

Diversity of Narrative Functionality in Short Fiction Films

Jamal Al-Deen Jamal Lutfi

Jamaljojo2000@gmail.com

Professor Dr. Barrak A. Ahmad Zaki

barrakalmudarris@cofarts.uobaghdad.edu.iq

University of Baghdad - College of Fine Arts - Department of Film and Television

Summary: 1- Finding a balance between using and employing complex narrative techniques and clearly conveying the idea to the recipient in short fiction films.

2- Finding solutions to the problems of time gaps in the narrative building of a short film.

3- Revealing the various narrative functions within the structure of the short film.

The research relied on a (case study) represented in a film sample according to a descriptive analysis because it fits the nature of the research depending on a clear and specific tool, and the research community is short fiction films, and the research results are:

- Control of time and intensification is the biggest challenge that the short film maker is faced with in order to make a coherent narrative building according to a balanced plot that is not naive nor complex.

Keywords: Diversity of narrative functionality - short fiction film.

Methodological Framework

The Research Problem

It is about the diversity of methods for the flow of narrative information in a story within a relatively short time line and the difficulties faced by writers of short films in employing those complexes (non-classical) narrative styles / formats by manipulating the sequence of the components of the narrative text in a period not exceeding 30 minutes (the time of the short film) and conveying the meaning in a way that can be clearly understood by the recipient.

- To what extent can the writer diversify the chronological formulation of the narrative texts in a short film?
- How does the writer balance in his narrative construction between his individual creative awareness and the collective awareness of his audience without entering the experimental area?
- What are the ways of using and employing narrative formats in the short film?
- What are the challenges that the writer faces in telling events in complex narrative formats within the short film?

Second: The importance of research:

Shedding light on new possibilities in the ways of dealing with the story and telling it in the short fiction film and finding solutions for the writer to balance between the aesthetic function and the philosophical function of the narrative structure of the story.

Third: - Research objectives:

- Finding a balance between using and employing complex narrative formats and clearly conveying the idea to the recipient in short fiction films.

- Finding solutions to the problems of time gaps in the narrative building of the short film.

- Revealing the various narrative functions within the structure of the short film.

Fourth: Research limits

Short fiction films with complex narrative formats (non-sequential).

Fifth: Defining terms

Diversity of narration functionality: the multiplicity of ways of information flow and events in the narrative building and the purposes of narrative patterns within the film, whether in descriptive expression to present the features of characters, places, clothes, existential situations, psychological features or the aesthetic dimension in the narrative discourse of the story.

Short Narrative Film: Feature films whose duration is (5-30) minutes.

The second chapter / The Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

The first topic: Narrative patterns

Narration is one of the most important things in the structure of storytelling, whether it is speech or an image, and by that it acquires its utmost importance in the process of producing and developing events until the end. We can define Narration as the process of narrating events arranged in a chronological sequence. The chronological order carries the context of presenting the events in formats that carry what is apparent and what is indicative, although many of the definitions of narration take a different direction, especially in the process of chronological succession, our understanding of narration may be based on the fact that it is an action based on the recovery of a story or incident. (Maher Majeed, 2005, p. 36)

The researcher believes that the film narration goes beyond these limits, so that sometimes it becomes a work based on telling a story or an incident that could be in the future or even may be the brainchild of its narrator who excels in defining the form and content, relying on the technique of narrative formats in determining the form of the relationship between time and place and the event, all being controlled by the narrator.

As for the narrator, there are some prerequisites for the graphic narration of the cinematic story that must be present, which may take several sites and adopt different points of view:

- 1- He knows everything.
- 2- Participant in the event.
- 3- He witnesses the event.
- 4- Objective and narrates events as an outsider.

Cinema has been closely linked with literature since its beginnings in the types and methods of narration, and the forms of cinematic narration.

-The narration by the first person (the one who knows everything) may take two forms in the cinema:

- 1- A subjective visual view of the person and their voice in the vocal tract.
- 2- Another point of view (may be objective) and the main character's voice is in the vocal tract. The main character may direct his eyes to the camera (artistic style).

- The camera can take the point of view of one of the characters in the film, so that the recipient becomes the main character. There is an experience for Montgomery (The Lady of the Lake) which is a self-shot throughout the duration of the film, which did not succeed due to its professionalism and satisfaction of the viewer in portraying the main character. (Janetti, 1981, p. 69)

-The third narrator is frequently used in documentary films. He is an anonymous commentator who tells us the background of the character or the central event.

-The objective narrator is more separate, as he does not enter the consciousness of the characters, but rather tells us events from the outside.

We can define narration: narrating events in a specific temporal and spatial sequence with the condition of the presence of the narrator (anything that tells or presents a story, whether it is a text or performance or a mixture of that), so accordingly, novels, films, comics ... etc are narratives, and narration studies how is the audience addressed by the events of the story?

As for the story: sequential events that include characters, the events can be natural and unnatural (for example floods and car accidents), and the characters intervene as factors that cause events or are affected by events (beneficiaries or victims).

The narrative text consists of the signifier and the signified;

The signifier is the discourse (the way of presentation).

The signified is the story (the sequence of verbs).

Narrative Discourse: Analyzes the stylistic choices that determine the form or reality of a narrative text (or performance in the case of films and plays).

Storytelling: In contrast to discourse narration, it focuses on action units that knit and arrange the current of events in a path of main ideas, motives and plot threads, where the narrative novel represents a mixture of (telling words) and (narrating actions). (Jan Manfred, 2011, p. 15)

Hence, we conclude that narration in cinema is the flow of information and events through the sequence of shots and scenes within the film in a certain format, a process that requires the presence of the narrator who may take several locations and levels within the cinematic story..

The types of narration can be summarized in general as follows:

1- Objective narrative: in which the narrator stands at the same distance (equal) with all the characters (neutral), the characters are like puppets of his manufacture, and the events are presented from the narrator's point of view and he does not adopt anyone's point of view and we do not know the identity of the narrator (Mainly used in classical narratives).

2- Self-narration: the narrator is a person in which he is a participant in the events and belongs to the time and place of the events and the main chapter is located on it. The narrator tells the story of the characters from his own point of view (not objective).

The narration allows the manipulation of the components of the narrative structure of the story in general according to artistic, dramatic and aesthetic necessities within the framework of a new narrative building.

Narrative text: It is the manifestation of the process of succession of events in a linear causal way, similar to the nature of physical life, in which the events escalate logically. (The Russian Formalists, Tomashevsky, The Theory of Purposes, p. 180)

Narrative building: It is a process of events in a non-causal and non-linear manner that depends on technical necessities that the creator sees in an artistic way (formation of precedents, suffixes, and setbacks).

(Authors Group, 1982, p. 181)

The narrative formats are:

The eventual spatiotemporal relationships revealed by the narrator to the recipient

(The total set of laws that govern the regularity of the flow of narrative information), each format is a set of narrative conditions that distinguish it from other formats, as the narrative formats represent a chronological structure in a special way for the events listed, and the result of which determines several narrative forms, in which the form of the story narrated varies, between the classic, modern and contemporary storytelling, so that the narrator's shape and position within the space of the cinematic film are linked to the type of narrative pattern, especially since each narrative pattern requires a narrator adapted to it, achieving the initiation of the narrative process to the end. (Maher Majid, Time Structures in the Narrative of the Movie, pg. 60)

At the same time, the narrative construction according to the formulation of the narrative texts chronologically, determines the work of the levels of focus within the narration of the film, relying on the narrative heritage, the narrative formats varied, accompanied by the great additions that cinema has formed from its beginnings until now. Several types of cinematic narrative formats have appeared in literary and cinematic criticism. (Odith, 1985, p. 56)

Inner focus: The technique of viewing something from the point of view of an inner character in a story.

The inner operator: the character that we present events through his vision.

Operator: A person who focuses his attention and his perceptual senses on something.

The second topic: the structure of the short film:

The short film is considered a piece of art that has its own peculiarities and aesthetics, so the creative director fears the short film because it is a bet that has its own labyrinths. Since it's not a story nor a poem but a visual narrative with basic cinematic rules and creating a short film requires extreme focus. Dealing with it with ease or arbitrariness leads to a result that will be a disaster, especially for those who put in it more than it can bear and their work might have the seeds of a long film, both in terms of time duration or in terms of the overlapping and complexity of themes. (Salah, 2011, p. 65)

The short film is an independent art in itself, an art based on the situation, and not on the narrative construction based on the plot like the long film, where the plot creates the event and pushes the narration and the story of the long film forward, as the short film has a set of characteristics that make it distinct and unique from the rest of the other cinematic genres In terms of temporal and spatial narrative space, visual condensation, cinematic discourse close to abstraction, if not abstract, and a flow of meaningful images that are linked to each other, to produce a meaning that prompts the recipient to create his own meaning according to his interaction with the film, or to elicit other meanings for these flowing images. (Taher, 2007, p. 63)

The recipient waits every minute or every second of the short film for new information. The shots are focused and cannot bear omission, and this is what required the short film to impose a system of its own. Then created a group of festivals, forums and television programs to present it in special shows. The problem of the short film seems to be a subject of renewed controversy. By renewing the abstract film

reading, this formal reading that does not search in the film except for (story), the story, the agonizing anxiety that summarizes the object in that it is a storytelling being. A broader framework when the film is analyzed as a type of reception, and thus a series of receptions will be formed, perhaps in some way related to the same story.

So... there is someone who tells and someone who is being told ... and the stories the Thousand and One Nights are indicative of this intertwined pattern of narratives and of abstract narrative construction. Then the existence of a voracious being for tales fond of happy endings was established, drawn to a Western stereotype that empties any form of its content except Narrative content.

The study of the short film raises several issues that remain linked in its entirety to the concept and the essential preoccupations that this type of film can employ or work on, and consequently the limited expressive tools to form the film world of the short film.

Some may see it as a realistic embodiment of a certain humane phenomenon, Others demand the film to provide an integrated aesthetic vision with its narrative and dramatic components. (Maher Majid, 2005, p. 95)

However, despite the short film's short temporal nature, and the adventurous spirit that it can take, this does not put it in a comfortable position to present its vision and reflect an aspect of the worlds of its director and writer in focused shots that do not bear the omission of allusions and do not allow disposing seconds at the expense of the extreme accuracy in extending the issue and creating the knot and then the end, all this within a specific time and place, either attracting and enchanting the viewer from the first moments or dropping him into monotony and alienating him, and the experiences of cinematic writing range in general, and we will not stop here at any specific experiences, between two models: (See: Izz al-Din al-Wafi, b, c, p. 65)

1- Realism that tries to carry a message and provide answers according to the theory of simulation, and a tight plot with a straight narrative line, where it often draws its spirit from the documentary vision of reality as a reference and a goal.

2- An aesthetic that makes the film a subject for experimentation and raising questions according to the theory of beauty of Hegel, where it leaves an impression on the eye according to the mechanisms of creating and receiving experimental ones, in which the artistic and formal dimension is attended at the expense of the content.

Each of the two models certainly bears a conception of the nature of creativity and the writer and director's vision of the world and the meaning of the cinematic experience. Here we make a link to point out that the quality of writing calls for a style of reading, as the first is linear certainty and is characterized by the ability to consume, the second is overly easy to make things at the expense of intellectual and artistic effort.

Short film features:

The short film, in addition to the temporal characteristic that remains attached to it, is characterized by a set of peculiarities that are supposed to nourish it and give it the character of filmicité.

1. Condensation whether in terms of time or the existential state of the characters.
2. Reduction and omission in the narrative process without going into details, thus deviating from the logic of cause/effect.
3. An experimental approach that plays with cinematic style while breaking its rules
4. Functions that aim to achieve the strength of the film by focusing on the most important signs, movements and sounds.
5. Making the film pass through a triangle whose corners are divided into a problematic main character, a dramatic event, the action tool, or what I call CAO, meaning the character and the action, then the object such as a gun or a love letter, for example.
6. The shocking suddenness with the cracking of the familiar or expected horizon of the viewer.

(Authors Group, 1982, p. 102)

Indicators of the theoretical framework

1- Narrative formats represent a chronological structure in a special way for the narrated events, the result of which determines several narrative forms, in which the form of the story narrated varies between classical and modern and contemporary fiction.

2- Film writing experiences generally range from two models:

- Realism that tries to carry a message and provide answers according to the theory of simulation, and a strong plot with a straight narrative line.

- An aesthetic that makes the film a subject for experimentation and raising questions according to the theory of beauty at a structure where it leaves an impression on the eye according to the mechanisms of experimental creation and receiving.

3- Characteristics that must be available in the structure of the short film:

- The narrative space and time, visual condensation, and cinematic discourse close to abstraction.

- Job selection that aims to achieve the strength of the film by focusing on the most important signs, movements and sounds.

- The shocking suddenness with the cracking of the familiar or expected horizon of the viewer

4- The short film is an independent art in itself, an art based on the situation, not on the narrative construction based on the plot in the feature film.

Chapter Three / Research Procedures

First: Research Methodology:

The research relied on a (case study) represented in a film sample according to a descriptive analysis because it fits the nature of the research based on a clear and specific tool.

Second:

Research community

- short fiction films

Third: Research sample

Oscar-winning short films that meet the requirements of the research, the first is distinguished by being an important model for flashback hosting, while the second is characterized by the extension of time with a wonderful treatment.

● Borrowed Time (complex narrative)

● Father And Daughter (Classic)

Fourth: The research tool

1- Narrative formats represent a chronological structure in a special way for the events, the result of which determines several narrative forms, in which the form of the story narrated varies between classical and modern and contemporary fiction.

2- Film writing experiences generally range between two models:

- Realism that tries to convey a message and provides answers according to simulation theory, and a strong plot with a straight narrative line.

- An aesthetic that makes the film a subject for experimentation and raising questions according to the theory of beauty at a structure where it leaves an impression on the eye according to the mechanisms of experimental creation and receiving.

3- Characteristics that must be available in the structure of the short film:

- Narrative temporal and spatial space, visual condensation, and cinematic discourse close to abstraction

- a function that aims to achieve the strength of the film by focusing on the most important signs, movements and sounds.

- The shocking element with the cracking of the familiar or expected horizon of the viewer.

4- The short film is an independent art in itself, an art based on the situation, not on the narrative construction based on the plot as in the feature film.

Sample analysis

First Sample:

Title: Borrowed Time

Genre: Animation

Time: 6:25 minutes

Screenplay and Directed by: Andrew Goats

Story : A police commander stands on the edge of a mountain, trying to commit suicide, as he recalls the death of his father as a result of an accident that he unintentionally caused.

Narrative formats used:

- 1- Overlap mode: where we note that the narrative line consists of a series of flashbacks, as we find a narrator participating or witnessing in the events through transition and temporal regression (the main character : the police commander), which negates the level of zero focus.
- 2- The sequence mode: we notice the sequence of events in the main narration line, except for the gaps that occur due to the regression.

The writing style:

An aesthetic that made the film a material for experimentation and raising questions, as it leaves an impression on the eye according to the experimental mechanisms of creation and reception, which lies in the manipulation of the components of the narrative text and the methods of transmission with aesthetic methods that express linking the past with the present and linking life with death in a new way that dictates to the viewer to reconnect events and build them anew.

Optical intensity and time:

We also note that the writer focused mainly on working on the aspect of time practically and philosophically.. Practically when he breaks down no more than 6 minutes of the life of the police officer with an overlapping narrative line governed by a series of regressions that show us little by little a side of the truth until reaching the climax and the solution, philosophically by reference to the philosophy of time and expressing it with the symbol (hand watch) and the name of the film (borrowed time).

Using the functions of means of transition:

As we mentioned before that the film is based on a series of setbacks, where the film's strength lies in focusing on the means of transition between time in an aesthetic and philosophical way, such as the sluggish steps of the police command, where we notice that with each step he remembers a part of this painful event all the way to the edge of the mountain and the watch that symbolizes the the incident of killing his father.

The shock element(the Aristotelian inversion):

It is represented by our discovery in the end that he unintentionally killed his father when he was trying to save him from falling off the edge of the mountain. Here, the recipient finds out the reasons of the main character to commit suicide, and the conflict reaches its climax (the internal struggle), after which comes the descending event and the solution (Will he commit suicide or not??) Then comes the role of the main symbol of the film's theme, which is (Time), represented by the watch that was owned by his father, so the end remains open to the recipient.

Conclusions:

- 1- A short film script writer can use a maximum of two types of narrative formats (within one film), otherwise the film is abstract and departs from the most important principles of cinematic language.
- 2- Maintaining the rhythm represents the most important challenge in the modalities of arranging the components of the narrative building, as the time of the short film requires the writer to provide all the elements of attraction for the recipient from the beginning (the first minute).
- 3- Intensification is not limited to time and events only, but to the content of the clips and their aesthetic and dramatic implications in the short film.
- 4- The short film can deal with time realistically (a classic narration) and with a wide extension (several years) in some cases without the need for regression or anticipation, provided that there are necessity and means of transmission between scenes.
- 5- The narrative technique has limited control over the components of the narrative body of the short film story, and the false belief that the determinants of narration here can affect the expressive value of the short film, but take other forms that differ from the long films.
- 6- The concept of classic narration is subject to development, as we note that some forms of circular narration may be considered by some to be classic in our time. Therefore, modernity in methods of subtraction may require a double mix of formats or even a single classical format with new narrative modalities and locations.

Recommendations:

- 1- Staying away from unjustified narrative complexity that tends to abstraction. In the end, the task of assembling the components of the narrative text rests with the recipient, regardless of his scientific or artistic background. Communicating ideas and contents to the recipient is the core of what the cinematic language means.
- 2- Not to insert symbols and connotations, that weigh down the story and load it with more than one meaning, and change the misconception that visual intensification means planting semantics and encoding concepts in every part of the film. There is simply an aesthetic aspect that can be an element of attraction for the recipient in union with some symbols necessary to support the dramatic and philosophical content.
- 3- The area of experimentation in the short film should focus mainly on the sites and narrative formats that have become almost absent at the present time and which have been replaced by the saturation of the story with symbols and connotations that are often incomprehensible to the recipient.
- 4- Rhythm is one of the most important elements of attraction, suspense and excitement, and short films with a sluggish rhythm should be limited, which often justify a mistake because they contain features and an atmosphere of anticipation, in addition to the aesthetics of filming, which are often at the expense of rhythm.
- 5- The starting point of the first event in the narration is often the first problem for the screenwriter, so it should be considered the climax of events, from which the event proceeds forward and to another climax or backward to be the same end point.

Sources:

1. Odith Kirswill, The Age of Structuralism, translated by Jaber Asfour, Arab Horizons House, Baghdad: 1985.
2. -Janetti, Louis D., Understanding Cinema, translated by Jaafar Ali, Baghdad: Dar Al-Rasheed for Printing and Publishing, 1981.
3. -Salah Muhammad Taha, Narrative Segments in the Structure of the TV Series, University of Baghdad, Journal of the College of Arts / Issue 98, 2011
4. Taher Alwan, Cinematheque on August 25, 2007
5. -Abdullah Ibrahim, The Narrative Imaginary, Cairo: The Arab Cultural Center, 1994
6. -Ezz El-Din El-Wafi, the script of the short film.. A vision for the world
7. -Maher Majeed, Temporal Structures in Film Narrative, University of Baghdad, 2005.
8. -A group of authors, Theory of the Formal Approach, translated by Ibrahim Al-Khatib, Beirut: Arab Research Foundation, 1982.
9. -Moroccan News Today website - the short film: peculiarities and components
10. -Yann Manfred, The Science of Narration, translated by Amani Abu Rahma, Nineveh House, Damascus: 2011