

The Feminist Narrative in Yu Xiuhua's Poetry

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Abstract: Yu Xiuhua's poetry stands out in the contemporary poetry scene not only because of her special identity, but also because of her unique narrative techniques in her poetry. This paper analyzes some of Yu Xiuhua's masterpieces and finds that the poet makes good use of gender replacement and the dissipation of grand narratives in her creative work, which stems from the author's special identity and the influence of her predecessors. This narrative style can be regarded as a rebellion against traditional poetry, in which feminism is implicit; however, this rebellion is not complete, as Yu Xiuhua's poems portray the "fictional authority" of women.

Keywords: Yu Xiuhua; Feminism; Narrative Techniques

Introduction

In 2015, Yu Xiuhua's "Through Half of China to Sleep with You" was widely circulated on the Internet in an instant, and both the poem itself and the poet became hotly debated. When it first became popular, media opinion mostly used the poem as an entry point to create topics. Of course, the reason for Yu Xiuhua's popularity is not only because the poem's wording is bold and subversive, but also closely related to her special identity. The deliberate emphasis on the poet's identity enables the poem to gain an ideological value. As a woman with cerebral palsy, a farmer with only a high school education and a rural woman, Yu Xiuhua seems to have little to do with the identity of "poet". Yet she has written many wonderful poems that are recognized by professionals in the field of poetry, which makes readers curious about her. Why does Yu Xiuhua stand out from the rest of the crowd? The author believes that Yu's unique approach is one of the main reasons.

1. The technique of gender substitution

Gender role substitution is a narrative mode often adopted by female writers. In the early gender-swapped texts, female writers took the male identity as the master of the narrative voice, while women were hidden behind the male role, so as to construct a textual language system belonging to women. As the narrative subject of the text, what we see on the surface of the text is the most objective evaluation and interpretation of women's world by men. However, the ideology of female writers behind the text refutes this viewpoint from a deeper level, forming an overall dissolution of male discourse and the traditional narrative mode, making the expression of female consciousness less abrupt and more acceptable to readers in a softer way, which to a certain extent achieves the subversion of the male narrative mode. The emergence of this narrative mode not only provides objectivity in the narrative of the text, but also shows the sense of narrative subjectivity.

Yu Xiuhua's "Marriage" also adopts this technique. In this poem, there are actually two narrative subjects, the female "I" and the male "I". These two "I's" are presented in turn, with the most direct words of the male speaking out about the status of the disabled woman at the bottom. The author brings the male discourse into the picture, while the female narrative takes a back seat. "I" have to "lower my voice" in front of men and live without dignity. This is a true reflection of Yu Xiuhua's painful marriage, and also reflects the superiority of men and inferiority of women due to their gender in the process of getting along with each other. But another female narrative subject dissolves this male narrative, "Let me go, give me freedom" ("Marriage"), expressing the resistance of rural women to male power and their desire for freedom and dignity.

"A man, who is deliberately unshaven/His lover is on the second floor of the embroidery pavilion/With delicate features and small, brittle bones" ("Toad") Here Yu Xiuhua adopts a male narrative perspective, looking at women from a male point

of view, placing women in the status of lovers, and defining women's bodies in terms of male aesthetics, exposing the social reality that women have to use their looks to please men; later on, "she" establishes the self-image of women, "She is tired of pleasing him with her appearance/and of the silence, the expression, the seeing of his aging process" ("Toad"). She is tired of the male aesthetic standard, but chooses to leave in the way of female self, choosing to regain the social value of female self-centeredness.

Yu Xiuhua's famous poem "Through Half of China to Sleep with You" can also be said to adopt a gender-switching narrative, as it borrows the voice and narrative perspective belonging to men. The word "sleep" is a slightly vulgar way of saying "to have sex", and the person who gives it is usually a man and the person who receives it is usually a woman. The word "sleep" in the title of the poem is a load of the male narrative voice, showing the male play on the female gender, and even carrying an insult. In her poem, she declares, "In fact, sleeping with you and being slept by you are similar" (Through Half of China to Sleep with You), which is a simple and powerful word that playfully denies the imbalance of male-female relationship, which is also a kind of dissolution of the insulting male narrative. This is also a kind of dissolution of the insulting male narrative.

"He likes women who dance/like to see their asses shake around/he said, they can bark and sound good. Unlike me, I don't say a word/and always have my face covered" ("The dog I have is called Xiaowu"), the author writes about "my" lack of sexual attraction in vulgar male language, but it can be inferred from the later text that this behavior of "me" is perhaps deliberate. "I ate without saying a word/Called "Xiaowu, Xiaowu" and threw some pieces of meat to him/He wagged his tail and barked happily" ("The dog I have is called Xiaowu"), which follows the man's bragging about playing with women and reveals "I" despise men. The first and second stanzas of the poem are about the thoughtfulness of the dog Xiaowu, while the third and fourth stanzas are about the indifference, vulgarity and violence of the man, which makes the reader compare the dog with the man horizontally, and the author implicitly conveys to the reader that "this bad man is worse than a dog". "He grabbed me by the hair and knocked me against the wall" ("The dog I have is called Xiaowu"), the author strongly criticizes men's abuse of women by virtue of their natural physical strength, which is a rebellion against male centrism. The author expresses that "I will not submit to violence" in this poem. However, the author's defiance is obviously not decisive enough. She hides her inner pain and disguises herself as disdainful of men by submitting to them, but in reality she is full of hope and longing for love. If she had been brave enough to declare war on the abusive man, shouting "I am equal to you", she might not have been treated so unfairly. But this limitation is also due to her special status, rural women want to obtain the same equal and independent status as men in marriage is extraordinarily difficult.

In her works, Yu Xiuhua adopts a layered and objective narrative, borrowing from the male "he" discourse to highlight male ideology. This discourse adopts a male perspective to view women and even degrade their image. Yu Xiuhua, on the other hand, implicitly puts her own opinion behind the poem, departing from the male subjectivity and instead writing about the humble and sensitive hearts of rural women or women with disabilities, as well as their unique emotional experiences. But at the same time, we can also see that women need to resort to male discourse and male narrative models in order to speak out for their independence and equality. This "false authority" cannot be called true independence, but it is a desperate measure. After all, the conventions of existence defined by discourse guide the way of life in the world, and the two sexes are not necessarily in an antagonistic relationship that puts each other to death. The vulnerability of women needs to be rewritten in the common domain of both in order to achieve a more harmonious relationship.

2. Dissolve the grand narrative

The "private narrative" is a deconstruction of the "grand narrative", focusing on historical events from the perspective of individuals, and the main characters are mostly witnesses or witnesses of the events. The "grand narrative" is a narrative mode that focuses less on the fate of the individual and more on the whole, which is composed of many individuals. Male poets are keen to use grand imagery in their poems, such as "sun" "myth" and "earth" in Haizi's poems. He has created many heroic images in his poems, and his works are therefore strongly epic in nature. His poems are atmospheric and solemn, with a deep ideological content. As a rural woman, Yu Xiuhua includes in her poems objects that are "difficult to be

seen”: puppies, crows, toads, tares, and so on. Yu Xiuhua is a farmer and has a disability, so she is rarely able to go out. Therefore, many trivial details of daily life can be included in her poems, such as “A wave knocking over another/If it were in life, how big an event it would cause” (“The Man Waving to the Sky”). This meticulous observation of life and delicate emotions are quite feminine. Her creation is inward-looking, trying to seek the meaning of her own existence in human emotions.

In terms of poetic themes, she gave up the grand selection of social aspects and chose to describe the scenery in front of her eyes and the feelings in her heart in the moment. After the earthquake in Ya’an, Sichuan, she wrote a poem “Ya’an, what does it have to do with me”, “I won’t cry with poetry anyway, I can’t cry about food crops, I can’t go to Ya’an anyway, I can’t afford to play this luxury with a poor” Some people chided her for not having She explained, “When I am anxious about my personal life, I don’t care about human beings. When I write about them at some point, it must be because they touch and warm me, or make me really sad and worried. A person living a good life means that society itself is good, and vice versa.” (Lu Chuhan,2015:81) She hates big words, such as suffering and strong. These accolades reveal absurdities that do not stand up to scrutiny. For her, she writes poetry just because she likes it, and even in her once brief life as a part-time worker, without a computer or a desk, she would lie on her bed and write half a book. “It has nothing to do with being strong, it’s just a love, a bone-deep love. Thank God for giving me the desire to write, the existence of this desire is the existence of joy.” (Shi Xun,2018:75)

Yu Xiuhua’s “A Scrap of Paper” also reflects her dismantling of grand narratives. At the beginning, it is directly stated that “she does not care about politics” and “she does not care about geography”, even if she “cares about men’s bodies”, she is only worried that “it will prevent her from finding No. 54, Lovers Lane. The reader may wonder how “she” could be so cold and selfish, indifferent to almost all the world’s events, and put up a show of indifference to all the world’s events. The second stanza seems to give the answer: these things are “much lighter than real sorrow”. The last stanza reveals the mystery: “She” is concerned about her own inner feelings, but she can’t say it out loud, perhaps because there is no one worth talking to, and her concerns can only be turned over and over in her own mind to the point of “crumpling”. This indifferent attitude is shocking, but when you think about it, it is also reasonable. If a person can’t even live his own life and handle his own emotions, how can he have the time and energy to pay attention to other people’s things? Yu Xiuhua’s poetry is always a monologue of her own soul: “Poetry is nothing, but poetry leads to the soul, and the soul can only be understood by oneself” (Yu Xiuhua, 2015:6), and the pain she writes about is her own pain, and the state of existence of the people she writes about is also her own state of existence. It is not a group of people, but only individuals.

3. Reasons for formation

“The influence of poetry tends to make poets more original” (Harold Bloom, 2005:8). Yu Xiuhua’s poetry is clearly different from traditional writers, especially male writers, in that her poetry is not deliberately crafted, but genuine. She explains her initial contact with poetry this way, “It is when the heart calls out, it [poetry] arrives in the posture of a naked son, but it acts as a crutch when one is staggering around the shaky earth.” (Yu Xiuhua, 2015:6) The uniqueness of her poetry is inseparable from her special identity, as she herself said, “The order of my identity is like this: woman, farmer, poet. This order will never change, but if you forget all my identities when you read my poetry, I will respect you.” (Lu Chuhan, 2015:81) Because Yu Xiuhua’s pain comes not only from her own disability, underclass status and poor appearance, but also from the fact that when she dissects her inner emotions, she sees a common state of existence of people, which is the hopelessness of life.

The pain of disability has always afflicted Yu Xiuhua, which makes her poetry suffused with the aura of sickness and death. “This bed is not a wedding bed, a plank flattened more like a tomb bed/in winter the hands and feet are cold all night/as one dies after surrendering everything” (“Bed”); but she does not dwell on the pain, in fact whenever she finds her body is getting better, her poems flow with the expectation of life. “But when morning comes, I still leap up/for those rabbits of mine/for those who will reward me with a smile on the road” (“Bed”). Her poetry expresses the spirit that no matter how bad the situation is, she will still retain a positive attitude and always be full of love and yearning for the world. She believes

that no difficulty on earth can defeat her, and she will always actively fight against her fate and defend the dignity of her life. “I love those weeping, sorrowful, unbearable whistling out/and then return with the sound of laughter” (“The Wasteland”). Under the siege of fate, Yu Xiuhua seems to gradually begin to accept all the sorrows and pains in her life, and she still loves life. It is as if she is telling us that even if we are ordinary and small, even if God seems to be unfair to us, there is always a way out of this world.

Yu Xiuhua’s marriage was arranged by her parents, and at the age of 19 she still knew nothing about marriage. Her husband did not love her, and he punched and kicked her in life. “When he grabbed my hair and knocked me against the wall/Xiaowu kept wagging his tail” (“The dog I have is called Xiaowu”), the poet used a calm tone to tell the coldness of her husband and the helplessness of her marriage. Her husband is materialistic, vulgar, and domestic violence against her, and her disability deprives her of a voice in the marriage. Her disability limited her pursuit of love, and although she always aspired to a beautiful and divine love, she eventually succumbed to the helplessness of real life. Poetry is her medium of comfort, and she writes all her feelings about life, love, marriage and disability in her poems, which are drawn from her own experiences and hit the reader’s soul. In her poems, she writes frankly about the hardships of rural women in their marriages, and even inspires readers to think about human nature and ethics. But most of her love poems also allow readers to feel the most passionate and sincere emotions. Moreover, Yu Xiuhua does not hide her yearning for love and her pursuit of sexual desire, which can also open up the scale of openness of women’s hearts.

The relationship between the poets who came before and those who will come after is also addressed in *The Anxiety of Influence*. “The new strongman poet must reconcile two truths that exist within himself: ‘The spirit of culture (Ethos) is the devil’ and ‘All things are created through him, and without him nothing that has been created is created’” (Harold Bloom, 2005:101), “When the newly emerged powerful poet turns against the ‘sublime’ of his predecessor, he undergoes a process of ‘demonization’ process, a ‘counter-sublime’ process, whose function is to suggest the ‘relative weakness of the antecedent’. When the new man is demonized, his antecedent is then necessarily mortalized.” (Harold Bloom, 2005:102) “The power that makes a man a poet is the power of the devil, because it is a distributing and allocating power (which is the original meaning of the word “devil”). It distributes our destiny, allocates our gifts, and stuffs its goods in the vacancies left by taking our destiny and gifts. This ‘distribution’ brings order, imparts knowledge, creates confusion where he knows it, and bestows ignorance to create another order.” (Harold Bloom, 2005:102) Bloom’s theory of “anxiety” about “influence” reflects the poet’s anxiety about the traditional influences that stifle the space for the newcomer’s originality, showing the courage to break with the tradition of the former. (Harold Bloom, 2005:2) Later generations of poets naturally have a competitive mentality toward their predecessors, so they want to be different and deviate from tradition, even if this idea is not subjective.

4. Conclusion

Compared with male narratives, the spirit of female narratives is to affirm women’s pursuit of value as human subjects by authentically representing women’s experiences in texts. Due to the constraints of women’s experience, women’s narratives show many characteristics such as staying away from mainstream ideology, sorting out the development of history through women’s life encounters, creating realistic and complex female images, and affirming women’s desires. As a woman who is aware of her own existence and has a unique life experience, Yu Xiuhua, of course, will also join the tide of feminist narrative literature. Although she is not highly educated and does not seem to have really understood the concept of feminism, her keen perception and strong spirit of resistance to fate give her the awareness and courage to write from a feminist perspective. However, her feminist narrative ability is not sufficient, and she only writes because she is shocked by some real-life events. She uses poetry to present her feminist ideas, and thus her poetic language is different from that of traditional male writers, and this departure can be considered a kind of rebellion. But this rebellion is not complete; what Yu establishes in her poetry is the “fictional authority” of women.

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