

On the art of satire in Zhang Ailing's Novels: the Erotic Emotional World in *Red Rose and White Rose* and *Little Reunion*

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Abstract: In *Red Rose and White Rose* and *Little Reunion*, the satirical art and images in the emotional world of both men and women form the bleak keynote of Zhang Ailing's novels. *Red Rose and White Rose* describes the secular men and women in real life when they face the dilemma of reputation and desire of material and lust. In the sex description of *Little Reunion*, the author expresses her satirize of sexual desire with concrete images and reveals the pure emotion of sexual desire from feminine perspective. This article explores the causes of Zhang Ailing's desolate and pungent satirical art and analyzes the complexity of human nature in her works, especially the instinctive desire of human beings and the intuitive sexual attitude of women.

1. Introduction

Zhang Ailing's novels mostly describe the love between secular men and women in a desolate and gorgeous style to show the weaknesses and defects in human character. With the ups and downs of the fates of the protagonists and heroines in the novels, she affects the readers' nerves and stabs the readers' sensitive heart with the bleak tip of her pen. Zhang Ailing, who is always try to be sober and straightforward, writes satirically about them and their unsatisfied love. In this way, she reveals the cruelty of fate and points out the weakness of human nature in unique and sharp language. Her novels vividly and fully uncover people's instinctive desire and surviving dilemma in emotional life.

Taking the images in *Red Rose and White Rose* (*Hong Mei Gui Yu Bai Mei Gui*) and *Little Reunion* (*Xiao Tuan Yuan*) as examples, we try to analyze the ironic artistic characteristics and verbal irony art of Zhang Ailing in the application of those images, especially pay attention to the causes of irony in Zhang Ailing's works and the ironic art presented in her early representative (*Red Rose and White Rose*) and late one (*Little Reunion*).

The desolate and pungent irony art is Zhang Ailing's unique artistic style which is relatively rare for a female writer in modern China at that time. In real life, the extreme cold and bad living environment in her early years led to Zhang Ailing's character becoming lonely and unsympathetic. In the troubled times, the love between Hu Lancheng and Zhang Ailing was finally broken in a quite heartrending way and Zhang Ailing's insight into the world was transformed into her harsh and ironic language. As famous scholar Xia Zhiqing said, "Zhang Ailing's satire is not meant to punish evil and promote good, it is just a supplement to her tragic outlook on life."

Behind Zhang Ailing's ironic art technique with thorns in her pen is her sadness for secular men and women, her deep understanding about human defects, though from the appearance, the desolation and meanness form a basic tone of Zhang Ailing's love novels. Zhang Ailing satirizes ordinary characters in the real society. She exposes the hidden dark side of the characters and reveals the hypocrisy and selfishness in human nature in front of the readers. Readers may notice the same weakness of themselves or the people around them while mocking the characters in the works, which inevitably causes shock and reflection.

2. Satire on the weakness of human nature: *Red Rose and White Rose*

Zhang Ailing is good at using specific images of daily life to convey irony, which makes the novel form a pungent art of irony. There are two metaphors in the title of the novel: *Red Rose and White Rose*. It seems that women are compared to red rose and white rose separately. Let us try to specifically analyze the use of these metaphoric images. The red rose is as enthusiastic as Wang Jiaorui's attitude towards love - warm, free and easy. The white rose is pure and flawless, just as Meng Yanli has the characteristics of a considerate wife and good mother. In Zhang Ailing's works, the identity as red rose and white rose is not stably from beginning to end, which is not permanent and fixed. There is an essential transformation between these two roles. As a matter of fact, Wang Jiaorui and Meng Yanli are women with dual identities - wife and mistress, red rose and white rose. In order to pursue the happiness of love with Tong Zhenbao, red rose Wang Jiaorui resolutely divorced her husband, but was abandoned by Zhenbao after all. After realizing the cruel reality, Wang Jiaorui can only rely on a next man to become an honest wife and have children. She is no longer warm and free, no longer being a mistress who is easy to fall in love, and abides by her duty by becoming the role of white rose. The white rose Meng Yanli has a traditional Chinese virtuous wife personality, but her husband Zhenbao thinks she is conservative and boring, so she chooses to have an affair outside the family just like her husband does. Cheating on Zhenbao is some sort of release and revenge to her. In the later stage, Meng Yanli becomes bold and chooses to have an affair with the tailor, breaking the image of virtuous wife, and changing her identity into red rose. In the later stage, Zhenbao turned back to his family and Yanli chose tolerance and forgiveness, so her identity changed to white rose again. Generally speaking, white mostly symbolizes innocence and holiness. In the novel, the author uses satire, associating white with emptiness and boredom. Red symbolizes vitality and enthusiasm. The author describes the red color of the red rose as "mosquito blood" on the wall, implying the bleak ending of the red rose. For red rose and white rose, love seems so pathetic and difficult, the transformation of their identities is the final result of helpless choice in the face of practical plights when love cannot be satisfied. We can tell that both red rose and white rose are the victims of male legal power and money society. They have to depend on men from beginning to end, and they still wither and wither no matter what kind rose they are.

Zhang Ailing uses sexual relations to expose human nature, the transformation of the identities of red and white roses in the novel satirizes the weakness of human nature in the secular world. Behind the weakness of human nature is the complexity of human beings, which is the suppression and release of sexual desire and erotic desire in the heart. White rose represents people's repressed sexual desire and lust, and choose to break the tradition to vent. Red rose represents the difficulty of women's independent survival in troubled times. Finally, they choose to compromise with reality, attach themselves to men by marriage, and restrain their bold characters. For Tong Zhenbao, whether it is the light and distant "bright moon" or the "cinnabar mole" close to his heart, there will be inevitable regret in the binary choice. In the novel, Zhang Ailing analyzes that the root of Zhenbao's pain is the inner darkness of secular men and women and the despicability and selfishness of human nature. Zhenbao not only wants to occupy another man's married wife irresponsibly, but also fears that marrying red rose will destroy his reputation, career and future. The entanglement of material desire and erotic desire eventually makes red and white roses and Tong Zhenbao himself fall as victims in the erotic emotional world. But for Zhenbao, social status and reputation are the most important thing. Compared with feelings and lust, a good reputation is significant after all, meanwhile women are dispensable. Is "Tong Zhenbao" in the novel not a vivid reflection of some men in the real world? When trapped in the dilemma of love, do people choose to face desire directly and bear responsibility, or choose to escape from love and compromise with the utilitarian need? The author uses a seemingly sympathetic tone to describe these ugly and pathetic characters, but in fact, she shows an intention of contempt and ridicule between the lines.

In the novel, Zhang Ailing wrote that Zhenbao is "the most ideal modern Chinese character". Tong Zhenbao won the reputation as a man who can resist the temptation of women, because he didn't have a sexual relationship with his first love "Rose" when studying abroad. In ancient times, "Liu Xiaohui",

a famous thinker, was widely remembered as a model of abiding by traditional Chinese morality. In the Spring and Autumn period, Liu Xiahui of the state of Lu wrapped the frozen woman in his arms without indecent behaviors. Later generations also regard "Liu Xiahui" as a pronoun for good conduct and decent style especially for men. However, since Tong Zhenbao met Wang Jiaorui, he calculated the pros and cons wisely. He not only wanted to get the body of a passionate woman, but also didn't want to destroy his reputation of a loyal husband as "Liu Xiahui". He always found reasons for himself in the balance. The word "Liu Xiahui" was originally intended to shape the image of a gentleman who is not seduced by women or distracted by lust, but for Tong Zhenbao, the metaphor of "Liu Xiahui" has a wonderful ironical meaning. Tong Zhenbao's words and deeds are inconsistent, showing the extreme hypocrisy and selfishness in his heart and exposing the despicable side of his nature.

3. Satire on sexual desire: *Little Reunion*

The language style of Zhang Ailing's early works *Red Rose and White Rose* is gorgeous and desolate, while the overall language style of her later representative *Little Reunion* is simple and plain. This book is an autobiographical novel created by Zhang Ailing after she went abroad. When the novel involves the paragraphs describing the sex between Sheng Jiuli and Shao Zhiyong, the language is straightforward and more explicit.

Some bold and explicit sexual descriptions in *Little Reunion* reflect that Zhang Ailing faces up to her body and sexual experience, and expresses her honesty and truth to herself, others and the world, which means a complete release and completion of her own life. After two giant changes in marriage and living environment, Zhang Ailing has produced new experiences and views on life, love and sex. In the works expressing these views, the use of specific images is more ironic even than before.

In the *Little Reunion*, most of the descriptions of sexual behaviors between Sheng Jiuli and Shao Zhiyong are related to animals. The love writing fragments in Zhang Ailing's book boldly interpret women's intuitive feelings in women's sexual experience. Among the erotic writings of Shao Zhiyong and Sheng Jiuli, the author once compared Shao Zhiyong to a beast who drank the spring in a cave, an external hunter and a foreign enemy. Sheng Jiuli is compared to a upside down bat, a prey and one who is intruded. Sheng Jiuli wants him to "return to her arms and back to the bottom of her eyes" is a real idea that women want to regain their sense of security because of their inner fear. The sexual experience that should have been equal and respect, but Sheng Jiuli's fear and helplessness of gender behavior caused by Shao Zhiyong's forced intervention, is an ironic artistic writing.

Zhang Ailing compared "a tail of lion and tiger dusting flies" and "a police baton wrapped in flannelette" to male reproductive organs. In the process of sexual description, the emergence of flies makes people feel dirty and disturbing. At the same time, flies also refer to the ugliness and dirtiness of sexual behavior. The baton has the characteristics of beating and violence. It can be inferred from the text that Sheng Jiuli's feelings about sexual behavior are uncomfortable, and she is not immersed in happiness. With these specific images, Zhang Ailing shows a discomfort relationship caused by the inequality between men and women's sexual status with women's intuitive feeling. The use of images shows the transformation between human nature and primitive animal nature. The language is direct and explicit, giving people such strong reading impacts. At the same time, it also makes people feel frank and true, which deconstructs the romance and beauty of love in the traditional Chinese sense to a certain extent.

In the *Little Reunion*, Zhang wrote: "At least there was (sex) in a parting time. Of course. According to the formula of traditional reunion, this is necessary. As a keepsake, sex makes an oath of alliance works." Shao Zhiyong forcibly asked for Xiaokang's body when leaving. The word "keepsake" makes a sharp and strong irony to the shameless, amorous, despicable and insidious of Shao Zhiyong's behavior. For Shao Zhiyong, this "keepsake" is more effective than any oath of alliance, because he believes that as long as he occupies a woman's body, this very woman will naturally wait for him for the rest of her life. This is mean to satirize Shao Zhiyong's greedy and arrogance without doubt.

The vigorous love between Zhang Ailing and Hu Lancheng eventually dried up and decayed because of Hu Lancheng's amorous and treacherous, which greatly affected Zhang Ailing's

understanding of love and marriage. *Little Reunion*, as her autobiographical novel, in the description of Sheng Jiuli and Shao Zhiyong, the image roughly shaped by herself and Hu Lancheng as the prototype is very analytical and ironic. Irony is not only a narrative strategy, but also related to the author's life cognition and experience. The autobiographical *Little Reunion* runs through the author's experience and understanding of life. The author boldly and even explicitly describes the love and desire of men and women, focusing on the inner feelings of the characters. The author's description of sexual fragments is very self-mocking and ironic. Among them, the satire about sexual desire is Zhang Ailing's deep view of gender relations. She truly reveals the true feelings in sexual desire from a female perspective.

4. Conclusions

The satire on the weakness of human nature in *Red Rose and White Rose* is Zhang Ailing's description of the sorrow of women's life and the desolate era. The satire on sexual desire in *Little Reunion* permeates Zhang Ailing's intuitive feelings about gender relations and feelings. These two novels deeply express women's love, desire, painstakingness and men's promiscuousness. The images in Zhang Ailing's novels have the characteristics of "materialization". She uses metaphors to transform the people and scenery in her novels into something tangible and vivid. For example, women are compared to cinnabar mole, bright moon. And sex is compared to keepsake to convey a distinct feeling. Implement people's emotional attitude into reality in the unique form of things.

The tragic experience of childhood, the hardships of growing up and the failure of marriage make Zhang Ailing's literary language style cold and meaningful. Zhang Ailing pays a deep attention to women's life and human weakness with a stern insight. She uses a lot of daily images in her literary creation, and the subtle combination of images constitutes her unique desolate tone. The use of metaphorical images reflects her re-experience and exploration of life itself, and conveys desolate irony with specific images, it constructs a unique and desolate language style as the "Zhang's tune".

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