

The Anxious Self and the Crisis of Identity: a Comment on the Tetralogy of Wonderland

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Keywords: Joyce carol oates, Tetralogy of wonderland, Time, Space

Abstract: Joyce Carol Oates' early novel art is represented by the tetralogy of Wonderland. As a representative writer of "psychological realism", she dissolves the character consciousness with dialogue characteristics into time and space. Oates constructed a nostalgic time and homecoming space, which showing the cultural landscape of the 1960s' in the United States.

1. Introduction

Joyce Carol Oates is an important contemporary American female writer. The group portraits of the characters in the tetralogy of *Wonderland* have a strong sense of independence, and the anxious dual selves of the characters form a self-dialogue. With the help of inner conflict monologues, the characters realize the dialogue of consciousness and express the characters' potential identity crisis. They constantly deny and escape from themselves in the drift of double anxiety.

2. Anxious Dilemma Voice

The creative perspective of characters from outside to inside is the prerequisite for constructing the inner person. In order for a character to realize a dialogue with himself, he must first recognize the independent status of the character's self-consciousness. That is to say, the character consciousness becomes the dominant factor, and the inner person feels and grasps the self through active dialogue with consciousness. It forms a whole independently in the work. "In my eyes, I am the center of the origin of behavior, the origin of the initiative that affirms and confirms all values, because this is the only starting point where I can participate in the only existence responsibly. It is the combat headquarters, which is the command in the event of existence. The supreme command of my possibility and my responsibility." [1] They become anxious individuals due to the constant conflict of consciousness, thus establishing the subjectivity of the characters.

Take a look at the characters in the four-part novel, from Clara and his illegitimate son Swan, who ran away from home in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* to the teenage murderer Richard and his mother, Nada, in *Expensive People*, to them "The brothers and sisters who dreamed of different lives in"-Jules and Maureen, and in the last *Wonderland*, Jesse and his wife Helen, who planned their ideals according to the wishes of adoptive father Peterson, abandoned the "old me" and so on.

The novel features characters The independent self-awareness is the center, and the anxious consciousness prompts the character's individual introspective inquiry, forming an anxious dialogue between the character and the self. If the consciousness of the protagonist in Dostoevsky's works is the "conversation subject", then the protagonist in the quartet is the "anxious consciousness subject" whose potential dual selves make their consciousness a conflict battlefield. Through the dialogue-oriented inner monologue of the characters, the thoughts of the characters are expressed in subdued discourse. From the sense of conflict between the characters and self in Oates's tetralogy, we can see the identity crisis consciousness of the characters themselves. The protagonist is constantly negating and fleeing in the double anxiety of self identity, thus realizing spiritual self-salvation.

According to Freud's classification of personality levels, that is, the most basic id, which acts according to the principle of happiness; the middle layer of ego, which acts according to the principles of reality; the highest layer is the superego (superego), it acts according to the principle of perfection. Among them, self is the only place for anxiety, and only self can produce and feel anxiety. Therefore, he divided anxiety into three types, namely reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety and moral anxiety. Reality anxiety develops from a state of preparedness for anxiety, and one of the possible outcomes is that anxiety-the repetition of early traumatic experiences-is only a signal. In this case, the result of the anxiety response can adapt oneself to the new dangerous situation and be able to fight or defend. There are three conditions of neurotic anxiety. One is a free-floating, universal anxiety; the second is that this anxiety is firmly absorbed in certain perceptions in the so-called "phobias"; the third is that it exists in Hysteria and other serious neuroses.[2] They can be used to observe the anxiety of the protagonist in Oates's tetralogy.

2.1 Anxiety of the Bastard Swan

Because of his status as an illegitimate child, he was criticized by Jonathan as a "bastard" or "Little fucking bastard-baby" (Little fucking bastard-baby). What the new family brought to him was the indifference between his brothers. During a hunt, he couldn't stand everyone calling him "little bastard" and hate him, and accidentally killed Robert. At his eighteenth birthday party, his cousin Deborah revealed his well-known identity as an illegitimate child, and he still pretended that it was not true. Finally, he went to the doctor due to anxiety, and then had a private meeting with his married cousin Deborah in the hotel. The reality of loneliness pushes Swan to the edge of anxiety, and escapes from self through his unruly love with his cousin. "I don't know who made me the person I am but I have this strange idea it's someone who's watching me right now. I can feel that person staring at me! And I loathe that person, I hate him with all my insides- he made me come alive and is following it through to the end, and I can never get free-The bastard!" Years ago, the blond man with a distorted face in his memory said, You're lying. I can see in your face you killed something already and you're going to kill lots of thing.....I can see it right there-all the things you're going to kill and step on and walk over.[3] Unfortunately, this became true in Swan's life. In fact, the prophecy finally came true not because Laurie had clairvoyant .[4] But he understands that Clara has a huge social value system behind her after her rejection.

2.2 Juvenile Murder RICHARD's Anxiety

On the title page of the book *Expensive People* is an inner monologue by the protagonist, Richard who is the genius, "I am a young murderer." The whole book is based on the process of Richard's recollection. The whole book can be regarded as a dialogue between the first person "I" and a fictitious reader. In reality, Richard is frail and sick, and endures many diseases. This is Richard in the daytime, that is, the bright Richard (daylight Richard), by contrast, the Richard in the

night (that is, the devil Richard) is very strong. , Two Richards appeared with the change of day and night. My daylight time was slow as usual, but my night time was picking up faster and faster, like a deranged heart.) [5]From the tone of Richard's narration, he is on the verge of madness. His tone is always mixed with fictitious readers' guesses and fluctuates, with a strong controversy atmosphere. Strong self-affirmation in arguing, most of them have unquestionable authority. Oates once said: "When the child-murder of Expensive People realizes that he has become, or has been, in fact, all long a mere 'Minor Character' in his mother's life, he is made to realize absolute impotence; inconsequence; despair. He has slipped forever 'out of focus.'"[6] It is this desperate sense of loss that made him a murderer of mothers. In his memoirs, Richard gradually revealed himself in an anxious state from calm to confused. It can be said that Richard is the result of neurotic anxiety caused by reality anxiety. In the end, "Demon Richard" kills his mother according to the powerful "sniper" role in his mother's novels.

2.3 The Anxiety of Maureen

Here's Maureen's illusory "Three Dreams of Life" to explore the anxious individuals in her pursuit. The "Three Dreams of Life" can be said to form a psychological counterpoint structure with Maureen. The illusion of dreams is a sign that his anxiety can be relieved, and it represents the turn of every important choice in Maureen's life. The first dream began when she realized that she had to escape. Oates talked about Maureen's dream: "In Maureen's case, her integrity as an individual is being completely violated by her mother's attempt to 'use' her, and she sees no way out except-naively-the way her brother seems to have gone, by acquiring money, somehow, anyhow, as if 'money' were key to freedom."[7] In the second dream, the two Maureen met after being beaten. Two Maureen kept fighting in her heart, the first Maureen sold her body in exchange for money to escape, and became the second Maureen. But after being discovered and violent by her stepfather, she felt a strong sense of "guilt" which lasted for 13 months can be said to be a manifestation of moral anxiety. In the third dream, she dreamed of walking down the street with another Maureen carrying a bag. Then two Maureen talked in a dream, one realized his disguised heavy and numb body, the other knew that he was safe, but fell asleep in his body. After recovering from illness, Maureen sought to escape the painful memories of the unbearable past and re-seeded the opposite sex as a refuge, returning to Maureen who was living in the body and longing for "freedom". At this time, the moral anxiety in her heart has disappeared, and she did not hesitate to induce a married man to divorce and marry herself and start a life of "another person".

2.4 The Dual Personality of JESSE's Anxiety

In *Wonderland*, after Jesse's father shot and killed Jesse's mother and sisters due to unemployment and depression, he intended to kill Jesse, and Jesse escaped in danger. The injured Jesse lived with her grandfather and aunt one after another. He quarreled with his grandfather and ran away from home because he wanted to see the old furniture of his parents. Later, he was sent to the juvenile shelter by his uncle. In the juvenile shelter, an adoption visit by Dr. Peterson disturbed Jesse's heart, and for the first time he realized the double self. "Existence-what does that mean? He tried to remember Peterson The strange things the doctor said to him...he didn't understand. I don't know what it meant. A person...has to be who he should be.."[8] The special fonts in the novel are what Peterson said, and they remain in Jesse's self-consciousness. Jesse's questioning and thinking about "existence" were highlighted, and he began to examine himself for the first time. In college, Jesse devoted himself to crazy experimentation and learning, and did not know the world well. At this moment, there are two selves in Jesse's heart, one is on the verge of violence, and the other is the true body in reality. The traumatic experience in the past has become a terrible mixture living

inside Jesse's body, and is opposed to the ambitious Jesse in reality. Jessie lives anxiously in such a double conflict of self. He needs to pay attention all the time and fight against the devil Jesse who is dormant deep in his heart.

3. Negation and Exploration of Identity

Looking at the four parts of *Wonderland*, as far as the character and self dialogue are concerned, the characters wandering on the battlefield of conflict consciousness, all show anxious self-consciousness, show the character's deep psychological space, and show the character's restless vitality. From the perspective of the characters' self-exploration path, the protagonist in the quartet has begun to explore because of the lack of identity. The escape or denial of the "old me", the yearning and dream of the "new me" identity run through their life journey, and they hope to achieve self-salvation through the channel of their choice. "Oates's identity exploration is not only a sense of identity loss, but also a kind of identity maintenance, just like Whitman and Mailer, transcending the individual and becoming a culture." [9] The original text is as follows: Oates's exploration of identity involves both a perceived lack of identity and an assertion of identity that, like Whitman and Mailer, transcends The individual to become cultural. From *A Garden of Earthly Delights* to *Wonderland*, behind the anxious characters are the precarious American Dream. They think they have chosen the right path, but they are questioned by others after the "recovery of mountains and rivers". The previous choice does not have absolute meaning, which makes the dialogue between the character and the self gradually have an open and unfinished nature. It can be said that when they face their own lives, they clearly know that reality is not what they want, but they cannot choose the correct solution. Just as ignorant healers have failed to prescribe a realistic cure.

4. Conclusion

The protagonists in the tetralogy are anxious double self-contradictions, they wander alone on the edge of anxiety and constantly explore, trying to achieve self-defining success. The protagonist can be portrayed (rather than expressed) through the dialogue of consciousness monologue, and the external and objective world and the "third party" opinions are integrated into the protagonist's self-conscious vision. Furthermore, the protagonist is someone who can actively talk to and respond to the author. Oates focused on highlighting the "destiny" of the family when revealing the individual's survival doubts and spiritual dilemmas. "What is destiny and what is accident is determined by the spiritual experience of the individual mind-and the cultural mind." The four parts all highlight the value of "knowledge" to varying degrees. Laurie warned Clara that if you want to be different from your family, you'd better go to school. Knowledge is a way and a way to enter the "American Dream".

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Youth Innovative Talents Project under Guangdong Provincial Department of Education (Humanities and Social Sciences) 2017WQNXC015.

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