Normally, we think of bones and skeletons as links to the end of life. The appearance of a large number of skeletons and bones in the film strongly conveys the atmosphere of destruction and death brought by the end of the world. Secondly, skeletons and bones also symbolize violence and war. In the film, skeletons and bones are frequently seen with bikers, war boys, and other characters who show acts of violence. These symbols represent the rough atmosphere of the world, the unbridled power and the fierce fighting environment. In addition, skeletons and bones symbolize a kind of resistance to authority. In the movie, people decorate their vehicles, clothes and weapons with skeletons and bones to express their opposition and struggle against the authorities. This is a common decoration in movies designed to demonstrate the combatant's strength and autonomy to the opponent.

Finally, the bones in the film can also be seen as a symbol aimed at achieving balance, in which the neutralization of male and female relations is an extremely important aspect. In the film, as Furiosa and Max work together to advance their project, their relationship grows closer, evolving into a friendship that emphasizes compassion and mutual help, which means that mutual support and collaboration between men and women becomes critical in this difficult environment.

In the Bible, Genesis chapter 2:21-23, the original text reads, "The Lord God caused him to sleep, and he slept." So he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh. So the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man was made into a woman, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she may be called Woman because she was taken out of man." In the film, Furiosa is driven between his ribs with a bone-like dagger by an enemy in the final

World War I battle, echoing the biblical scene of a man's ribs being taken out. At this critical moment, when a woman has a rib from a man, it promotes the neutralization of male-female relations. Furiosa's collaboration with Max also indicates that when men and women work together, no matter what difficulties they face, they will be solved, and hints at the inevitability of the ultimate failure of the Immortan Joe. All in all, the symbol of bones also covers the relationship between men and women, firmness, friendship and mutual cooperation, emphasizing human solidarity and cooperation against the strong.

3.4. Antichristian

The Bible gives certain attributes to the Antichrist. In Genesis chapter 13, verses 11-18, the image of the Antichrist is described as a beast. It has two horns, looks like a sheep, and sounds like a dragon. It can make fire fall from the sky in front of people. It is stated in verse 16 that it has a strong means of oppression, that it tries to dominate and rule the believers and oppresses the faith by various means. The Antichrist is described in 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 18, as posing as an image of Orthodox Christianity in order to deceive people into thinking they are true Christians. And the values it espouses are contrary to the teachings and values of Christ, and the values it represents lead people away from God's truth and salvation.

In contrast, the image of Immortan Joe, the immortal throughout the film, echoes the anti-Christ character of the Bible. Among them, his pale face is like the hair of a sheep, and the two breathing tubes on the top of his head are like two upside-down sheep horns. His voice was magnificent, like the roar of a dragon, and thrilling. He is able to make water come down from the sky, and like the Antichrist described in the Bible, he has a strong deterrent that people have to submit to his rule. In addition, Immortan Joe was able to make people worship him as a prophet and stamped the mark of Immortan Joe on everyone's body with a red-hot soldering iron. This approach not only bears similarities to the Antichrist described in the Bible but also strengthens his control. In terms of the war boy's mind control, the idea of Immortan Joe entering Valhalla after death is used as a means of control to make people no longer love the world and willingly die for it in the way of "witness me". This behaviour is consistent with the teaching of 1 John not to love the world, and it places people's faith in the realm of Immortan Joe's control. This shows the transcendent skill of Immortan Joe, the Immortal, in mind control, which is one of the important characteristics of the Antichrist power described in the Bible.

Although the term "Antichrist" does not appear in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, through the comparative analysis of the description of antichristianism in the Bible and the image of the Immortan Joe in the film, we can see that the image of the Immortan Joe echoes the characteristics and images of the antichristianism in the Bible.

4. Conclusion

With the film's ups and downs, explosive editing rhythm, coupled with the world view and character design, scene shaping perfect fit, "*Mad Max 4: Fury Road*" won the 88th Academy Awards for best editing, best sound mixing, best costume design and many other awards. It's hard to believe that George Miller, a director born in the middle of the 20th century, could still be so vibrant, conquering Hollywood and the academy with edgy visuals and story structures and racking up the box office and award nominations from 1985's *Mad Max 3* to 2015's *Fury Road*, George Miller with a story spanning 30 years to prove to us, "fire explosion" wasteland punk in the soul at the same time, from the film many hints can see the director buried foreshadowing and dark line, Max's journey will continue, and "fire explosion" waste earth punk world tour is still on the road.

References

- [1] Jin Ming, (2017). *Mad Max 4* from the perspective of Feminism [J]. *Film Literature*,123-125.

- [2] Zhang Xiang, (2019). "wasteland" the tone of the aesthetic and spiritual purport [J]. The movie review, 32-35 DOI: 10.16583/j.carol.carroll.CNKI, 2019.17.009. 52-1014 / J.
- [3] Mao Xiaoguang (2001). Analysis of the new vision of symbolic interaction Theory in the 20th century [J]. Foreign Social Sciences, 13-18.
- [4] Peng Longyu. (2013). The Symbolic Use of Clothing in Films [D]. Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology.