

Multidimensional Study of "Friends" Based on Narrative Art

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Abstract: *Since its launch in 1994, Friends has become a classic sitcom with its unique narrative structure, characterization, and light-hearted humor, and has set a benchmark for sitcoms by showing friendship and love in urban life, attracting many scholars to study it from multiple dimensions. This study analyzes the narrative art and charm of Friends in depth from sitcom structural features and time brief, narrative structure, narrative color, and characterization respectively. The study explores the important value of fragmentary narrative, closed structure, and multi-clue narrative techniques used in the storytelling of the movie, which also constitute an indispensable highlight in the creation of sitcoms; and this paper digs out the uniqueness of the characterization of Friends compared with that of traditional sitcoms, and the innovative way of character portrayal creates a flashpoint for the show that can not be ignored. In its thirty years of broadcasting, Friends has not only provided profound creative inspiration for the global sitcom field but also become a source of new narrative techniques for many works to learn from. This paper aims to analyze the classic elements of Friends on its 30th anniversary, to provide solid theoretical support for the creation of sitcoms in the future.*

Keywords: *American Sitcoms, Friends, Narrative Structure, Characterization*

1. Introduction

Since its inception in 1994, Friends, a classic American sitcom, has won a wide audience and lasting attention worldwide thanks to its unique narrative structure, distinctive characterization, and light-hearted humor. The entire ten seasons of the show not only showcased friendship, love, and philosophy of life in urban life but also set a benchmark in the production and artistic expression of sitcoms. Through multi-stranded narratives, fragmented episodes, and closed structures, combined with the character's growth over the decade, the show has become an important object in academic research, attracting many scholars to explore it from multiple dimensions, including narratology, cultural studies, and psychology.

This paper first makes a preliminary understanding and exploration of the structural characteristics and time-brief form of sitcoms to lay a foundation for the subsequent research. After initially constructing a cognitive framework of American sitcoms, the study further focuses on the classic series Friends, analyzing in depth its distinctive narrative structure, narrative color and emotional expression, rich characterization, and unconventional linear character growth design, and analyzing the outstanding achievements and unique charm of Friends as a representative of American sitcoms in several aspects. In this way, this analyze the outstanding achievement and unique charm of the American sitcom represented by Friends from various aspects. This process not only deepens the understanding of the narrative art of the show but also provides rich research perspectives and theoretical support for sitcoms[1].

2. Brief Overview of Sitcom Structure and Time

Scholars at home and abroad have their own opinions on the concept of "Situation comedy", this paper mainly focuses on the American sitcom Friends for discussion, concerning Western scholars Mintz Larry's research, "This is a half-hour-long plot-oriented television series, the characters in the play set in stone." The main characteristics of sitcoms are classified as sitcoms with humor, sitcoms with relatively fixed airtime and length of airtime, sitcoms with relatively fixed character setups, sitcoms with relatively fixed scene setups, and accompanied by laughter or canned laughter from a live audience. All of these characteristics are represented in the current study of Friends[2].

Friends began airing in 1994 and ran for ten years, taking the form of filming as it went along. With

this filming mode, the narrative time of the movie is consistent with the real filming chronological order, and after ten years of broadcasting, the characters in the show have grown together for ten years, for example, the six old friends spent ten years of Thanksgiving together in the show.

3. Analysis of Narrative Structure in Friends

3.1 Fragmentary Narrative

Sitcoms are characterized by relatively fixed broadcasting time and duration, relatively fixed character settings, and relatively fixed scene settings. Relatively speaking, sitcoms are unable to use too many or too fancy artistic techniques in their narrative structure, and most sitcoms adopt a fragmentary narrative structure to complete the narrative of each episode. Each episode is an independent story unit, and there may be clues or emotional connections between episodes, but the plots are not connected. This easy narrative brings viewers a unique and relaxing experience, which can be watched without the need to watch it in order like a TV series, and there will be a simple and complete story when you click on an episode of a sitcom at your own pace, which provides viewers with a relaxing and joyful viewing experience. This mode provides viewers with a relaxing and joyful viewing experience, which is also more convenient for groups with busy lives to entertain themselves in a fragmented way[3].

3.2 Closed structure

Friends adopt a closed-loop narrative structure, which is reflected in the narrative as "status quo - status quo destruction - status quo restoration", or the closure of "beginning, middle and end", so to speak.

Take for example the first episode of the first season of Friends. The episode is called "Monica's New Roommate", and as you can tell from the title, the main focus of the episode is the arrival of Rachel, "Monica's new roommate". The episode starts with "Monica's high school friend Rachel skips out on her wedding and runs to the Central Park Cafe to find Monica without any help", and then goes on to "Rachel's attempt to get a job at Monica's apartment fails, and after the interview, she uses her father's credit card to make purchases as usual, and her friends point out that she is not getting rid of her past life." As the beginning and the climax of the episode, the climax of the episode is also the center of the episode, which is to express that "Rachel, with the encouragement of her friends, cuts up all the credit cards related to her past family, and says goodbye to her past life as a young lady with this action. ", and finally "the friends together welcome Rachel to the real world 'Welcome to this real world, it sucks, but you'll love it. '" The main story plot follows naturally, with a clear explanation of the ins and outs and skillful use of closed structure.

If look at the narrative structure of a single episode, or the narrative structure of ten seasons, it's easy to see that the development of the entire series is also a closed structure. Comparing the situation of each person at the beginning, the end of the show is the realization of their intentions, and each person's storyline and destiny also get a happy ending through the "beginning and end". Especially obvious is the relationship line between Rachel and Ross (referred to as Double R), from their love after reunion to their breakup, their bumpy road of love develops in waves, with ups and downs, but in the end, they finally become a couple, which is a reflection of the closed structure that breaks down and restores itself in the end.

One of the purposes of the audience to watch sitcoms is to relax and de-stress through funny episodes. The closed structure makes the story clear and easy to understand, and enables the audience to get the humor with the least amount of "effort".

3.3 Multi-clue narratives

In contrast to some sitcoms that will utilize a single thread for a more direct narrative, such as "Martial Arts" which will choose one character to be the protagonist of a unit and the other characters will be dealt with in a weaker way in that unit, an episode of Friends is a cross-narrative of the stories of different characters from multiple periods, with story threads that are both ancillary and dominant, and the characters finally coming together in the same space and time.

Using the sixth episode of season 6 as an example, the episode is mainly a cross-narrative with stories that take place in two spaces at the same time. The first is the last night of the move when Chandler is worried that Joey won't have enough income to support himself and tries to give Joey money to help him out, but Joey's pride won't accept Chandler's kindness and Chandler tries to give Joey \$1,500 by any means

necessary. The second is the last night of the girls' stay, when Rachel and Monica, who are not happy with each other because of the move, begin to express their frustrations with each other during their roommate period under Phoebe's misguided guidance, and eventually resolve their conflicts by sharing their feelings for each other. In addition to these two clues, there is Ross to avoid Monica's moving arrangements, lies that his son Ben at home needs to take care of and some witty vignettes to assist, the three threads of the vein cross over occurs, and finally bring together, Rachael moving, Chandler and Monica living together. The rich multilinear narrative structure makes the whole episode fuller and richer. This narrative technique skillfully realizes the synergy effect of " $1+1>2$ ", i.e., while maintaining the compactness of the narrative, it greatly enhances the interest and information of the story, so that the viewers can experience a richer and more fascinating plot development within a limited period. Plot development. This is also the charm of the narrative structure of Friends.

4. Character Development and Growth in Friends

4.1 *The Shaping and Growth of Joey*

In sitcoms, the story is driven by the development of the characters, and at the same time, if you want to achieve a higher comedy effect in a fixed time and space, you need the language and action of the characters, and the funny comedy atmosphere cannot be created without the performance of the characters. One of the purposes of creating sitcoms is to provide services for the general public, and good characters are one of the important reasons for attracting the public to watch, so characterization is very important in sitcoms, and excellent characterization can add color to sitcoms. However, because sitcoms are different from ordinary TV series, which can be richly shaped into a main character through large episodes, the fixed characteristics of sitcoms lead to the need for distinctive and fixed character traits of the characters in the work, and their "unwavering" character is easy to recognize and remember, as Mick Bowers said in his book, "Only when I'm laughing", that "this kind of characterization is a very important part of sitcoms. Mick Bowes said in "Only When I Laugh" that "the character of such characters is a static closed structure", and they are called "flat characters" in "Faces of Fiction". Looking at Chinese and foreign sitcoms, it is not difficult to see that many characters have static characters, and these characters are constantly reinforcing the characteristics of their character to create laughs and attract laughs episode after episode. "Flat characters" highlights the distinctive expressive power and formal beauty that can add to the narrative charm of sitcoms, and is also a commonly used artistic tool.

Although "flat" characterization is hard to avoid, the six-person gang in Friends has made a breakthrough in American sitcoms. They are no longer characters with a single characteristic that is constantly enlarged and solidified. Throughout ten seasons, they have all developed their personalities, and their distinctive personalities carry a certain depth of humanity.

In many analyses, Joey is often defined as a "flat character" in the same way that sitcom characters are generally portrayed. Joey is the most simple and distinctive character among the six, unlike the others who have more regular jobs and do nothing every day, Joey has a mediocre career as an actor; he is always slow to talk or has his naïve views when everyone is talking and laughing; he has no fixed partner in his relationship and is a playboy who hangs out with beautiful women. When everyone is talking and laughing, he is always slow or has his naïve point of view; as for his relationship, he doesn't have a fixed partner and hangs out with beautiful women like a playboy. These characteristics are portrayed over and over again in episodes, just like in a traditional sitcom, creating the stereotype that viewers will think of these characteristics once Joey is mentioned. While this is true for a single episode in the "micro" sense, in the "macro" sense, Joey is a special character full of human charisma.

Joey is a character who acts like an older brother and a child at times. He is loyal, kind, and "protective" of his friends and sister. To remain friends with Phoebe, he can give up dating Phoebe's twin sister; Joey has traditional ideas and fantasies about family, and he asks his father to be devoted to his mother; when Ross and Chandler are bullied, he will step in for his two best friends to drive away the bullies; after learning that his sister is pregnant, he, who looks like a playboy, asks his sister's boyfriend to give her "a home". Joey is a "different kind of brother" who loves the people he loves in his way. At the same time, Joey is also a "child" who is soft to the touch. For example, he cares about being Ross's best man because he thinks it proves that they are best friends; when Chandler moves in with Monica, he doesn't want to let go of his soulmate who has lived with him for many years, even though they have gone from living in one apartment to living in two apartments across the hall from one another; and he is equally childlike and naïve in his preparations for Chandler and Monica's wedding. As Chandler and Monica prepare for their wedding, he insists, with the same childlike naïveté, that only he can be their witness, Joey's heart longs

for dependence; he wants to be taken care of, and he wants to be loved by his friends.

Joey's confusion about relationships can also be seen in Joey's intimate relationships, where he is confused and wavering in his love life, which is also a sign of his childlike uncertainty about himself and his desire for dependence. In the later episodes, Joey has several stable relationships that are different from his previous flirtations and pleasures, and the objects of his affection are all mature women who are independent and sensible, which also shows that Joey is still a growing child, and he longs for the sense of security and stability that this kind of mature women can bring to him.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that Joey is by no means a simple "flat character", in the portrayal of Joey's character, the creative team has retained the traditional sitcom character features are constantly reinforced in the traditional shaping techniques, but Joey's character also has complexity, richness, and he has developmental changes, the audience can see his colorful inner world and exaggerated extroverted personality. His colorful inner world and exaggeratedly outgoing personality. Although Joey does not complete a relatively complete "restoration of the status quo" closed structure like the other characters, Joey grows and becomes stable due to his career success and emotional maturity in the later stage of his life, and this is also an ending that converges to a complete structure[4].

4.2 Rachel's molding and growth

Rachel's change in Friends is a reflection of the positive themes that Friends is trying to convey; when Rachel's character first appeared, she represented the "upper class" rich girl who could have lived a life of luxury with her dentist fiancé, but that life was stable and boring and lacked passion, as she says, "If I don't want to be a shoe-in, I'll be a shoe out. But that life is stable and boring and lacks passion, as she says, "What if I don't want to be a shoe? What if I want to be a bag or a hat?" She escapes and chooses to seek out another life full of unknowns, choosing to embrace a different, ordinary version of herself in her colorful twenties. Unlike her five friends, who longed for a stable life, she let go of the shackles of her previous "stability" and came out into the real world to crash into a new life. Rachel embodies the value of trying, failing, and striving in your twenties, and she seems to lead the audience into the unique world of Friends. Rachel is a guide to show viewers that destabilization doesn't have to be scary. Throughout ten seasons, Rachel's life has progressed slowly, but Rachel's heart is strong and she has found a purpose for her career; she has split with Ross to gain true independence of her own. Rachel has proved to the audience that decisions made in your twenties can change the direction of your life, and her growth from pampered bridesmaid to sophisticated supervisor and hot mom is something that can inspire the public to go out and make brave decisions. Rachel's rich transformation throughout ten seasons is a departure from traditional sitcoms, and it's an excellent change of pace for Friends to break with tradition and be innovative.

Through the six unique and vivid images of the Friends Gang of Six, the audience can see the Friends creative team in the character of the deeper portrayal of the expansion and in-depth, they are a person with artistic charisma and profound human nature, so the characterization of the sitcom, but also irreplaceable aesthetic significance. Sitcoms with the ability to explore the depth of characterization give the audience more "self" thinking and humanistic care, which also greatly increases the style of the sitcom[5].

5. Narrative Colors and Emotional Expression in Friends

In the process of analyzing the classic American sitcom Friends, it is not difficult to find out that although the sitcom upholds the principle of simplicity in character setting and scene construction, the characters and their environments in the drama all display a distinctive sense of color. Phoebe, for example, often wears colorful and outrageous dresses or suits with a series of exaggerated and exquisite accessories, which together create a distinctive and unconventional image of the character, while Ross, as the professor, is dressed in a relatively monotonous and subdued manner, forming a stark contrast. Monica's residence also reflects the subtle use of color, with purple walls and bright bright decorations. The red sofa at Central Park Cafe is an important symbol of the unfolding of the plot and emotional exchanges. The use of color in Friends is not only a visual aesthetic consideration but also a visual expression of the mood and atmosphere of the story. Bright colors can visually bring more positive energy to the audience, while dark colors can render a negative or sad atmosphere, which is how the creative team grasps the emotional expression of sitcoms[6].

6. Conclusions

This article analyzes the subtleties of the narrative art of *Friends*, based on the consistency of the narrative time and the shooting time, it skillfully integrates the three major techniques of fragmentary narrative, closed structure, and multi-clue narrative, which are intertwined with each other and interlocked, telling the story of the protagonists of the group of six clearly and vividly, and giving full play to the creative ability of the cast and crew on top of the preservation of the traditional characterization techniques to shape the classic image of the group of six, the article especially focuses on the growth trajectory and profound transformation of Joey and Rachel, the two non-traditional sitcom characters. The article especially focuses on the growth trajectory and profound transformation of Joey and Rachel, the two non-traditional sitcom characters, revealing their unique charm and depth in character development; at the same time, the article also briefly analyzes the unique narrative color and emotional expression of the show, which together constitute the show's unique artistic appeal and are the key reasons for its popularity and enduring popularity after three decades.

This study provides several unique contributions. First, it fills a gap in sitcom structure research, offering new insights into American sitcoms' fragmented and closed-loop structures, particularly as represented in *Friends*. Secondly, by intertwining character growth with narrative structure, it expands traditional understandings of character development in sitcoms. The study also sheds light on the dual role of "narrative color" in enhancing emotional expression, deepening the analysis of aesthetic choices that underpin *Friends*' storytelling. Finally, this paper provides a solid theoretical foundation and practical references for future sitcom creation, drawing lessons from *Friends*' success to inspire innovative approaches to narrative structure and character portrayal in future sitcoms.

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