

Article

Tradition and New Trends: The Film-Portrait Genre in Uzbek Documentary Cinema of a New Era

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Abstract: This article analyses the development trends of the film-portrait genre in Uzbek documentary cinema in the post-independence period. In particular, the study examines the work of directors in this genre, the ideological and aesthetic characteristics of the films produced, their dramaturgical structure, and the methods of employing modern cinematic visualisation techniques. Particular attention is also paid to the issue of expressing social processes through individual destinies in film portraits.

Keywords: newsreel, biographical film, documentary, interview, monologue, biographical film, screen journalism, cinematic portrayal.

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1. Introduction

Within the documentary film genre system, the portrait film emerges as one of the most complex and synthetic forms. It conveys on screen the human nature, the inner world and the spirit of the age through the life and work of a particular historical figure, artist or public figure. In this sense, the film-portrait not only depicts biographical material but also serves to interpret it artistically and journalistically through the language of cinema[1].

From a film studies perspective, the main characteristic of the film-portrait genre is to reveal the dialectic of individuality and universality. In other words, the social, political, and cultural processes of a particular historical period are reflected through the destiny of an individual. For this reason, this genre is considered one of the leading forms of screen journalism[2].

2. Methods

In contemporary documentary filmmaking practice, the methods of working with factual material in the creation of a portrait film have expanded significantly. Whereas in the past biographical films relied mainly on newsreel footage and archive material, today directors actively use interviews, reconstructions, voice-over narration, visual metaphors and symbolic imagery. This serves to enhance the film's dramaturgical impact[3].

In works of the film-portrait genre, film and photo-archive materials are a significant source for creating the character's image. In films about famous individuals, in particular, historical footage, photographs, personal documents, the memories of contemporaries, and interviews play a crucial role in revealing the protagonist's character and worldview. However, from a modern film studies perspective, these materials are required not merely to serve an illustrative function, but to be integrated organically into the overall dramaturgical structure[4].

During the period of independence, the film-portrait genre in Uzbek documentary cinema was elevated to a new level. Creators gained the freedom to choose their subjects, and the previous ideological constraints were removed. As a result, film portraits began to shed light not only on a person's social activities but also on their innermost feelings, personal drama and individual perspectives[5].

3. Result and Discussion

Today, various dramaturgical models can be observed in the film-portrait genre: chronicle-biographical depictions, investigative films, essay-style works, and screen sketches with a strong authorial position. This diversity demonstrates the genre's expanded artistic possibilities[6].

The production of films dedicated to individuals who have played an important role in national culture and history is also one of the most pressing directions of this genre. Such works not only restore historical memory but also play a vital role in helping the younger generation understand their national identity and develop spiritual values[7].

For instance, the film "Tree of Knowledge", dedicated to the life of the literary scholar and public figure Naim Karimov, offers a modern interpretation of the film-portrait genre. It highlights the spiritual atmosphere of an entire era, historical memory, and issues of national identity through the hero's scientific and social activities. The film combines archival materials, interviews, and journalistic commentary to create a cohesive artistic and cinematic portrayal.

In conclusion, in contemporary Uzbek documentary cinema, the film-portrait genre is being enriched with new artistic explorations and stylistic innovations, whilst retaining its traditional forms. This demonstrates that the genre is not only enhancing its aesthetic significance but also its socio-educational importance[8].

The film "Tree of Wisdom", created by the creative team of writer B. Yakubov and director M. Qoraboyev, features a compositionally successful dramatic structure. The work begins with a high appraisal of Naim Karimov by Ozod Sharafiddinov, presented as an off-screen text. This device serves as a prologue typical of the film-portrait genre, forming the audience's initial impression of the protagonist's character.

The film's principal artistic-conceptual solution is to reveal the hero's character through the symbol of the 'tree of knowledge.' From a film studies perspective, this metaphor is multi-layered: the tree symbolises life, stability, roots and development, embodying Naim Karimov's scientific and creative journey. The roots are interpreted as his spiritual sources and mentors, the branches as his scientific research, and the leaves as the significant stages and influential factors in his life. This makes the film's figurative system coherent and conceptually robust[9].

The work embodies all the key components characteristic of the film-portrait genre. In particular, the hero's childhood and youth are reconstructed in a reportage style, ensuring a harmony between subjective memory and objective historical material. In the episodes concerning the war years, the period's drama is intensified through variations in the music and the rhythm of the editing. The audiovisual solutions, combined with wartime photographic material of Tashkent, serve to immerse the viewer in the historical setting.

The protagonist's inner feelings and life's hardships are revealed through his monologues. Here, the director has used elements of dialogue and monologue as a tool for psychological analysis. As a result, the screen reveals not only biographical facts but also the hero's inner world[10].

In the film, the use of the "tree leaves" metaphor to explain the turning points in Naim Karimov's life is a well-founded artistic solution. In particular, the portrayal of the academic Oybek, who played a significant role in his creative development, as the "root" further enriches the system of cinematic imagery. Moreover, the historical context associated with the work and fate of Enlightenment figures such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Abdulhamid Chulpon, Fitrat, and Usmon Nosir defines the spiritual and ideological foundation for the hero's activities[11].

The use of black-and-white for archival footage of the Stalinist era plays a significant role in the film's visual style. This choice not only ensures historical authenticity but also heightens the dramatic and tragic atmosphere of the period. In film studies, this technique is described as “the stylistic encoding of the visual chronotope”[12].

The film makes effective use of interview elements. The character's speech, facial expressions, and body language naturally reveal their personal qualities. The transformation of the interview into a monologue lends the film a journalistic and poetic spirit. At the same time, the director's replacement of the interview with visual imagery, without dragging it out, serves to maintain the screen's dynamism.

The film ‘Urib Turkin Yurak’ is also noteworthy as one of the contemporary manifestations of the film-portrait genre. It portrays his professional career and personal character through a day in the life of academic Ravshanbek Qurbonov. The film employs the ‘one-day observation’ (observational documentary) method, creating a sense of real time[13].

The film's dramatic structure is based on the traditional three-act model: exposition (introducing the protagonist), development (his life and professional journey), and climax and evaluation (assessing the individual through the opinions of loved ones and colleagues). The combination of interview and observation elements ensures a credible and multifaceted portrayal of the protagonist[14].

The choice of gentle music in the film and its juxtaposition with the protagonist's intense lifestyle is an effective solution in audiovisual dramaturgy. The camera's constant movement and the near absence of static shots shape a dynamic visual style.

Overall, in both films, the protagonist's childhood, formative years, professional career, and societal role are consistently portrayed, creating a cohesive on-screen portrait[15].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth noting that in recent years, the film-portrait genre has become significantly more active in Uzbek documentary cinema. However, the demand for multi-part works on historical figures, based on in-depth research and produced in a modern cinematic language, remains high. One of the key challenges for contemporary film studies is to bring the lives of great scholars such as Amir Timur, Mirzo Ulugbek, Alisher Navoi, Mirzo Babur, Ibn Sino, and Beruni to the screen using a comprehensive and innovative approach.

In this regard, it is possible to strengthen the factual basis of documentary films by collaborating with historians, archaeologists, museums and international scientific centres, and by bringing new scientific discoveries to the screen. For the modern film-portrait is shaping up not just as a biographical narrative, but as a product of a scientific, artistic and journalistic synthesis.

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