

Comparing “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” and “Ulysses” in Consciousness Stream Techniques

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Abstract:

“Ulysses” is one of the representative works of Irish writer James Joyce, and also a masterpiece of the writing technique known as “stream of consciousness,” which has had a significant impact on the world literary arena. “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” is a novella created by Taiwanese writer Bai Xianyong which delicately exhibits the entire emotional flow and inner conflicts of the protagonist, Lady Qian, during her attendance at the banquet hosted by Lady Dou through the use of stream of consciousness technique. This paper compares these two classic works from the perspective of stream of consciousness, and analyzes the inspiration and creation of Bai Xianyong’s “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” from “Ulysses”. The paper seeks to more profoundly unearth the profound literary value and social significance beneath the unique narrative style of “stream of consciousness” in the former. Based on his proficient mastery of Western stream of consciousness technique, Bai Xianyong fully exerts the creativity of an outstanding writer, forming a distinctive and unique Eastern stream of consciousness writing style rich in Chinese charm.

Keywords: Bai Xianyong; stream of consciousness; “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream”; Ulysses.

1. Introduction

Bai Xianyong is a renowned writer and drama artist whose works have influenced the Chinese community nationwide and even worldwide. Among them, his short story “Silent Light” won the 5th Yu Dafu Literary Award. Since the late 1970s, Bai Xianyong has been widely noticed by academic circles as one of the first Taiwan writers familiar to mainland readers and critics. As the discipline of overseas Chinese literature has become more mature and complete in the 21st century, academic research on Bai Xianyong in mainland China has seen a significant increase in both quantity and quality. Nowadays, there are over 600 research papers on Bai Xianyong available, focusing mainly on four aspects: the study of tragic consciousness in his novels [1], the exploration of the cool and concise language style and the underlying nostalgia and sense of rise and fall triggered by changes in the times[2, 3], the discussion of female images in the novels, often combining women’s fate with historical backgrounds to explore the reasons for tragedy[4, 5], and the multi-angle consideration of homosexual themes in his works [6].

Based on the previous research achievements obtained from various perspectives and rich theories, the author

has noticed a unique issue in a large number of reading practices: the source of the stream of consciousness writing technique that frequently appears in Bai Xianyong’s novels has not been comprehensively and deeply stated by researchers. Mr. Bai is a scholar who has mastered both Eastern and Western knowledge. He comes from a bureaucratic family and is deeply influenced by Chinese classical aesthetics. “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” is one of the most popular and representative pieces in his early work Taipei People, which shows rich references to Chinese excellent traditional culture in both thought and charm. However, it cannot be ignored that “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” not only exhibits the influence of Chinese traditional culture but also skillfully employs modern stream of consciousness techniques, presenting the unique charm of Western narrative color.

This paper aims to conduct a case-by-case comparative analysis of James Joyce’s “Ulysses” and Bai Xianyong’s “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” to reveal the similarities in their artistic expressions of stream of consciousness. At the same time, the paper traces Bai’s process of contacting, identifying, and applying

the stream of consciousness technique. Through in-depth discussions of these two works, it is expected to more comprehensively understand Bai Xianyong's unique contribution in integrating Eastern and Western cultures in literary creation.

2. Definition and Interpretation of Stream of Consciousness Technique

The concept of stream of consciousness was initially proposed by the American functionalist psychologist pioneer James to describe the flowing characteristics of consciousness. James emphasized the uninterrupted nature of thought, i.e., there is no "gap" or "blankness" and it is always "flowing," emphasizing its transcendence of time and space, unbound by the constraints of temporal and spatial limitations. Consciousness is seen as a purely subjective thing that is not constrained by objective reality [7].

In psychology, stream of consciousness is defined as a freely flowing process of thinking. It emphasizes the continuity and unrestricted nature of thought, where the content and direction of consciousness are not significantly limited or controlled by any external factor. In stream of consciousness, thoughts can flow, float, detach, and recombine freely, like a river. This form of thinking is often unrestricted, potentially jumping to unexpected directions, yet capable of producing unique and valuable insights [7]. This concept was further elaborated by the French philosopher Henri Bergson and gradually integrated with artistic creation at the turn of the 20th century, adopted and employed by writers who focused on describing characters' inner activities, giving rise to a unique literary genre known as stream-of-consciousness literature [8].

Representative writers of the stream-of-consciousness literary genre include Marcel Proust, James Joyce, William Faulkner, and Virginia Woolf. Through unique narrative techniques and linguistic styles, they portrayed the subjective consciousness of characters, revealing its purely subjective and unrestrained nature [9].

In essence, the core of the stream-of-consciousness technique lies in capturing and documenting the authentic feelings of an individual's inner world, revealing the interior landscape through meticulous depictions of thoughts, emotions, and memories. In literary creation, it is characterized by three main features: firstly, emphasizing the portrayal of the reversal of time and space in a character's inner world; secondly, breaking the traditional narrative mode, de-emphasizing plot and storylines; and thirdly, primarily adopting techniques such as interior monologue, free association, montage, and symbolism. This writing technique has gradually become an important genre in

literary creation, exerting a profound influence on subsequent literature, drama, poetry, and film and television works.

Next, this paper will analyze its primary artistic techniques of stream of consciousness from the following perspectives. First, stream-of-consciousness literature often employs interior monologue to reveal characters' complex inner worlds. The uniqueness of this interior monologue lies in the absence of external environmental and authorial perspectives, focusing solely on the pure exhibition of characters' inner consciousness, leaving the interpretation of thoughts to the reader. Second, free association in stream-of-consciousness literature is an unstructured, illogical, and disorderly mode of thinking. Since human thinking when dealing with affairs is often chaotic and difficult to maintain clarity and order, and is often disturbed by external environments, free association restores this state of difficulty in concentration, intertwining characters' memories, sensations, imaginations, etc., breaking the traditionally linear narrative structure of novels to truly reflect characters' inner worlds.

Another frequently used technique in stream-of-consciousness literature is the montage of time and space, which transforms scenes through jumps and shifts in time and space. Common montage techniques include flashbacks, close-ups, slow motion, etc. This method interweaves characters' memories, reality, and imagination, forming a unique narrative technique that achieves the effect of reshaping facts.

Lastly, stream-of-consciousness literature often employs symbolism and metaphor, expressing abstract concepts and emotions through specific images and language. This technique makes the work more vivid and figurative, and more capable of resonating with readers. In summary, the artistic techniques of consciousness stream literature are diverse. Through the application of these techniques, they not only promote the development and innovation of literature, providing new ideas and directions, but also offer readers a richer and more novel reading experience.

3. The Application of Stream-of-Consciousness Techniques in Both Works

3.1 Metaphor

Joyce employs implicit mythical structures in "Ulysses" to represent the "collective unconscious" of humanity. Each chapter's title corresponds to Homer's epic "Odyssey." Dublin, chosen as the setting, reflects the entire Europe. Through "Ulysses," Joyce strips away the hypocritical facade of European society, exposing its spiritual illusion and pale barrenness.

In Bai Xianyong's "Wandering through a Garden, Waking

from a Dream”’s metaphors are primarily manifested in several aspects. Firstly, the metaphor of “dream” permeates the entire novel. The “dream” refers to both the performance of “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” within the Dou mansion and Madam Qian’s personal dream. This dream represents Madam Qian’s recollection and nostalgia for the past while hinting at her confusion and unease about the future. Additionally, the character Du Liniang from “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream”. It is used to metaphorically represent Madam Qian’s experiences and fate, reflecting her helplessness and impotence in the face of love and destiny.

3.2 Temporal and Spatial Montage

The montage technique in “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” creates an impression of “revisiting the past” or “reproducing the past,” primarily manifested in the plotting and structural arrangement of the novel, constantly switching between the present and the past. For example, there is a contrast between today’s Madam Dou and Madam Qian of the past. Madam Qian, the protagonist of “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” was once known as Lan Tianyu and renowned for singing Kun Opera in Nanjing. She was young and beautiful at that time, attracting many suitors, and ultimately married the older General Qian.

However, as time passes, her beauty fades, her husband dies, and she becomes a widow. At the banquet in the Dou mansion, she sees the elegant Madam Dou and recalls her own glory in her younger days, while also feeling her current loneliness and desolation. In “Ulysses,” Dublin is presented not as a city’s history but as a small piece of time extending within space, encompassing its entire past within an expanded and enlarged present.

3.3 Shift in Multiple Perspectives

In the early stages of the development of stream-of-consciousness novels, narrative perspectives were generally singular, and the use of multiple narrative perspectives was not widely employed by writers but gradually developed later. “Ulysses” is a representative work of such multi-perspective shifts. Both shifts in narrative perspectives between chapters and within many chapters are evident in “Ulysses.” For instance, in Chapter 2 of “Ulysses,” a boy answers Stephen’s question, and the reaction of the people around them is described: “Some laughed again, not heartily, but with a meaning. Two sat in the rear bench and seemed to be saying something. Yes. They knew: ‘Never having learned, yet never being ignorant. All were like that, twisting, and the bracelet on the wrist was laughing in secret.’” Reading this sentence for the first time

may feel chaotic, incomprehensible, and even difficult to distinguish whether it’s third-person narration or an inner monologue.

However, a close reading reveals the author’s artful handling of the relationship between clear and structured third-person narration and the chaotic and disorderly stream of consciousness. Through shifts in perspectives, he cleverly combines these two parts, making the description consistent with the jumping nature of human psychological activities while also shaping vivid characters.

In “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream”, the narrative perspective shifts between omniscient perspective and Madam Qian’s limited perspective. When describing the banquet in the Dou Mansion, the omniscient perspective is adopted, allowing readers to fully understand the scene, characters, prosperity, and decline. In contrast, when describing Madam Qian’s inner world, stream-of-consciousness techniques are employed to more delicately represent her inner feelings and emotional changes.

4. Tracing the Origins of Bai Xianyong’s Stream of Consciousness Art

Mentioning Chinese modernist literature, the works of Bai Xianyong are inevitable monuments. As Xia Zhiqing praised, “In artistic achievement, there are only a few people who can compare with or surpass Bai Xianyong’s later novels, from Lu Xun to Zhang Ailing.” This kind of achievement is inseparable from Bai Xianyong’s active and positive acceptance of Western modern culture. As the son of Bai Chongxi, Bai Xianyong grew up in a feudal family with a strong atmosphere of traditional Chinese culture, but he also has overseas study experience. In 1956, Bai Xianyong graduated from high school. Although he was admitted to the Department of Water Resources at National Cheng Kung University, he decided to switch to literature the next year and enrolled in the Department of Foreign Languages at National Taiwan University for further study.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the literary creation technique of stream of consciousness began to flourish, and many great timeless classics emerged. The series of works include “Remembrance of Things Past”, which is the pioneer of stream of consciousness in the 20th century, and Faulkner’s important representative work “The Sound and the Fury”, which is known as the “encyclopedia of stream of consciousness”. In the late 1950s, Western modern philosophical consciousness and related literary trends gradually poured into Taiwan. Facing this innovative imported culture, many literary researchers and writers, including Bai Xianyong, regarded it as a treasure.

In order to better study Western modernist literature and its theory, Bai Xianyong, Ouyang Zi, Chen Ruonuan and others founded the publication “Modern Literature” in March 1960. “Modern Literature” translated many Western modern writers and their works, such as Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, Faulkner, Proust, etc. As a major mainstream creative method in Western modern literary works, stream of consciousness has a profound impact. Since its introduction to China, the shadow of stream of consciousness can be seen in many writers’ works, which also impacted Bai Xianyong. By reading these classics of modernism, he gradually contacted and understood the creative technique of stream of consciousness, and was greatly inspired. In his speech at the Shanghai Theatre

On June 2, 2017, Bai Xianyong recalled his academic experiences and mentioned the huge impact of the trend of “Western literature high modernism” on himself at that time [10]. Among the works of stream of consciousness, Mr. Bai bluntly talked about the importance and influence of “Ulysses”. In a dialogue interview with Bai Ruiwen about the origin of “Modern Literature” magazine in 2016, Bai Xianyong said, “...At that time, when we read Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’, we all felt amazed! How could such a thing come out?! We were all very surprised by this new form, which can write hundreds of pages in one day’s narration, describing a completely inner world. How could such a thing be written?! It’s really amazing” [11]. In May 2018, Mr. Bai visited Fudan University. During the lecture, Bai Xianyong listed “Ulysses” as one of the top five books he loved most. To sum up, Bai Xianyong was indeed influenced by Joyce’s “Ulysses” and other stream of consciousness writers when creating “Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream”.

5. Bai Xianyong’s Creative Transformation of Joyce’s Writing Techniques

“Ulysses” is regarded as the greatest English literature of the 20th century, but it is also a difficult-to-understand “heavenly book” that scares many readers away. Woolf once wrote in his diary about his evaluation of the first 200 pages of “Ulysses” that he had read so far: “I was amused, stimulated, and fascinated by the first two or three chapters; then I felt confused, bored, irritated, and disillusioned, like a nauseated undergraduate scratching his acne” [12].

One of the most famous chapters is the eighteenth chapter “Penelope”, which is an entire chapter of Molly Bloom’s conscious stream of inner monologue between sleep and wakefulness. The entire chapter consists of only eight sentences, with the semantic richness of the first sentence alone reaching 2,500 words. In the end, punctuation

marks even disappeared from between the sentences. It can be said that many of the stream of consciousness writing techniques used in “Ulysses” are quite radical. However, Bai Xianyong obviously made a localized and Chinese-spirited adaptation of this writing style, which was difficult for most readers to accept at that time.

5.1 The Bold Use of Sensory Impressions

Sensory Impressions emphasize the subjectivity of the impressions. In the work, the most noticeable is the sexual association of Madam Qian. “...His white horse was galloping in the birch forest, just like a rabbit darting around in the wheat stalks. The sun was shining on his back, steaming out wisps of white smoke. A white horse and a black horse - both were sweating. But he was covered in the pungent smell of horse sweat. His eyebrows turned dark green, and his eyes were like two balls of burning black fire. Beads of sweat rolled down from his forehead to his red cheekbones. The sun, I exclaimed. The sun was so blinding that it made people unable to open their eyes. Those tree trunks, so white and smooth, with all the layers of bark stripped off, revealing the bare, tender flesh beneath [13].”

The author uses a series of symbolic images to convey his meaning implicitly. The images of “white horse”, “sun”, and “tree trunk” are both novel and appropriate, fully expressing the meaning while conveying bold and passionate emotions that make people feel real and credible. This is something that is not found in “Ulysses”.

5.2 The Rich References to Chinese Traditional Culture

“Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream” is a novella created by Bai Xianyong, first published in 1966 and later included in the collection “People of Taipei”. The story revolves around Tian Yu, the widow of a Chinese Nationalist General, attending a banquet at the Dou mansion. Through her feelings, memories, and psychological activities at the banquet, it realistically reflects the social changes in Taiwan, China, during that era: the decline of the old aristocracy and the rise of the emerging middle class. It can be said that the work itself carries a sense of historical grandeur from the East.

The rich references to Chinese traditional culture shroud the work in a heavy atmosphere of sadness, presenting a sense of beauty fading and life being like a dream. The intertextual references to literary works such as “Dream of the Red Chamber,” “Peony Pavilion,” and “Untitled” in “The Peony Pavilion” are quite obvious and abundant. Here, the paper will not delve into each one in detail but provide a brief analysis. For example, the singing lyrics, tune names, and drama names interspersed in the plot sub-

tly hint at some of the plotlines.

In Qian Furen's stream of consciousness, there is a reference to her past love affair with General Cheng: "The sound of the flute became increasingly melancholy, as if it were blowing out all of Du Liniang's grievances. Du Liniang was about to fall asleep, and Liu Mengmei was about to enter the scene. But Wu Shenghao said, 'The most explicit scene in "The Dream Within a Dream" is when they meet in secret.' (Wu, play the flute a little lower, I've had too much to drink tonight). And yet he came over with his wine cup and called out, 'Lady Qian... Riches and honors - there was only that one time. Riches and honors - I only lived once. Do you understand...?' "Here, a passage from the Chinese classical opera "The Peony Pavilion" is used to elegantly and implicitly describe the love affair between Qian Furen and General Zheng.

Taiwanese scholar Ouyang Zi has also explored new ideas and breakthroughs in examining the thematic implications of the novel, linking them to the rise and fall of Kun Opera in China. She believes that Kun Opera is the essence of Chinese classical culture, and Qian Furen's eventual silence and inability to continue singing Kun opera actually hints at the interruption of Chinese classical culture [13].

Chinese culture is extensive and profound, with many characters and images that have developed into culturally rich images beyond their basic fixed meanings. The work "Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream" cleverly relies on a profound cultural heritage and forms rich intertextual connections with the moon. The characters' names in the work, such as Guizhi Xiang, Yueyue Hong, Jiang Biyue, and Lan Tianyu, are all cleverly related to the word "moon." Among them, Guizhi Xiang is the name of a ci poem form, while Lan Tianyu originates from the poetic line "Blue Fields Grow Warm, Jade Produces Smoke," which metaphorically compares Qian Furen to the faded Lan Tianyu, whose former glory is no longer present.

Additionally, the place name "Deyuetai" also implies a close connection between these Kun Opera singers and the moon, as they sing there, forming a special resonance with the moon. General Qian says to Lan Tianyu, "Except for the moon, which cannot be plucked down, I have given you everything." This sentence not only expresses his deep affection but also highlights the important position of the moon in the work, which is closely connected to the emotions, characters, and story of "Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream", adding a broad and profound impact to the emotional and meaningful content of the text.

6. Conclusion

As an Eastern writer with overseas study experience in the twentieth century, Bai Xianyong had early exposure and study of James Joyce's stream-of-consciousness writing in "Ulysses" and applied it to his own writing, which is not surprising. Through a comparative analysis of text cases, the author confirms that there are significant similarities between the two works in terms of consciousness-based techniques such as metaphor, spatial-temporal montage, and the transformation of multiple narrative perspectives. Combined with relevant research on Bai Xianyong, it can be said that there are many similarities between the two works "Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream" and "Ulysses." Bai Xianyong poured his thoughts about that era and society into his writing, transforming them into vivid life and flesh, creating solid literary texts. He integrated new concepts and writing techniques, adopting stream-of-consciousness writing to break the boundaries of time and space and the barriers between memory and reality. Lan Tianyu's recollections of Zheng Yanqing and his sister correspond to the rhythm of Kun Opera, with the climax of the singing and the characters' emotions peaking simultaneously before abruptly ending, achieving a true sense of "the dream within a dream."

Of course, as mentioned earlier, Bai Xianyong's use of stream-of-consciousness is not mere borrowing and copying but a reasonable borrowing based on the atmosphere and plot needs of the novel, resulting in such a unique blend of Eastern and Western literary styles. China's excellent traditional culture and classical literature provide fertile soil for literary creation. From Shanghai to Taipei, from Taipei to New York, from Bailemen to Xinyi Road, from Xiafei Road to the Central Park, Bai Xianyong has always been diligently cultivating on this soil. Before "Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream" many Chinese writers had experimented with Western stream-of-consciousness writing in short works, but few could achieve such good reading effects. Some even gave the impression of being formalistic and constraining the expression of the novel. "Wandering through a Garden, Waking from a Dream" does not deliberately seek to be different but instead incorporates localization and innovation based on learning and borrowing, unifying the old and the new, perfectly combining Eastern implicit reserve with Western Baroque's intricate artistic aesthetics. This grasp of tradition and modernity provides an excellent model for future literary appreciation and creation.

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