Manifestation of Gothic Style in Contemporary Films
---- Taking *Edward Scissorhands* as an Example

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Abstract:
With the changes occuring in contemporary, Gothic style of art currently represents the passion for imperfection and the chivalrous spirit of solitary struggle for many people. Through its combination with the media and literature of film, it brings audiences a feeling of classical darkness, fear and death originated from the classical, as well as triggers audience's heart-shaking experience through the cold and gorgeous visual representation. This paper probes into the origin of Gothic style of art and its development in contemporary films. From the perspectives of characters, plots, scenes and lines, it summarizes and analyses the manifestations of Gothic style in contemporary films, and explores the Gothic spirit contained in them, which is of great significance in thoroughly understanding contemporary film theories and innovating film creation.

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1. The Origin and Carrier of Gothic Art

1.1 The Origin of Gothic Art

As a Renaissance term used to distinguish the artistic style of the Middle Ages, the mention of Gothic style reminds people of dark words such as vampire, curse, darkness, castle, abyss, as well as vocabularies of Germanic, Frank, etc.. The exaggeration, mystery and irregularity of Gothic art are opposed to the rationality and order of classical art.

Having appeared in the surrounding areas of Paris as early as the 12th century, Gothic style continued to extend outward over time and gradually replaced Roman style until its taking root in Germany in the 16th century. Gothic originally refers to Gothic people. As part of German, the Gothic nation invaded, conquered and disintegrated Rome from the 3rd to 5th centuries A.D.. From the macro point of view of human tribes, Goths are the tribes of those of Germanic that have not been baptized by "civilization". Nevertheless, the Goths were simply adhering to their inherent ideas incompletely whenever they declared their sovereignty in a bold and arrogant manner, and what they lacked was a spiritual ladder at the highest level. Despite that the Gothic style seemed to have developed smoothly in Europe, it had encountered a great number of difficulties in Italy. Italian artists in the 15th century were eager for the traditions of the Roman Empire and expected to return to classicism. The word Gothic was also coined in the 16th century by Jorge Vasari, a disciple of Michelangelo and an Italian art historian, who sniffed at the Gothic style with immense respect for Michelangelo and called it a Gothic brutal and vulgar style.

1.2 Diversified Carriers of Gothic

In additon to being reflected in the architecture, sculpture, painting, fiction and clothing, the diversification of gothic carrier also contains in literary medium such as literature, music and films among which the Gothic architecture is the most direct manifestion of the impact of Gothic style on the public. Influenced by St. Denis Church near Paris, the birthplace of Gothic architecture, the famous Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris together with the Lance Cathedral in France were regarded as the most representative churches of Gothic architecture in the early period. Compared with Roman architecture, their windows have been enlarged in size and lighter in structure, while the slender stained glass window paintings enhance the contrast of light and shadow. Chartres Church and Amien Church are signs of the maturity of Gothic architecture.

In addition to church architectures, sculpture and painting are also the embodiment of the diversification of gothic carrier. Unlike the classical works of Rubens and Ingres, the Gothic style was once excluded by academic schools and mainstream exhibitions. William Black, a British painter and poet who played an important role in the inheritance and development of Gothic painting techniques, used thick black lines to outline most of his biblical prints, which set off the center of the picture and conveyed a mysterious atmosphere. Some of his works are dim and give up the traditional perspective, which makes people feel the salvation idea advocated by the Bible in the overall atmosphere.

In terms of Gothic literature, instead of being a fixed fiction type in history, Gothic fiction is a pan-horror form of fiction that has continued since the 18th century. In addition to Gothic fiction, which has been recognized in history, it also includes supernatruel fiction, horror fiction, and even part of the classic horror fiction in the 19th and 20th centuries(Huang Lushan. 2007) themed with darkness, vampire, witchcraft, thriller, castle, death, etc., such as famous Gothic fictionist Allan Poe, who is known as the creator of Gothic fiction with most of his works of are Gothic. These

works show the unique aesthetic sense of Gothic fiction by arousing readers' interests.

2. Manifestation in Films
2.1 Bizarre Contrastive Techniques

Directed by Tim Burton and starring Johnny Depp, *Edward Scissorhands* tells a pathetic and moving love story between Edward Scissorhands and his lover who fall in love with each other yet are not able to stay together, whose scenes and characters are extremely touching. As an incomplete man and an incomplete robot at the same time, Edward, who possesses human emotions but without a complete human body, lives alone in the castle, which is doomed to his tragic fate. By adopting a number of contrasts in the narrative and shooting techniques of the film, Tim Burton makes the story compelling and full of unique Gothic beauty.

In love and despair, the most painful thing in the world should be separation and death. Although Edward had fallen in love with Kim when he entered Peg's house and saw her picture, the heroine already had her lover Jim. Edward was not initially liked by Kim because he was not good at speech alone all the year round. As a villain in the film, Jim played a catalytic role in their love. When Edward, who was misunderstood as a thief, saw the initiator come to Kim, with anger and jealousy, he used his scissors to scratch the wall and destroies the curtains and towels in the bathroom, seemingly intending to destroy everything. At this point, he could do nothing but bear it silently to protect Kim. As the misunderstanding deepened, Edward finally had to flee back to the castle, where Kim expressed to Edward her affection. They embraced each other tightly before the inevitable separation. Edward killed Jim in order to protect Kim, while Kim lied to people in the town and never met Edward again for the sake of protecting him. Struggling in love and despair is one of the characteristics of Gothic aesthetics, which was also reflected in Edward's memory that Christmas was a day full of love and despair. A scientist in the castle with profound love for him taught him etiquette and knowledge and gave him a pair of hands like those of ordinary people as a Christmas gift. Nevertheless, the scientist passed away suddenly at Edward's happiest moment, which plunged him from heaven to hell in an instant. Love and despair have been running throughout the film.

In the whole film, what impresses the audience most is the contrast of the light and darkness inside and outside the castle. At the beginning of the film, with the title of the film appeared the dark scene of the castle: Spider webs, the statue of demons, endless steps and cold machines. A dark world came into view, and the dark and cold castle on the top of the mountain was where Edward lived. Then the scene switched to a brightly colored neighborhood where Kim lived, with blue sky, white clouds, green grass and colorful houses in red, yellow, blue and green. People who lived a leisurely life and Peg who wore pink overalls and smiles were out of step with Edward, who was like a demon living in a castle and never got access to the fairytale town. Nevertheless , Edward never ceased the pursuit of light even in the dark. He made efforts to maintain the garden very tidy, which symbolized the simplicity and good traits of Edward.

Divinity and evil are not distinct from each other. For all that kind people tend to be bullied, they end up getting what they deserve. The characters in the film can be roughly divided into three categories, namely, the kind people like Peg, who brought Edward out of the castle and always treated everyone kindly and sincerely, the evil people like Jim, who opposed Edward everywhere, stole and was finally punished, and the third category who are most incomprehensible are the residents of the town. When Edward firstly arrived in the town, the residents were very gossipy and

eager to see what he really was like. When they found that Edward's craftsmanship could bring benefits, they respected him very much, while when they found Edward's theft, without asking the reason and being not nostalgic at all, they suspected, doubted and even framed Edward. It could be said that it was the residents of the small town who gradually pushed Edward back to the castle. Although we can imagine the follow-up development of the story in the film, that is, the residents of the small town may just treat everything as a prank and return to their previous life, they have never forgotten the harm they have done to Edward and the Peg family, which can be regarded as Tim Burton's reflection of certain people in reality in the film. Edward and the castle are also a comparison between divinity and evil. Having lived alone in the old castle for a long time, he was simple. The dark old castle standed in sharp contrast to Edward's well-kept garden outside the castle and his unrequitedyard and hair care for the residents. Despite that the environment sometimes changes a person, not everyone is changed by the environment.

Pain awakens, and vice versa. There was a climactic twist at the end of the film, when Edward was mistaken for a murderer and chased by police and forced by residents of the town, Kim did not want Edward to die and told him to run. While enduring the pain of parting from his beloved, Edward was once again in pain when he realized that he would never fit into the town anyway. He began to understand that no one would accept his feelings. He could never hold her hand or hug her or free her from worldly concerns, that he would only ruin her. He struggled with pain and sobriety. This is the gothic film style, which tells the story of love and despair with the expression of darkness, sadness, loneliness and despair, and describes the holy and evil of human nature and the struggle between pain and consciousness through the contrast between darkness and light.

2.2 Creative Art Installations

Gothic style can also be found in the installations of the film (installations here refer to the modelling, materials, props, colors, lights and shadows of the film). Excellent scripts and shooting techniques alone are not sufficient in producing a good film, while the key to its success lies in the installations and details.

Gothic originally existed only in architecture, sculpture and painting. With time evolved, punk singers introduced gothic elements in about the 1970s, which led to the revival of gothic culture and the infiltration to various aspects music, makeup, etc.. In *Edward Scissorhands*, Edward's modelling reflected the typical gothic style. The original Edward had loose black hair, long black leggings, a black leather coat with a high collar, and pointed black leather boots that contrasted sharply with his pale skin. Black was his trademark, and it seemed that only this mysterious color can represent his inscrutability. In terms of makeup, the thin eyebrows and eyeliner, the matte black lipstick, light blush and exaggerated eye shadow spreading all over the eyes on the pale skin seemed to convey to the audience that these symbolized the aristocracy of the Victorian era. In addition, there were different sizes of silver ring ornaments and leather as clothing decoration, which was quite eye-catching in black clothes. Leather and silver were typical gothic decorations, which, however, were in sharp contrast to his extremely simple eyes. Such temperamental inconsistency with appearance always prompts us to ponder certain social issues, that is, whether what we see is what we get.

Light, shadow and color. Gothic scenes gave the film a negative and desperate darkness in the castle. Influence by the Gothic, all the bleak and gloomy were originated from the dark, negative

and pessimistic styles of goth culture: Cold spidery machines, gothic flying buttresses, crumbling stone walls, broken skylights and ancient wooden floors. There were few other colors except black, white and gray. In addition to the light injected from the window, there was no extra light in the castle, which formed a pervasive gloom and terror. When walking into the castle for the first time, Peg dressed in pink was in great contrast to it, while the colors were suggesting that Edward did not belong to the same world as Peg and others. When he first met Peg, Edward hid under a skylight of the attic and didn't show his face until walking into the damaged place. At the end of the film, Kim looked for Edward in the castle at night, where there was no light except the moonlight shining into the attic of the castle through the broken skylight. Edward crouched in the attic, his favorite place where he would often huddled after the death of the scientist.

The most striking prop in the film is Edward's chilling scissors with metallic luster. As the symbol of Edward and the origin of all the stories, suppose Edward's scissors turned into hands, the plot might not be the same as in the film. Peg might not had taken Edward home, and this touching love story might have not happened. The gloomy and terrible atmosphere out of the scissor decoration had made Peg, who firsty saw the shadow of his outline, afraid of the scissors in Edward's hands. However, her impression of Edward gradually changed when she understood the reason for Edward's "hands" and the conversation thereafter. Isn't it just in line with the Gothic spirit that hides the inner longing for innocence and beauty by wrapping its appearance in darkness?

2.3 Vivid and Refined Lines

In addition to shaping the character, the lines also have an impact on the plot of the film. As a lonely and worldly robot, Edward's lines in the whole film were not more than 100 sentences and are all quite brief. Therefore, it is worth exploring how to use short and concise sentences to shape characters. At the beginning of the film, Edward's state was explained through Kim's narration "unfinished and very lonely", which laid a sad tone for the whole story. Edward's first words when he saw Peg were "Don't go", reflecting that he didn't want Peg to be afraid of him because of his appearance, and that he longed for company, love and friends. Then he raised his hands and said to Peg, "I'm not finished yet." It is said that a person's personality can be inferred within three sentences. Although Edward could have explained Peg's identity and situation in detail, he preferred to use the simplest and most direct words, which reflected his simplicity and inability to express himself. We can conclude from Edward's lines that Gothic does not mean vulgarity, and scissors do not mean barbarism. With the courtesy a gentleman should have, "Thank you, hello, sorry" and other polite phrases in his few lines accounted for a large proportion. Edward proved to us with words that appearance does not cover up people's charm of personality, and so does Gothic. Edward had hardly any lines for a long time afterwards. The most touching moment was when Kim said "hug me" to Edward, and Edward answered "I can't". There is a comment that says, "I can't protect you without a knife, and I can't hug you if I have a knife." It's not "won't" but "can't", the difference between which lies in the desire in heart. Edward suffered from the opposite emotions in his heart and reality. Edward's last line at the end of the film was "Goodbye", which was a farewell to Kim, the audience as well as himself, saying goodbye to the small interlude in life and back to loneliness.

3. Connotation of Gothic Spirit

In accordance with Martin Heidegger's theory of "living to death" put forward in *Existence and Time*, death is a process, towards which people move death step by step since birth and wander on the edge of it, while decease is a state of disappearance and non-existence. Everyone has to work hard to survive in the world. People are counting down to death from the moment they are born. Compared with nature, the limited time and the fragility of life highlight the relative insignificance and imperfection of human beings. In the 13th century, the Black Death spread throughout Europe and made the poor tremble every day as they fell into a life-and-death crisis. Different social classes determine different ways of life and the differences in money lead to different methods of dealing with even the same difficulties. Faced with the devil, the rich chose to avoid and began to pursue elegance, leisure and gorgeousness unprecedentedly in order to paralyze themselves by building a gorgeous luxury world. In the long period of great contrast and depression, people started to seek spiritual sustenance, when Gothic culture came into being. Mostly with the creation themes of "mortal" and "immortal soul", gothic art's works describing soul and death have provided spiritual comfort for people desperate for life（Zou Lin,2014）.

People in modern society tend to regularly reflect on why people live and what is the meaning of living? What we encounter is no longer the problem of survival, but that of existence. With the progress of the times, people get access to all the information without leaving home. Faced with the computer screen, you know nothing about the face and heart behind it. People's attention to the ones around them continues to decline, and the lifetime contact for most of them may limited to a text message, when human beings become increasingly insignificant and eager to get care from the attention. Gothic style has been well recognized with its eccentric spirit. People win attention through seemingly exaggerated appearance to reflect on the beauty be missed. Such spirit of doing the opposite is worth pondering whether we should focus on the people around us.

The Nightmare Before Christmas, Corpse Bride, Sweeney Todd and *Sleepy Hollow* are all typical Gothic films directed by Tim Burton. Being magnificent, tragic and extraordinary, they set off the beauty of human nature through darkness and gloom. As a typical Gothic film, the *Twilight* directed by another famous director Catherine Hardwick contains a great number of Gothic elements such as vampires, werewolves and castles. Compared with the cruel impression of vampires in the past, the Karen family as a vampire family in this film lives like human beings, which is not easy for them in that in addition to enduring the desire for blood, they have to be bound by the living rules and morals of human beings. This has endowed the vampire with human nature through a great breakthrough in the image of vampires in the past, and conveyed people's yearning for brightness and beauty through the horrible imagery of death, which is also the core of Gothic spirit. An increasingly number of contemporary directors and producers tend to incorporate Gothic style into their works, the excellent box office and favorable reputation of which are the manifestation of the success of Gothic style in films.

In addition to conveying Gothic style, Tim Burton and other directors have jointly endowed Gothic art with contemporary connotations through films. The vulgarity, pessimism and barbarism are only the presentations of Gothic art held by people who do not really understand it, while people good at thinking shall perceive the primitive innocence and the brave pursuit of beauty through films. Beauty and terror, devinity and darkness, gorgeousness and weirdness are no longer the opposite in Gothic films. Gothic-style films depict the sacredness and evil of human nature, struggle in pain

and awakening, and tell stories of love and despair through darkness, sadness and loneliness. Despite that there are still a number of different views on Gothic art, it has undoubtedly exerted profound impacts on art's world and the audience.

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