Visual Representation of War Themes in American Cinema

- A Case Study of the Evolution of War Films

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Abstract: Throughout American cinematic history, war-themed films have captivated audiences with their distinctive visual representation. Since the release of the first war film in 1951, war movies gradually evolved to become an essential genre within American cinema. These films not only entertain but also convey the cruelty of war, the fragility of human nature, and the preciousness of peace through visual storytelling. This paper delves into three distinct periods: the early development, mid-development, and contemporary development stages, analyzing the evolution and visual representation of American war films, along with their impact on audiences and society. Furthermore, they reflect the prevailing values and political stances of their time and, with the evolving society, gradually target female audiences, influencing film creation and thematic choices. This study aims to offer insights into the visual representation of American war-themed films and their effects on audiences and society, providing valuable references to understand the significance and role of war films in American cinematic history.

Keywords: war movie, history, American war

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on American cinema to explore the visual representation of war themes in film and analyze its development over different periods and its impact on audiences and society. Presents the origins of American war films, emphasizing how they reflect the zeitgeist and political trends of their respective eras. The paper is divided into three main sections that discuss the evolution of American war films. Firstly, the early development section examines the film "Patton," a representative work that aimed to stabilize morale and boost patriotism during the Vietnam War by depicting a heroic general. Secondly, the mid-development section discusses "Platoon," which starkly exposes the ugliness of war and the immense pressure soldiers endure, leading to profound reflections on the meaning of war. Lastly, the contemporary development section explores "Pearl Harbor," which incorporates emotional elements to cater to female audiences, making war films more diverse and captivating. The paper then delves into the visual presentation methods used in these films, exemplified by "Saving Private Ryan." It highlights how director Steven Spielberg employed advanced cinematography techniques, providing audiences with a realistic and impactful war experience, and making them perceive the brutality of war and the fragility of humanity. Lastly, the paper examines the impact of war-themed films on audiences and society. These films evoke

viewers' emotions and stimulate reflections on war by depicting authentic war scenes and character fates. such films can promote anti-war sentiment and the desire for a peaceful settlement [1].

2. The Evolution of American War Films

2.1. Early Development

Representing the early development of American war films is the iconic movie "Patton" (1970), which premiered during the Vietnam War, a time when America was deeply embroiled in conflict. The film aimed to boost domestic morale and raise patriotism by showcasing the image of the brave and fearless General Patton. At that time, a significant portion of the soldiers had lost enthusiasm for the war, and anti-war sentiment was on the rise. However, "Patton" instilled soldiers with renewed combat confidence by presenting the image of a courageous general. Additionally, the film sought to exhibit the mightiness of American generals against foreign forces. Regardless of the motivation, the ultimate objective of this film was to lead America to victory. Director Steven Spielberg uses advanced photography technology to let those who have never participated in the war and have no concept of war feel the perspective of soldiers under the exquisite animation and shooting techniques [2]. The film portrayed General Patton's chivalric ideals, reminiscent of a 16th-century Don Quixote figure, symbolizing the spirit of overcoming challenges and maintaining unwavering faith. It inspired audiences to remain optimistic, resolute, and courageous in the face of adversity and challenges. Consequently, war-themed films during this period were imbued with uplifting emotional portrayals.

2.2. Mid-Development

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Vietnam War had ended, but its effects lingered on. The scars and aftermath of war continued to impact society, influencing a different approach to visual representation in war films. A significant example of this approach is the film "Platoon" (1986). Unapologetically, the film laid bare the ugliness of war and the enormous pressure borne by soldiers. It emphasized the harm and suffering caused by war, without romanticizing or glorifying it. Through authentic war scenes and vivid character portrayals, the film prompted profound reflections on the meaning and value of war. Its raw depiction of war's horrors and cruelty deeply affected audiences, spurring them to contemplate the necessity of war and cherish peace.

2.3. Contemporary Development

As society evolved, female audiences gradually gained importance in the film market, leading war films to incorporate emotional elements to cater to their preferences. A prime example is "Pearl Harbor" (2001). In addition to showcasing war scenes, the film interweaves a love story, enriching war films with emotional depth and diversity. This more inclusive visual representation style attracted a broader audience, opening up new avenues for war films' development. To really know what it's like to be at war. Using an immersive approach to empathize with the audience, generates thought, making it a powerful and influential war film [3].

3. Visual Representation Methods

Visual representation is a pivotal aspect of war films. Taking "Saving Private Ryan" as an example, director Steven Spielberg utilized advanced cinematography techniques, employing close-ups and personalized perspectives to depict realistic and harrowing war scenes. Audiences felt immersed in the film, experiencing the brutality of war and the vulnerability of humanity. The continuous innovation in visual presentation allows war films to realistically recreate war's settings and

atmosphere, enhancing their watch ability and emotional impact. The movie Pearl Harbor added an emotional line because people at that time did a survey and found that the proportion of women who watched the movie was twice that of men, so they added an emotional line to the movie [4].

3.1. War Themed Films Historically

War themed films often blend fiction with historical events to create compelling narratives. While some movies strive for accuracy, others prioritize entertainment value and may take creative liberties with historical facts. This is precisely because the more entertaining, more emotional films will be more attractive to people. Attract more people to watch. In this way, the director and screenwriter want more people to watch historical movies and understand the history behind the movies. Most of the good war movies made will ensure the complete presentation of historical truth while being full of entertainment and will not distort history or change the facts.

3.2. Society's Perception of War Themed Films

War films can shape public opinion and influence how people think about war. Because their plots are not only the cruelty of war but also more emotional lines that can arouse people's empathy [5]. Being able to empathize with the audience is what a good movie must do. Good war films evoke emotions, provoke discussion, and encourage reflection on the consequences of armed conflict. Once people bring their feelings into the film, they start to think about the deeper emotions involved. This is very helpful in getting them thinking about war. Different people will have different ideas, once they have their own ideas about war. The collision of ideas will subtly affect the general knowledge of society, thus affecting the change of society's views on war films [6].

3.3. Expression of Emotion

"Saving Private Ryan" has been praised for its realistic and immersive depiction of combat [6]. Director Steven Spielberg uses advanced photography technology to let those who have never participated in the war and have no concept of war feel the perspective of soldiers under the exquisite animation and shooting techniques [7]. To really know what it's like to be at war. Using an immersive approach to empathize with the audience, generates thought, making it a powerful and influential war film [8].

4. Discussion

While war films have traditionally attracted a male audience, contemporary developments like Pearl Harbor have broadened the genre's appeal by incorporating emotional elements that appeal to a more diverse audience. The movie Pearl Harbor added an emotional line because people at that time did a survey and found that the proportion of women who watched the movie was twice that of men, so they added an emotional line to the movie [4]. The aim is to attract more women to watch war films. It's really about bringing movies of different genres to a wider audience. Make war films accessible to all people at all levels of society. To really make war movies accessible to everyone. Ideas to change society. So war movies are by no means exclusively for men. Some war films, such as Platoon, confront the harsh realities of war, prompting viewers to reflect on the costs of war and advocate for peace. In countries with frequent wars, soldiers are tired of daily fighting, and people in their families hope that their loved ones who are out fighting can return safely as soon as possible [9]. At such a time, if there is a movie can directly tell them about the cruelty of war. The anti-war sentiment can be amplified by the gory facts and the way in which real war situations are presented. So, such films can promote anti-war sentiment and the desire for a peaceful settlement. Directors

have leveraged advanced cinematography techniques to immerse audiences in the cruel realities of war and the fragility of human nature [10].

5. Conclusion

The visual representation of war themes in American cinema remains an important and complex topic. From inspiring patriotism and boosting morale to promoting deep introspection and emotional expression, war films have displayed diverse characteristics across different periods. With societal developments and changing audience demands, film production has adapted to contemporary trends, incorporating emotional elements to engage broader viewership. War-themed films stimulate viewers' contemplation and reflections on war, fostering a greater appreciation for peace and life. Moreover, these films serve as a reflection of prevalent values and political stances while bearing witness to history and cultural heritage. Overall, war-themed films play a significant role in American cinematic history, profoundly impacting audiences and society. As society continues to evolve, future war films will likely continue to focus on themes of humanity and peace, conveying positive social values, and contributing to the advancement of human civilization.

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