



A Study on the Narrative Methods of *Times Still Turns the Pages* (2023) from the Perspective of Trauma Theory

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Abstract: *Times Still Turns the Pages* (2023) is a feature film directed by Hong Kong director Zhuo Yiqian and produced by Er Dongsheng. The film received five nominations at the 60th Golden Horse Awards and was shortlisted for the World Focus Unit at the 36th Tokyo International Film Festival. The story begins with an unclaimed anonymous suicide note, triggering middle school teacher Zheng Sir's search for the story behind the suicide note. This search process evoked the painful memory of his brother's suicide when he was young, allowing him to re-face the trauma deep in his heart. Through this story, the film reveals the family, campus and social issues behind the phenomenon of teenage suicide. On a deeper level, it explores the short life span of a damaged soul and how the living carry trauma and heal themselves. The film explores how people face, understand and deal with trauma, and raises the possibility of rebuilding the ruins of the soul through love and telling.

Keywords: trauma theory, *Times Still Turns the Pages*, narrative methods, reconstructing the mind

1. Introduction

Times Still Turns the Pages is a poignant exploration of trauma, focusing on familial pressures, societal expectations, and the psychological toll on teenagers. The film artfully portrays trauma's complexities, utilizing a dual narrative structure to capture its temporal nature. While it delves deeply into individual struggles and inter-generational trauma, it emphasizes the irreversibility of certain aspects of trauma, yet champions the power of love, courage, and forgiveness in navigating life's challenges.

2. The background and manifestations of traumatic psychology

Times Still Turns the Pages shows the multiple traumas in the growth process of teenagers through the two character lines of Youjun and Youjie. First, there is the oppressive family environment. On the surface, the Zheng family is seen as a perfect model, but it hides countless hardships. Despite his father's charming appearance, he plays a dictatorial role in the family. The wife was afraid of her husband's violent behavior and turned her dissatisfaction towards Yujie. The unequal treatment based on academic performance exacerbated Yujie's disgust and led to further abuse. This one-way power relationship leads to alienation from family ties and creates a vicious cycle of indifference.[1]

Secondly, the film reveals the impact of society's excessive pursuit of success on youth education. Parents believe that academic success can enhance social status, resulting in children experiencing tremendous academic pressure. Education has become a utilitarian mechanism, ignoring individual health and all-round development, exacerbating the anxiety and stress of teenagers.

Another layer of trauma stems from the analysis of depression in the field of psychology. Depressed people are unwilling to accept loss and have a negative attitude towards themselves, leading to low self-esteem and self-denial. The film shows the psychological mechanism of traumatic experiences through multi-line narratives, such as Youjie's self-blame caused by his idealization of his family, and the blow his death had on Youjun and his family alienation[2].

In addition, trauma in adolescence can easily lead to anxiety, fear, depression and other problems. The film shows different ways of coping with trauma through the two characters of Monitor and Vincent. The monitor chose to suppress and numb to avoid trauma, while Vincent's problematic behavior stemmed from self-protection from bullying. Violence and discrimination in schools are also presented as the result of structural trauma on individuals.

These traumas present the challenges adolescents face as they grow, impacting their psychology and behavior and requiring deeper understanding and support.

3. The continuity of trauma and its temporality

Times Still Turns the Pages uses a dual-line structure and a displaced perspective to present the temporality of trauma.

The narrative is divided into past and present tenses, using diaries as the central medium to show emotions and memories across time and space. The dual tenses in the film reflect both the traumatic death encounter and the experience of survival. Trauma narratives oscillate between the event itself and the story of survival, using dislocated narratives to reveal the complexity of trauma. Through vivid images, the film shows the cycle of trauma in time, revealing its lag and invisibility[3].

Cathy Caruth defines trauma psychology as the psychological state after experiencing overwhelming experiences such as sudden or catastrophic events. Usually, the victim's response to such events is delayed and often manifested through invasive phenomena such as hallucinations. Recurrent uncontrollable behavior. "Trauma breaks down a person's defense mechanisms and prevents them from responding effectively, which means that the trauma does not take effect immediately but manifests itself over time with a lag.[4]

Inter-generational trauma profoundly affects the self-perception and identity construction of the next generation, presenting a cycle in which trauma evolves into emotional connections. The English title of the film *Times Still Turns the Pages* implies the linearity of time and the cycle of psychological time, and the stagnant moments in life become the key to the traumatic narrative. In these moments, the audience perceives the stagnation of time and the overflow of emotions, showing the irreversible and cyclical dialectical relationship between life and trauma.

4. Restoring the subject in memory and narrative

Historian Dominick Lacapra linked traumatic memory to the unconscious, proposed the concepts of "historical trauma" and "structural trauma", and introduced "loss" to explain them[5]. The former refers to the trauma of historical events caused by a specific time, and the latter is a trans-historical inner state that makes people anxious about "integrity". *Times Still Turns the Pages* adopts a linear overall logic, but multiple clues run in parallel, including the task of finding the owner of the suicide note, Youjun's recollection of the growth stages and the reconstruction of the contents of the diary. Trauma is both absence and presence, with individuals shaping their actual actions based on the experience while simultaneously re-understanding the past as a result of the encounter. These three clues are intertwined and advanced in a montage style, complementing each other, depicting the formation process of Youjun's historical trauma, and showing his struggle and self-rescue from structural trauma. The narrative of Youjun's adult stage is the main line, while memories and past plots explain and promote the changes in the character's behavior, providing completeness and clarity to the main line logic.

Times Still Turns the Pages uses a dual-line structure and a displaced perspective to present the temporality of trauma. The film is constructed through a dual narrative time, which not only shows the past where the trauma occurred, but also reveals the recurrence of the trauma in the present. Diaries are the core medium, carrying emotions and memories, and becoming a place for dialogue between the deceased and survivors. The film devises narrative tricks through confusion, cross-montage and other techniques, and finally reveals in the "Funeral" episode that the diary reporter is the survivor Youjun, and the diary author is the late Youjie.

The double tense corresponds to the two tellings of the trauma narrative: the encounter with death and the experience of survival. Trauma narratives oscillate between the events themselves and stories of survival. The delay and repetition of traumatic psychology results in the subject being unable to respond effectively. The traumatic memory will not appear immediately, but will appear with a lag over time. In the film, Youjun's trauma does not cause intense grief, and the family forcibly maintains order and covers up the tragedy. Youjun hid his diary after encountering a drastic change. When he grew up, he found temporary salvation in love. Inter-generational trauma is an insidious and profound form of trauma that is perpetuated through "inter-generational ghosts". Youjun suffers from the influence of his parents' emotional instability. His father's critical illness and Youjun's indifference are manifestations of a state of dissociation. The delay and repetition of trauma make the subject encounter trauma again and again, destroying interpersonal relationships and subjectivity.

The English title of the film *Times Still Turns the Pages* implies the cycle of time, the traumatic narrative reciprocating in psychological time. The wheel of life cannot be turned back, but psychological time is entangled with the past. Trauma narratives express chaos, dissociation, meditation and other emotions through moments of stasis, embedded in action images, forming a "Crystal of time". In these moments, present and past, phenomenon and potential, memory and fantasy meet. Trauma narratives often use techniques such as scenery, silence, and time cracks to break linear time sequences.

"Unreliable narrative" comes from *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and describes a narrator who is inconsistent with the norm. In film, the implied author is the authoritative coder, and film contains a tripartite narrative agent. The unreliable narrative in *Times Still Turns the Pages* is reflected in Youjun's limitations in observing his brother and his imagination of the unknown contents of the diary. After encountering a trauma, the victim experiences repetitive dreams and behavioral impulses, which Freud called "repetition compulsion". The vortex of traumatic memory needs to go through the process of trauma narration to turn it into a narrative memory. Witness is an important part of the trauma narrative. The diaries, comics, and suicide notes

in the film are the second space of the traumatized people.

Director Zhuo Yiqian created *Times Still Turns the Pages* to commemorate his deceased friends. There are autobiographical elements in the film. The audience and the protagonist experience trauma together, achieving narrative creation in both personal and public senses.

5. Conclusion

Times Still Turns the Pages is a cruel memoir about the growth of teenagers, and it is also a profound reflection on the structural trauma behind suicide through the social issue of suicide. The film depicts the operation and experience of trauma in an extremely delicate, intimate and personal way, making “depression”, an emotion that is widely used but lacks sufficient attention, gain audio-visual perceptibility and be noticed and understood by more people. The film analyzes the psychological dilemma of contemporary people and its cultural roots. However, in the performance of inter-generational trauma, it lacks analysis of deeper issues such as the image of patriarchy and women’s family status, making the characters’ behaviors and motivations slightly flat and losing some of them. sociality. But what is commendable is that in the presentation of the theme, *Times Still Turns the Pages* does not use a preaching attitude, but puts oneself in the shoes of others to understand and empathize. The film respects the reality of life and does not give a perfect ending - in the end, the mother never comes back, the father passes away in repentance, the marriage is broken and cannot be reunited, and the owner of the suicide note is not found. The irreversibility of time determines that the trauma cannot be completely repaired, just like those late, powerless, and helpless moments in the film, but the film still conveys the belief of redemption—gaining the power to continue living in love, courage, and forgiveness.

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