

An Analysis of Autobiographical Narrative in Novels of Yu Dafu

Ni. Wei

郁達夫の自伝小説の特徴に関する考察

ニー・ウェイ

要旨

郁達夫は、長くない文学生涯の中で、多くの詩、エッセイ、小説を創作した。彼の小説は、情感表現を軸にし、社会の重圧の中で青春の悲嘆と人生の感傷を描き、叙情的な詩風かつ軽妙なタッチで描かれている。特に、登場人物の内面世界を深く掘り下げる世界感は評価が高く、彼のユニークな描写スタイルと溢れた才能は、今日の現代中国文学に大きな影響をもたらしている。

Abstract

Yu Dafu has produced prodigious literary output in his short writing career, including poems, essays, novels and reviews. His novels, in a lyric keynote, reveal the sentimental grief and depression of youth and life under great social pressure. Internal monologues of characters in novels explicitly manifest his emotional expression. By the virtue of his exceptional aptitude for writing and unique style, he brought fresh breadth to the modern Chinese literature, whose influence today is still profound.

Key words; modern Chinese literature, autobiography, mood novel

Introduction

Since the May Fourth Movement, China's modern literature has been developing robustly like bamboo shoots after a spring rain, when schools of literature and great writers rose up in great numbers. Yu Dafu, with his outstanding literary talent and unique style, outshone the others in the world of arts so much that over half a century has passed, our memories of him have remained. Yu Dafu has his own distinct writing style in the history of Chinese new literature, featured with strong lyricism, open frankness, bold self-disclosure and sentimental style. The reason why this superstar of literature has outlasted his peers and enjoyed enduring popularity has direct relationship with his ingenious autobiographical novels. He recalled that, "during my college life for four years, I had read about 1,000 novels in Russian, German, English, Japanese and French; then I entered Tokyo Imperial University, but I was still addicted to reading novels. Even now, aside from eating and working, I sit down and read novels most."ⁱ Zheng Boqi, who studied abroad and joined the Creation Society with Yu Dafu, recalled the scene of Yu Dafu reading foreign literature.

"He reads very extensively, not focusing on one writer or literature of one country. He reads nearly all masterpieces, even including works of budding writers and little known works. He feels delighted in reading what he is interested in. He seems particularly fond of such writers that writer with rich romantic, lyric and artistic elements. For example, among masters in the Imperial Russian Age, he seems to prefer Turgenev and Chekhov. As for writers of other countries, he shows the similar taste. Since he excels in English, he has read more and deeper into English literary works. His close relationship with Japanese novelists and concern over their works can be glimpsed from his diary and letters. He prefers novels of Junichiro Tanizaki and Sato Haruo. While among Japanese naturalistic writers, he claims that Kasai Zenzo has exerted some influence on him. Admittedly, his profound self-analysis and monologue techniques are similar to the style of Kasai Zenzo; his fresh free-flowing style is just contrary to heavy frivolous naturalistic literary forms of Kasai Zenzo, but is close to art nouveau writing style of Wilde. In a

word, he has rich accomplishment in foreign literature and all-round influences from foreign writers."ⁱⁱ

Though there are ample studies about the influence of Japanese literature on Yu Dafu at home and abroad, it is discovered that early novels of Yu Dafu are imprinted with Japanese naturalism and aesthetism. Apart from the influence of foreign literature, what is his unique style? This paper attempts to expound the aforementioned features of Yu Dafu's novels from these three aspects.

I. The autobiographical feature of intense ego expression and self-awareness

1. Study Abroad--Return to China (1913-1922)

Yu Dafu's novels feature strong ego expression and self-awareness which embody his view on literature as "literary work is the autobiography of the author". Invariably, his novels hide the shadows of the author himself or the memoir of the life fragments and emotional experience of the author. Works from The Degradation Collection (《沉沦集》, 1921), to The Cold Ash Collection (《寒灰集》, 1927), The Cypress Vine Collection (《莛萝集》, 1932), to The Past Collection (《过去集》, 1927), have displayed fully the vagrancy and tough life and the transforming thought and emotions of Yu Dafu. His father died when he was three years old, which added to misfortunes of his family living in very difficult conditions and exerted a deep influence to the young tender mind of Yu Dafu. Due to his father's death, he never enjoyed such love of father that is intertwined with love for wife and children in his lifetime. Instead, he always felt endless fear, sadness, dreariness and helplessness.

The autobiographical novels of Yu Dafu's First Period of Writing included The Degradation Collection and The Cold Ash Collection, which were written from 1921 to 1922. The Degradation Collection compiled and published in 1922 included three novels, The Grey Death (《银灰色的死》, 1921), Removal to Southward (《南迁》, 1921), and The Degradation. The Degradation Collection was the first collection of novels of modern China literature, whose rich color of autobiography pioneered the lyrical novels of China. "Sinking" was a reflection of the mental suffering of the author during

his eight years' stay in Japan, and a cry of desperate struggling and pain from the bottom of the heart of most overseas students.

The protagonists of all three novels are overseas Chinese students in Japan, and the novels depicted all the hardships and misfortunes they suffered in a foreign land; because they were from weak nations, they were isolated and despised by foreigners, along with mental oppression, difficulties of life, dissatisfaction of sex and missing of true love. The novels depicted all the fickleness and lonesomeness of life and a secular world. They abased, pitied, resented, hated and regretted themselves, until their mentality was perverted.

We know that Yu Dafu went to study in Japan with his older brother in 1913. In 1914, his brother went back to China while he stayed in Japan to learn. During this period, he fell out with his brother due to different ideas which strangled his source of finance. In 1922, he went back to China with a poor and broken heart.ⁱⁱⁱ During his study in Japan for ten years, he fully suffered scorn and insult as the "Sick Man of Asia". From his reviews on Japanese people and culture, it was not difficult to find his emotional contradiction and spiritual perplexity. China was an ancient civilization with more than five thousand years of history and was a powerful and prosperous country in history. However, after the Sino-Japanese War, Japan posed the greatest threat to China in the risk of national subjugation and genocide. At that time, a patriotic Chinese really experienced and bore a great emotional gap of pride and inferiority. As a patriotic intellectual, Yu Dafu naturally was burdened with this spiritual paradox. Like many Chinese overseas students in Japan, he was despised as a citizen of a weak and falling country, suffering from all-round humiliation and bitter experience. Under such serious social background and cruel realistic environment, his quite sensitive nerve was deeply hit by his immersive experience in Japan and triggered by full indignation.

The Boundless Night (《茫茫夜》, 1922), of The Cold Ash Selections is a calling to the soul in real life. Unable to find love in real life due to prejudice, he had to seek temporary comfort in brothels. While, The Willow in Autumn (《秋柳》, 1927), as the companion piece of The Boundless Night depicted two broken

souls – comfort to each other between the protagonist Zhi Fu and the prostitute Hai Tang. It suffices to consider these two novels a continuance of Yu Dafu's foreign land complex. He was chewing the bitter life, despicable and mean life of himself while he was also deeply aware of the misfortune and suffering of the people at the bottom of the echelon with deep compassion. A Humble Memorial Ceremony wrote the story of 'I' and a jinrikisha puller, which embodied the common date facing intellectuals and laborers. From this series of works, we can see that Yu Dafu developed his individual sadness to compassion for miserable people at the bottom of the society and flagellated the dark social system, i.e. from the depiction of the agony of sex to the depiction of agony of life, which shed some light on his gradual progress of consciousness and awareness.

In 1922, Yu Dafu completed his study and returned to China with his original intention that he might get rid of the contempt of foreigners and achieve his ambitions; but China back then disappointed the author deeply; the warlords were fighting each other, the imperialists were covetously ready to invade China, the people were destitute, China was a mess, and the Creation Society founded by Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo was closing down. Once he set his feet on his hometown, Shanghai, bread-and-butter issue came to prominence. The Cypress Vine, Hall, created by Yu Dafu during his Second Period of Novel Writing (1922 – Great Revolution), recorded 'his' sufferings after his return to China. 'Once I landed on Shanghai, bread-and-butter issue came to bother, like a neck ring around the neck of my fate, getting tighter as each day passed by.'^{iv} Meanwhile, he found that he was incompatible with his mother who hoped that her son could return to China with money and glory instead of abjection and poverty. His wife was living between the indifference of her husband and the blame of her mother-in-law; she wept and she led her life meekly which made him pity her and he decided to take her to Shanghai with him. Although the lyrics 'a young man can't travel further than a hundred miles, yet his fear for starvation could drive him to walk to the end of the world' is very undisguisedly, yet it revealed the cruel truth of life. He had been working bent over backwards for clothes and food, but his ambition had been away from him further and

further, plus the stimulation of bitterness of the society, his aspiration to progress was dead completely. He did not only doubt his life but also destroyed himself. His wife killed herself due to his self-destruction. He himself also 'tramped to the bank of Huangpu River for several times (to try to commit suicide).' ^v What a misery it was for him to sleep over the night in a French Park. The misery of life led to no destination and the blood and tear of life were mixed. After that, Yu Dafu wrote an aloft and proud intellectual who could not locate a job after his return to China and lived in dilemma in his novel *Blood and Tears* (《血泪》, 1922), which could be accounted as his contempt for the mystifying and falsifying pseudo-scholars and political struggle. They were the direct reflection of the two jobs which he resigned in Shanghai and Anqing.

2. Later Period of Autobiographical Novels Creation (1927-1935)

1927-1935 was the late stage for Yu Dafu's creation of Autobiography. Due to the social chaos during this period, Yu Dafu's thought became rather complicated. The Past wrote about the romantic entanglement between Li Tai Bai, Lao Er and Lao San. There is no authenticity. In The past the author used his own soul to lament the flying times and the youth gone forever. The Late sweet-scented Osmantus (《迟桂花》, 1932), wrote that 'I' went to Hangzhou City to visit a friend and met the sister of his friend, Lian Gu, and was drawn to her innocence. Yu Dafu wrote this novel using sheer imagination, without which there is no art and without life and reflection, In this novel, a wish was proposed in the final part 'how I wish we are all later Osmanthus'. This time, the author revealed his tiredness for vagrancy and yearning for leading a life in seclusion and leisure which demonstrated the rising of the author's pro-seclusive thought. The completion of the novel *Run Away* (《出奔》, 1935), indicated the coming end of the author's literature career where he first made his flight away from novels.

The novels of Yu Dafu are the autobiographies of explicit subjective colors and self-awareness. His novels were a kind of anatomy and self-examination

of his own life and thought. Pain is the source of all arts, which was more vividly demonstrated by Yu Dafu's literature career. When contempt by foreigners, annihilation of hope, vagrancy, suffering, poverty and illness assaulted his boat of fate one after another, all he could do was to be strong inside, to temporarily heal his wounded heart in the land of freedom. He transferred all the desires which could not be satisfied in the outside world to the digging and self-examination in the internal world, and unleashed all the bitterness and anger in his literary works and bore fruits out of pain, blood and tears. When comfort was calling, love was greeting, peace and happiness were around the corner, and pain was to end, then literature – the child of pain, just like the setting sun, whose fragrance and beauty were fading away bit by bit.

II . Intense Decadent Sentiment and Frankly Dealing with Self Exposure

1. Influence of Foreign Emancipation Thought

Yu Dafu embraced the influence of Karl Schmidt and appreciated his famous words were: 'ego is everything, everything is ego.' Besides, the British end-of-the-century poetry and the claim of 'return to nature' by Rousseau of France all had influenced him, interweaving the vehemence of social struggle and the sad self remorse in his novels, hence making the whole chapters teeming with a keynote of sadness. Furthermore, it was the reason of Yu Dafu's individual psychological quality, 'Dafu's character is amazingly frank' that he 'exposed the 'anguish of sex' and 'bitterness of life' and even his whole heart innocently and frankly to the readers in his works.

This kind of self exposure and rich sad sentiment adjustor are particularly prominent in *The Degradation Collection*, which embodies the sadness out of struggle between soul and body. The protagonist, due to his lust not being satisfied, was anguishing everyday so much as to peep at the landlord's daughter showering and to go to a brothel. However, the burden of thousands of years of morality were weighing him down and made him feel guilty and regretful; (but these were all because his satisfaction was unnatural and perverted) yet the

more the desire of youth was pressed, the stronger it got and the more pathetic and miserable he deemed himself to be……It was so unquenchable that he saw himself being drawn to psychopathy and brink of death. Finally, he cast a glimpse at the bright star westward, and his tears fell like raindrops ‘motherland, oh my motherland! It is you who inflicted this death on me! Please grow rich! Please grow strong! So many of your sons and daughters are suffering here!’^{vi} this kind of fierce monologue outcry and self exposure exactly revealed the root cause of his psychopathy.

The protagonist of the novel, ‘he’, was an enlightened intellectual after the May Fourth Movement, who suffered humiliation and isolation as a citizen from a weak nation in a foreign land and the oppression of the strong wills for freedom and love, and therefore psychopathy was caused. ‘I’ was a faithful psychological reflection of the generation of intellectuals enlightened after the May Fourth Movement who found themselves lost. It was written at the start of the novel: ‘he lately felt very lonely and pathetic.’^{vii} The intense ambience of sadness was overwhelming, and the interior monologue at the end of the novel was even more stunning. The Removal to Southward and The Grey Death all showed the same wood colors and keynotes. In The Grey Death, ‘I’ drank excessively every day because of melancholy at his wife when he encountered Jing Er, daughter of the tavern owner, whom he could pour out his woes to as a comfort of friendship. But the news of Jing’s marriage made him suffer. Before long, ‘he’ died on a street sprinkled with grey silver moonlight, with the whole article teeming with colors of decadence: the broken home, dim tavern, his broken body and intermittent sobbing, until the final death. It took people a ton of tears of compassion and sadness to finish the reading. The Green Smoke (《青烟》) recorded one piece of life fragment where all the mental attributes of ‘his’ were all related to invalidism, through two different scenarios to indicate the vain melancholy of life.

2. Intense Sentiment--An Irony to Feudal Society

Many of Yu Dafu’s autobiographical novels described the anguish of sex, perverted mentality, and

sensual love with prostitutes, which were all for the purpose of reflecting the misfortune and bitter fate of insignificant people. They were either poverty-stricken or oppressed by foreigners so that they suffered double blow from both material and spirit, while their personalities tended to be sentimental which made their works full of tones of corruption and sadness. He narrated miserable life tragedies all along, freely exposed his depressed sorrowful feelings, clearly witnessed injustice and unfairness in reality, and fully realized the necessity of social reform. In spite of his utmost efforts, he still failed to seek the right way of realistic reform.

In his works, protagonists either chased after freedom, love and happiness or boldly cursed the society for its injustice, but the sadness and decadence were not so much as his individual whining and sadness as a fight against the ugly and vile reality, because his individual whining and sadness were caused by the ugly reality. He, in his works, openly demanded material life, boldly described the anguish of sensual desire, and cried out his sadness and anger towards the real society. All these were a satirical and heavy blow to the military and bureaucratic politics, the hypocrisy of upper classes and life-consuming old society. As Guo Moruo put it: ‘his self exposure was a rampant assault on the hypocrisy of Chinese scholars and bureaucrats who have existed in China for thousands of years, making some pseudo moralists and scholars feel it was all the more difficult to practice fraud.’^{viii} the motherland was weak and inferior, the imperialist powers were bullying, the politics was dark, the warlords were rampant, and people were sweltering in the heat of poverty. He willed to be strong yet meek in his nature, and he wanted to strengthen his country, yet there was nothing he could do, he had been a vagrant since young, and contempt from others made him a sentimental eccentric. The protagonists in his novels was exactly the incarnations of Yu Dafu, who was unnerved, decadent, whining and sighing, subsisted and hoped in self pity. Therefore the whole work lacked the conflict and strength of force, displaying a keynote of intense sadness.

III Poeticized and prosified mood novel

1. Natural and Smooth Lyric Techniques

Old-typed poems of Yu Dafu are distinctively characterized by aesthetic beauty, namely, emotional sincerity, poetic image, and concise language, as well as smooth rhyme and rhythm. His early poems are distinctly featured with sentimental mood, in which he expresses sentimental feelings of concern about society and the people, living hardship, far away from home and country as an authentic record of his life and for the society.

Yu Dafu's novels broke the plot structure of traditional novels, and he penetrated the whole work with mood, and created a very strong lyrical style with intense lyrical implication; as a result, there was no cohesive structure and the novels tended to be poeticized and prosified. The autobiographical novels of Yu Dafu tended to be written at will and the plot changed with scenario, different from either novels of plot or novels of character. The whole work usually pivoted on the changing mood of the protagonist, while most of his protagonists were sentimental, aloft or of psychopathic tendency. Their conscious activities were bouncing, flashing and changing. Therefore, the whole work was based on mood, which seemed like sad and whispering chanting of music, depressed, revolving, and was also like overflowing spring water, teeming in his works. Furthermore, the author liked to use nice prose writing skills to depict the character mentality, describe the environment, blending the plot with scenario and using the external environment set the characters off to advantage; apart from that, he inlayed his novels with lyrics to emphasize the personalities of the characters; as a result, the novels were to some extent like poems, fresh and fluent, with strong mood throughout the novel, creating artistic wonders of blending plot and scenario one after another, integrating the description of scenario and the inner feelings of characters, and thus achieving the double effect of scenario deriving from plot and plot caused by scenario. The natural and influent lyrical structure, i.e. the mood, penetrated the whole novel, which was the major structural features of Yu Dafu's autobiographical novels.

The structure of *The Degradation Collection* was the most representative. The eight paragraphs of it were not paragraphs for story telling, but typical lyrical verses of poems, written entirely according to the emotional development of the protagonist. From 'his' lonely sighing in the fields, to 'his' shame and anger in the school as a student from a weak nation, after inserting a piece of history of his overseas learning, the author wrote about his empty love and bitter sex during his suffering and then moved on to write his melancholy and elusion after further loneliness and self regret after complete isolation that 'he' occasionally went to taverns in dilemma of poverty; finally 'he' walked himself to the deep of the sea to commit suicide out of self remorse. The emotion of the protagonist moved on from paragraph to paragraph and reached the climax in the final paragraph. Although this 20000-word novelette did not boast a thrilling plot, it was smooth and magnificent to reach, the end because the author tightly grasped the emotions of the protagonist.

2. Internal Monologue and Intermittent Transient

Short stories such as *Blood and Tears*, and *Cypress Vine* trip were all important works after *The Degradation Collection* of Yu Dafu's mood novels. The pieces of events and scenarios as were depicted in *Blood and Tears* spanned several different periods from the protagonist's overseas study to making a living after his return to China, and the work clung to the focus deeply felt by the protagonist, i.e., the sharp contrast between some intellectuals who climbed up the social ladder through blurting doctrines and poor but honest students who could not make a living, using lyrical association to connect several thrilling scenarios. The span of time and space were big yet natural and coherent, digging deep step by step. The *Cypress Vine* adopted the same structure, which was only more incisively and vividly. The *Dark Night* wrote the restlessness of inclination towards goodness and anguish of evil mind, tormenting the fragile and sentimental soul of Yu Zhifu. This work was driven by the plot that Yu Zhifu bid farewell to Wu Chisheng and came to A as a teacher, and the student strike, but the author did not write it in a clear and detailed description. Instead, the author focused on analyzing

the emotional fluctuation and mentality to reflect his anguish and depression when his desires for love and sex could not be satisfied. His works adopted excessive use of internal monologue, and made use of intermittent and sudden changes, consciousness flashing back to connect his life and mentality in this very period, revealing his strong conflict between soul and body which could just not be let off. Some plots in the novel served entirely the changes of the internal mentality of the protagonist. Apart from that, novels such as the *Nostalgist*, *windbell*, and *Third of November* were also based on the mental analysis to depict the continuous flowing of the emotion of the protagonist. The *Climate of Late Autumn* focused on rendering a kind of symbolic ambience and environment, to remind readers of the internal world of the protagonist, and to complete the lyrical figure. The *Climate of Late Autumn*, through the exchange between the clear and bright scenery of Late Autumn in the eyes of the protagonist and the desolate and gloomy scenario in the picture of a young painter, displayed the changes of the whole ambience and emotion from bright intoxication to annihilation and desolation. The *Quarry Rock* with overflowed poetry throughout the chapters, and it generally adopted alternative use of lyrical prose and poetry, that the protagonist sometimes drank and rhymed a poem or looked for the grave of Li Tai Bai. The whole text paid attention to rich lyrical implications.

As we can see, the use of written skills such as psychological description, environmental description and alternative use of poetry, constitute the important means to of the emotional appeal of Yu Dafu's autobiographical novels. The mood novels of Yu Dafu broke the traditional writing of novels of plot and played a unique pioneering role in China's literature circle.

This was an importance factor of the glamour of Yu Dafu's autobiographical novels and also a very important reason for his works to sustain their influence over the years.

Conclusion

The aforementioned features are the main characteristics of Yu Dafu's autobiographical novels, and also the key parts constituting the writing style

of Yu Dafu. Yu Dafu's novels mainly provided a history of psychological tragedy in self image and reproduced the shattered souls and bitter hearts of intellectuals during the May Fourth Movement, from a unique perspective which reflected the difficult process of individual liberation during the May Fourth Movement. His novels are prosified and poeticized, whatever in the background, structure, theme, character or plot and language. From prose-style grace of his novels, readers can hear the voice of those times. His novels launched the precedent of self lyrical novels and formed a new novel school; casting a propounding influence on the writers of his age and yet to come. In the late 1920s, he was wreathed in decadent colors among the academic circles so that he had not received impartial evaluation in history of literature. With social changes in China after the opening up and reform in 1980, Chinese people could be emancipated in thought. In addition to normal development of Sino-Japanese relations, increasingly scholars began to study Yu Dafu and Japanese Literature. Based on summary and analysis of three characteristics of autobiographic novels of Yu Dafu in the context, it is hoped that, there will be comparative analysis of linguistic features in his works and English literature to explore other special features in his novels other than Japanese elements.

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