

# Transformation and Extension: A Brief Discussion on the Evolution of Old and New Hollywood Films

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**Abstract:** *In the 1960s and 1970s, the change of the old and new historical periods occurred in Hollywood, which made the American film enter another glorious period after the golden age. The new Hollywood is the extension and development of the old Hollywood, it is the result of the change of the internal and social cultural environment of the film art. Taking *Gone with the Wind* and *Bonnie and Clyde* as examples, this paper discusses the evolution of the old and new Hollywood in narrative mode, value orientation, type evolution, expression techniques and other creative fields with both gender perspectives and social background. At the same time, it clarifies the change of Hollywood films in the historical transformation.*

**Keywords:** *New Hollywood; Classic Hollywood; Metamorphosis; Extension*

## 1. Introduction: Old and New "Movie Dream Factory"

It has been said that a history of world cinema is the history of Hollywood's conquest of the global film market; Others say that a history of world cinema is a history of anti-Hollywood cinema. From this we can see that Hollywood films occupy an extremely important position in the history of world cinema.

The film history usually divides Hollywood into two periods: the old and the new. The Old Hollywood (also known as Classic Hollywood) period is known as the "golden age" of American cinema from 1930 to 1960, which spanned several significant historical periods including the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War. After a decade of decline, the Hollywood film industry completed its transition to the New Hollywood film, under the influence of films by European authors, with Arthur Payne's *Bonnie and Clyde* as the boundary.

## 2. Classic Hollywood films -- Take *Gone With the Wind* as an example

Hollywood during the Classic Hollywood period was indeed a veritable "movie dream factory". No matter the filmmakers under the producer-centered system, the capital tycoons who realized the strategy of "vertical control", or the movie actors in the star system, they all enjoyed the dream of Hollywood being extravagant and rich. In terms of film content, Hollywood films have always provided the audience with the truth between drama and nature. At the same time, the typical characteristic of classic Hollywood is to frame the audience in a genre film, to tell the story according to a pure Aristotelian logic, to extend the time and space in the dream with light and continuous editing, to create the illusion of perfection.

### 2.1. The studio System

After independent producers teamed up to take down the film patent company, the American film industry entered a boom. By the 1930s, under the control of financial consortiums and the coordination of studios, Hollywood gradually formed eight powerful film companies which monopolized the production, distribution and projection of films. At the same time, a series of characteristics such as producer-centered system, vertical integration and star system resulted.[1]

The movie *Gone With the Wind* is a case in point. Serzenek, the producer who owned the rights to the film, was the son-in-law of MGM boss Meyer, and the two had absolute say in the production process. During the film's tumultuous filming, there were frequent confrontations between the producers and creators. Under the studio system, the result of the confrontation was three directors, several screenwriters, and the selection of male and female leads was tortuous. However, *Gone with the Wind*, as a film adapted from a classic novel, is undoubtedly a big production with the brand of epic drama, and

countless stars have flocked to it. Hollywood's men and women were keenly aware of this opportunity for fame and fortune, and the film did indeed sweep the Oscars in the end, winning Vivien Leigh, a generation of beauty, and setting a record high global boxoffice in film history.

## **2.2. Classic narrative pattern**

Bazin has said that Hollywood films have "all the characteristics of classical art". Classic Hollywood draws on the aesthetic principles and narrative patterns of 19th century novels and classical plays, rich in dramatic conflict. The development of the story is always gradual until the climax and happy ending at the end, forming a complete closed-loop structure. The technique of montage is the classic symbol of this period, and the natural and smooth continuous editing provides the audience with visual comfort. At the same time, with genre films as the label, there are often fixed patterns in theme, plot and character design.[2] For example, a gangster film will show the rise and glory of a gang of robbers until they fail. Westerns are always in the middle, there must be bloody and violent scenes; Film noir has a frustrated hero, a dark tone, and always a femme fatale. Feature films, on the other hand, tend to use classic narrative structures, starting with the character getting into trouble and ending with the character solving the problem and growing up. At the same time, the plot always takes the characters as the center of causality. The most important feature to promote the narrative is the characters' desire, and the external factors are only the catalyst of the plot.

As a four-hour love story war film, *Gone with the Wind* takes the changes of war as the booster under the large classic narrative structure, and describes the story of the growth of the heroine Scarlett in the continuous difficulties. This is a film against the background of war, but it portrays love and individualism in a vivid way. The structural story of *Gone with the Wind* is very dramatic, and the characters also have typical characteristics. The personalities of different characters are full of dramatic conflicts. For example, Rhett and Scarlett are similar in nature, which is in sharp contrast to ASHLEY and Melanie. The "happy reunion"[3] ending is also hopeful, celebrating the power of optimism.

## **3. The New Hollywood movie - Take Bonnie and Clyde**

The 1960s were a troubled time for American society. The war in Vietnam was not ending, and anti-war sentiment was rising in the country. Racial minorities, especially black people, were active as an important political force in the American society. Politics determined culture. Faced with domestic and foreign aggression, radical youth became suspicious and dissatisfied with the existing system, and irrational counterculture prevailed in the society. Out of the Beat Generation came the hippies, out of jazz came rock 'n' roll, and out of the ashes of Hollywood glory came the New Hollywood. After the golden age of Hollywood passed away, the American film also suffered an unprecedented winter. Eight major studios closed down or changed production one after another, and finally formed the situation that five major companies divided the world. At the same time, under the influence of European films and "authorship theory", a group of educated "film kids", [4] such as Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Spielberg, George Lucas, etc., began to create freely according to their own wishes, contributing a series of social and contemporary works.

When it comes to the watershed between old and new Hollywood, we have to mention *Bonnie and Clyde*, directed by Arthur Payne. We usually refer to this gangster road movie from 1967 as the birth symbol of the new Hollywood. *Bonnie and Clyde* follows the legendary careers of a pair of Bonnie and Clyde in the midst of an economic depression. It's a satire on the traditional Hollywood gangster movie myth -- the hero's motivations reflect the rebellion of the youth of society at large. *Bonnie and Clyde* are anarchists to the core, subverters of the traditional social order. But they represent the young people of their time, mad and confused. The film confronts the cruelty of real life with great strength and breadth, criticizing and protesting that era when life was restless and values were confused.

In terms of film language, *Bonnie and Clyde* obviously cuts the drama elements of classic Hollywood, and pays more attention to documentary and realistic style. At the beginning of the film, the data photos of the archetype characters are played, which emphasizes the historical and biographical color of the characters, and also highlights the authenticity of the narrative. In the way of expression, it also emphasizes the image function of the film, rather than the simple dream-making. The final scene of the film is a set of slow-motion shots in which the hero and heroine are sprayed with machine-gunfire for 30 seconds, their bodies shaking and crumbling like sunny dolls in the wind, when only seconds before they were alive and gazing at each other with affection. The aesthetic of such blunt violence was certainly pioneering at the time, and the treatment of the ending has since been imitated by many directors.

It is worth mentioning that after the development of New Hollywood in the 1980s, Hollywood commercial films with modern meanings began to appear and continue to this day. Outstanding representatives are Spielberg's "Jurassic" series and Lucas's "Star Wars" series. The growing use of stunt photography and digital production became a powerful tool to capture audiences' attention, and the Hollywood blockbuster model, which made full use of high technology, became popular. Nowadays, when people mention Hollywood, the first reaction will be directly associated with the American blockbuster, as if the author's film, which embodied the resistance and humanity, was only a dream in Hollywood history.

#### **4. The evolution of old and new Hollywood films**

In the creation of films, the filmmakers of New Hollywood hope to subvert the narrative strategy and studio system of classic Hollywood. With the development of The Times and politics, New Hollywood has transformed itself in the extension of classic Hollywood, showing differences with classic Hollywood in narrative mode, value orientation, type evolution and expression techniques.

##### **4.1. Narrative mode**

The classic narrative structure of classic Hollywood will not be repeated. Under the structural model of dramatic plots, the characters of classic Hollywood are also typed, and there are always two camps of positive characters and negative characters. After World War II, European films declined, while classic Hollywood films flourished. However, Hollywood had no reference for comparison. Overtime, there was a phenomenon of "parthenogenesis"[5] in its creation, such as the self-replication of genre films and the imitation of successful films like *Gone with the Wind*.

After the baptism of Italian neorealism and French New Wave, Hollywood found new ground. The new Hollywood reorganized and strengthened the classic Hollywood, broke the traditional continuity of time and space in the narrative mode, and subverted the straight-forward connection of the plot causal lines. Compared with classic Hollywood, New Hollywood is not only to force the director's ready-made ending on the audience, but also to seek open empathy for the story and open up deeper social significance. This approach also greatly enhances the documentary nature of the films. Unlike Scarlett and Melanie in *Gone With the Wind*, who are full of dramatic conflicts, Bonnie in *Bonnie and Clyde* is ordinary, discontented and at the bottom of society, fully embodying the neorealist appeal of "return me to the common man".

##### **4.2. Value orientations**

In terms of subject matter and subject matter, New Hollywood is undoubtedly a rebellion against classic Hollywood. During the period of Classic Hollywood, the United States promulgated the "Hays Code" to prohibit the shooting of social films. Influenced by this political factor and the studio system, classic Hollywood films rarely have a realistic tendency and are mostly conservative entertainment content far away from politics and reality. The new Hollywood, on the other hand, mostly shows strong criticism of social reality. The protagonists are mostly people who fight against the injustice of the environment, and their opposite is those positive heroes who have been praised in the past. However, due to the prevalence of the counterculture and the chaos of social order at that time, the protagonists who were out of the right track could gain the audience's empathy, stimulate the audience's strong reflection on the social reality, and envy and pursuit of another free, ideal and sincere life mode. Later, under the influence of the Vietnam War, New Hollywood produced a number of excellent films reflecting on the war. And in the 1970s, due to the Watergate scandal and other political scandals, New Hollywood also incubated black humor and political movies. The more and more open value environment gave the new Hollywood films a broader creative space and a stronger internal power.

##### **4.3. Genre Evolution**

In terms of genre evolution, new Hollywood films can best reflect the metamorphosis and extension of classic Hollywood. Genre is not only the fetters that new Hollywood tries to escape from, but also the new ones that it develops and integrates. Classic Hollywood solidified genres have solidified audiences, and most of the Oscars can be won by high-investment, big-budget drama films. *Gone With the Wind*, for example, swept the Oscars and won the global boxoffice. But by the 1980s, the family ethic film had become an enduring Oscar fixture. In the process of rapid genre evolution, there was a new trend of genre

fusion. *Fatal Attraction*, born in 1987, is the product of the fusion of family ethics, romance, psychological crime and horror films. With the further improvement of the commerciality of Hollywood films, contemporary Hollywood has regarded genre fusion as the main direction of genre evolution. It is for this reason that the "super mixed bag" such as *Forrest Gump* appears.

#### **4.4. Performance Techniques**

New Hollywood films attach great importance to the development of film skills, especially the artistic skills and authenticity of camera language. Therefore, in the new Hollywood movies, various angles and different speeds of jump, freeze, shot are very rich, thus strengthening the visual impact, more beautiful film.

In response to the Italian neorealist slogan "take the camera to the street", the shooting of new Hollywood films pays more attention to natural reality. For example, when the two met in *Bonnie and Clyde*, they used a handheld motion camera to set the scene with only a passer-by sitting on along bench while other shops were closed, which was a real metaphor and satire of the changes in citizens' lives brought by economic depression. In the art of photography, different from the classic Hollywood "perfect light", the new Hollywood uses more natural light effects. At the same time, the New Hollywood has also changed from the previous "photographic composition" to "motion shooting", which also reflects the freedom and liberation of the film creators themselves.

#### **5. Conclusion -- "New wine in an old bottle"**

New Hollywood is a metamorphosis and extension of classic Hollywood. It drags the glorious and lonely Hollywood out of the mire and makes Hollywood shine again. The new Hollywood reconstructs the old narrative mode and the solidified perception process, which is the transformation of breaking and rebuilding; But its reliance on genre constraints and the studio system is still an extension of classic Hollywood. The creation of the new Hollywood is embodied in going into the system to find itself. He adheres to the system, but it is a new wine in an old bottle, so as to get a new clay. In any case, the insurmountable technical and artistic success of the old and new Hollywood shows the strong vitality of American movies. Hollywood, with its traditional and modern interweaving, is still a "movie dream factory" that cannot fail. However, in the evolution and unchanging of old and new Hollywood, we may gain some common experience and explore a new way for the transformation and extension of Chinese film.

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