

The Irony of Exaggerated Language in Zhang Tianyi's Novels from Mr Warwick

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Abstract:

In the process of the development of modern Chinese literature, satire has gradually become an important literary form in the modern literary world under Lu Xun's physical force and active advocacy. After Lu Xun, a large number of writers with strong satirical style emerged successively, of which Zhang Tianyi is a typical representative. Zhang Tianyi successively created a number of satirical literary works and formed his unique creative style. Different from Lu Xun's traditional dark satirical writing style, as well as the satirical techniques of writers such as Lao She, Qian Zhongshu and Shading, Zhang Tianyi's satirical style is more sharp and spicy, and he mostly uses a kind of exaggerated irony. This kind of irony is not only shown in the characters and plots he portrayed, but also in the language and words. Mr Warwick, as a representative work of Zhang Tianyi, uses irony to portray a typical image of a reactionary bureaucratic party clerk of the Kuomintang, exposing all the ugliness of the Kuomintang's reactionary bureaucrats and dignitaries in their passive resistance to the war. Mr Hua Wei has become a typical image of satirical works in the history of modern Chinese literature. This paper takes Zhang Tianyi's Mr Huawei as a sample, and studies and analyses the language style of Zhang Tianyi's works, especially the satirical language style, in depth and specifically.

Keywords: Zhang Tianyi; satire; Mr Warwick.

1. Introduction

Satire generally refers to the use of hyperbole and metaphor to expose or criticise tasks or phenomena. It mostly reveals the absurdity of social phenomena through clever use of language and humorous and witty mockery, so as to make people feel the charm of language and the power of thought in a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere, and then cause people to

think deeply about the world of man and social problems. Mr Lu Xun once explained to satire novels in an interview: the life of satire is true, it doesn't have to be the real thing that has been, but it must be the real thing that will be [1]. Satire is often well-intentioned, and satirists tend to use refined and exaggerated language with the intention of wanting to shake these bad things up for the better. Different writers

have their different styles and characteristics regarding the degree of exaggeration in the use of language. In the history of modern and contemporary Chinese literature, there have emerged many satirical writers represented by Lu Xun, Nie Konyu, Shading, Lao She, Qian Zhongshu and so on. As a famous and far-reaching satirist in the history of modern Chinese literature, Zhang Tianyi's works have a unique satirical style, which has had a profound impact on literary value, criticality and reflection.

Zhang Tianyi was the most talented short story writer in the left-wing literary camp in China in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1930s, he published short story collections such as *Little Peter* and *The Collection of Monstrous Men*; his novels are mainly divided into three categories: agitprop, consciousness and satire. In the mid-1930s, Zhang Tianyi gradually developed an artistic personality long in satire, and his best novels belonged to the category of satire; his main representative works in the early period included *Mainstay*, *From Emptiness to Fulfillment*, and *Bao's Fathers and Sons*, in which the characters portrayed in these works included both hypocritical and cunning upper-class social figures and vulgar and contemptible small intellectuals and civil servants, small citizens, presenting a world full of characters who are self-absorbed, sadistic maniacs, snobs, and those who have no ambition but have to be subjugated to others, betraying people and being betrayed. After the outbreak of the war, Zhang Tianyi's *Mr Huawei*, published in the inaugural issue of *Literary and Artistic Positions* in 1938, portrayed the typical image of an anti-war cultural petty bureaucrat who „underwrites but doesn't do“ through the sketching method of silhouettes of one character, which became a work that best represented Zhang Tianyi's satirical language style. This paper intends to take *Mr. Huawei* as a sample, and through the analysis and study of the irony and satirical techniques of the language of this work, it will discuss the artistic characteristics of Zhang Tianyi's novels in using the technique of exaggeration to carry out irony, as well as the use of the technique of „exaggeration“ to expose and analyse the ugly phenomena of the society in order to arouse the readers' reflections and criticism, so as to provide useful references for further in-depth study of this theme.

2. The Specificity of Zhang Tianyi's Novel's Exaggerated Language in *Mr Warwick*

Mr Warwick was a highly opportunistic salvation worker at the rear of the war during the War of Resistance. He was busy all day long in rushing to all kinds of meetings

with his wallet in his hand; it can be said that he was always present at every meeting, but he was always late for the meetings, and he looked like a very busy man. Although he is so busy that he cannot solve any practical problems, he is only keen to gain various positions, powers and benefits from various social organisations. Not only does he have to be present at every meeting, but he also has to speak at every meeting. But his speeches do not have any specific practical content, but always so few dry big words empty words. Since one of his catchphrases in his speeches is „identifying a leadership centre“, he is often regarded by some people in the commentariat who do not know what he is talking about as a politician or a party cadre. In reality, however, he is just a cultural broker with a strong sense of vanity, obsessed with power, and keen to make a show of himself at various conferences and social events.

Lu Xun said: „The word ‚exaggeration‘ may be a bit of a misnomer, but it's okay to say ‚outline‘.“ Zhang Tianyi infiltrates exaggeration into all aspects of characterisation, putting the object of satire under the microscope and „contouring“ its state for people to see, which in turn becomes satire. He tends to focus the complex inner world of his characters on a single point, depicting distinctive personalities simply through subtle features. This approach involves highlighting and amplifying an individual's habitual behaviours and common expressions, a technique of caricatured exaggeration common in satire. In the case of *Mr Warwick*, every seemingly insignificant feature and action is closely linked to his strong desire for power, and is able to reveal his inner world profoundly. *Mr Warwick* is still late for the train, „When I got out at the door, I had to step on the bell by the way: ding!“ This „by the way“ action is very suitable for his identity, showing that although he is not a big official, but he loves to show off, shake the wind, there is a kind of monarch over everything, arrogant and arrogant [2]. Attend a meeting, after playing the old tune of „two points of view“, immediately left the meeting in a hurry, „put a hat on, put a purse a hostage, look at the ceiling nodded, and walked out with a belly.“ These few strokes depicted wearing, holding, nodding and belly and other comical actions, although the lines are simple but full of three-dimensional sense, clearly outlined the image of an absurd and shameless small bureaucrats, making it a caricature image with irony.

Focusing on the typical performance of the character, through repeated detailed depiction, which is also a method of using hyperbole. The author repeatedly writes that *Mr. Warwick* is „busy“ with similar performances at the meetings of various anti-Japanese organisations; he also repeatedly writes that his similar speech instructs that „there can only be one leadership centre“. In fact, *Mr*

Warwick was not busy, he had a lot of time to go to banquets, host banquets and sleep; he did not have the talent of „leadership“, he only gave two-minute empty „instructions“; he did not do any work for the anti-Japanese resistance, he did not even listen to a single report. His „busyness“ is to seize power, but I am afraid that he cannot be the „centre of leadership [3]“. The author’s repeated descriptions of his „busy“ state deeply reflect the core characteristics of Warwick’s character: a strong desire for power and a high tendency to speculate. The repetitive use of comical behaviour is rough and exaggerated, like a caricature with a strong sense of irony.

3. Variations and Characteristics of Hyperbolic „Ironic“ Language

Irony originates from the character types in ancient Greek theatre, which originally referred to those theatre characters who feigned ignorance and revealed the truth by saying stupid things; it later evolved into a rhetorical device, which is what we usually call saying the opposite of what we want to say [4]. In *Mr Warwick*, Zhang Tianyi constructs the context of irony from the perspectives of „I“, the narrator, and Mr Warwick, the protagonist, and presents distinctive features on this basis.

3.1 Repeated Paragraphs and Language

The reason why *Mr Warwick* has an opinion on such far-flung areas as women’s issues and literary issues is that he expresses his views in almost the same way. The reason for this is that he expresses his views in almost the same way. There are many occurrences of details such as „holding a briefcase“, „drawing a fire“, „smoking a cigar“, „crossing his fingers“, etc. For the three meetings, *Mr Warwick* does not have a single point. „and so on, for three meetings, Mr. Warwick invariably interrupted in the middle of the meeting, on the „intensification of the work“, „identify a leadership centre“, two universally applicable opinions, but also three times in a similar sentence and paragraph This Dickensian caricature of hyperbole is a very good example. This Dickens-like caricature of exaggerated irony simplifies the complex characterisation to one or two habitual actions and habitual language, and then repeatedly expresses these traits, just like a caricature of a character, which is always an exaggeration of the character’s most ludicrous and salient traits. The use of these languages and passages enhances the reader’s memory on the one hand; on the other hand, from these constantly repeated, monotonous and tedious statements, we feel the pitifulness and comicality of the main character.

3.2 The Use of „Language That Varies from Person to Person and from Place to Place“ Deepens the Effect of Irony

Mr Warwick displays a variety of linguistic expressions towards those around him: he calls his wife Misty Wong, a title that reflects her status as a spouse and emphasises her role as a secretary. „If you have anything to ask, ask Misi Huang“; to the „I“ in the text, *Mr Warwick* is very modest, not letting him be called „Mr“, but „Widi“ or „Ah Wei“; to the people in the official circle, he is very modest, not letting them be called „Mr“, but „Ah Wei“; to the people in the official circle, he is very modest. To the „I“ in the article, *Mr Warwick* was very modest, not to be called Mr, but to be called „Wei Di“ or „Ah Wei“; to the official associates, his language was calm; but to the young man with long hair and the two students attending the symposium on the Japanese issue, he looked at them „coldly“, „hung his chin down“, and even became furious [5]. When he went to the General Meeting of Cultural Resistance, „he had a big smile on his face and nodded to everyone, ‚I’m sorry, I’m sorry. ‚I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry,‘“ with a humble face; but when he went to a meeting elsewhere, he interrupted others at will and condescendingly lectured them: „If your work goes wrong, you’ll be responsible for it,“ and „If what I just said goes wrong, you’ll be responsible for it,“ and „If what I just said goes wrong, you’ll be responsible for it,“ he would even become furious [5]. „If you can’t do what I’ve just said, won’t that make you an illegal group?“. „...By observing Mr Warwick’s extreme attitudes and changes of words towards different people on various occasions, we can deeply appreciate his hypocrisy and falsehood, and feel his mediocre and inferior nature. However, the author adopts an extremely serious tone when describing all these, which inadvertently enhances the irony of the work [6]. In the novel, Mr. Zhongwei’s speeches are generally fast-paced, and when he is ranting about his two points, his words are dry and official: „The first point is that every staff member should not slack off, but on the contrary, should work intensively; and the second point is that the young staff members have to identify a leadership centre.“ and in a whisper about last night’s drunken anecdote, it is „with a very confidential and very serious face, whispered to ask...“ exudes a joking tone [7, 8]. From this, it is not difficult to see the shadow of the „chameleon“.

3.3 Unique Satirical Techniques

As a short story, *Mr Warwick* has neither a central event nor a major plot, not to mention sharp conflicts, but only through a few fragments of Mr Warwick’s life, a vivid satirical skit is vividly presented. Throughout the whole

text, the following characteristics are presented: Firstly, the props configuration and body language are just right: the author through the „always clamped briefcase“, „always carry the black oil cane“, „that from time to time the „pocket watch“, „the wedding ring on the ring finger“, „the cigar“, and the „fastest, loudest bell in town“. The Packers.“ The author puts several fashionable objects commonly used in officialdom in the 1930s on Mr Warwick’s body, together with the representative body language, and portrays the bureaucratic class and style represented by Mr Warwick. Secondly, the comic depiction technique: the author’s early experience of learning to draw has enabled him to freely use the comic depiction technique in his works and formed his own characteristics. In *Mr Warwick*, the author repeatedly renders the most characteristic actions of the main character, Mr Warwick, who is busy jumping up and down in all kinds of meetings, brushing up his existence and competing for power, so as to make the work present a simple tone similar to that of paintings, and then make the satirical power more focused and prominent. On this basis, the author makes the satirical image more caricatured by adopting bold and exaggerated means to show Mr. Warwick’s busyness. In addition, the author also portrays the hypocritical personality of *Mr Warwick* through the sharp contrast between Mr Warwick’s words and deeds in attending meetings of different natures and levels, and between his speeches and private exchanges of drinking trivia with the „moustache guy“, which is contrary to his words and deeds and inconsistent with his appearance. Thirdly, personalised language. Mr. Warwick“ focuses on the characteristics of Zhang Tianyi’s novels, such as clear and concise language, spicy wit and humour, and the language is perfectly integrated with the image of the portrayed character, without a trace of incongruity. Through these words and deeds of Mr Huawei, the author vividly portrays the image of a pretentious, flamboyant, vulgar and hypocritical KMT bureaucrat and party clerk.

The 1930s and 1940s were a golden period of Chinese satirical literature. Apart from *Mr Warwick*, Qian Zhongshu’s *Siege of the City* is another famous satirical novel. Both Zhang Tianyi and Qian Zhongshu lived in the Nationalist and Fallen Areas, and they had a deep feeling for the glittering of the city, the distortion of human nature and the degradation of the soul. In the extraordinary period of national survival, as two novels born under the same background, both of them excel in satire, but their styles are very different. In terms of character portrayal, Mr. Huawei satirically exposes the image of the reactionary bureaucrats of the Kuomintang during the war period, while *Siege* satirizes the grey life of certain intellectuals in the early stage of the war, which is known as the „New

History of the Confucian Forests“. Mr. Huawei’s scandalous appearance portrayed by Zhang Tianyi is exaggerated without losing its truth, humorous without losing its seriousness, bright and spicy; the intellectuals represented by Fang Hongguan portrayed by Qian Zhongshu are based on profound knowledge, combining the strengths of Chinese and foreign satirical art, and featured by witty and playful, funny and humorous; the satirical approach is tactful and delicate, and the intensity of satire and the strength of criticism are cast in a seemingly light-hearted and witty atmosphere. The intensity of satire and the strength of criticism are fused in a seemingly light and witty atmosphere. Zhang Tianyi and Qian Zhongshu are both masters of language in the history of modern Chinese literature. Zhang Tianyi’s extraordinary linguistic sensitivity and ability to master the dialect, his language is bright, vivid, humorous and full of wit, which makes his works have a wide readership. Qian Zhongshu’s language is light and playful, strange and treacherous, yet elegant and free, and his satirical language is full of scholarly humour through the use of metaphors and allusions. In addition, Qian Zhongshu is good at psychological descriptions, and his works often explore and criticise the morality of his characters’ deep weaknesses through a large number of sharp psychological descriptions, so that his obscene and dirty character is clearly revealed, and at the same time, the social ecology that has forged these mentalities is also refracted. This is not uncommon in the portrayal of the characters in *The Besieged City*. On the other hand, Zhang Tianyi’s works seldom see psychological descriptions. It has been recorded that Zhang Tianyi once believed that „to portray a character’s personality is just to think of his appearance“ and hoped to express his „rootedness“ through the character’s external performance.“ It is better to avoid the bulky and dull psychology, everyone takes the action to illustrate, and the less writing scene, the better“, in *Mr Warwick*, almost no trace of psychological description [9].

4. Reasons for Changes in the Level of Linguistic Exaggeration

In the late 1930s, China was at the beginning of an all-out war of resistance, and the country was beset by internal and external difficulties, social contradictions and fierce political struggles. Against this background, many intellectuals expressed their dissatisfaction and helplessness towards reality through satire and exaggeration in literary works. Sartain, Lao She, Chen Baichuan, Wu Xue, Qian Zhongshu and others portrayed various bureaucrats and rulers (such as White Sauce Dan, Secretary Tong, and the governor), and large and small intellectuals (such as Li

Mei Ting, Gao Song Nian, and Ma Bole) in their works, which made the country and the nation in a critical period of life and death and in need of the whole society to be united in the war against war, and the members of the upper class of all sorts of ugliness such as selfishness, lewdness, and deceitfulness, and so on. and other ugly characters in the upper-class society, such as selfishness, lewdness and deceitfulness, are revealed in front of the world. In Zhang Tianyi's Mr. Huawei, the war on the front line of the Resistance War is very hard, but Mr. Huawei, as a representative of the bureaucrats of the Kuomintang, is busy running between various organisations on the rear, claiming to make „contributions“ to the Resistance War - attending meetings and making speeches frequently. However, each of his speeches was only a slapdash one. However, each time he speaks, he only skims the surface and rushes to the next meeting. Does he really care about the development of resistance organisations? Obviously not. He only tries to pocket the power of each organisation, emphasising the importance of the „core role of leadership“ as his real purpose. Through vivid descriptions of language and action, and the use of exaggeration and contrast, the novel bitterly satirises the intransigent bureaucrats and party cadres of the Kuomintang at that time. This short story with a comic style became a famous satirical literature as it exposed the many shortcomings of the Nationalist government's ruling areas in the early years of the war. The character of *Mr Warwick* carries a certain typecasting, and his power-grabbing fervour and pervasive hooliganism give him a certain transcendent quality, so that even today, readers can still get a deep resonance from him. Zhang Tianyi was deeply influenced by modernist literature, especially western satirical literature. His creations focus on the exaggeration and distortion of language to reveal the truth and criticise reality. At the same time, the use of exaggerated language also meets the readers' aesthetic needs. Through this technique, it not only attracts the readers' attention, but also enhances the shocking and infectious power of the work.

5. Conclusion

In Zhang Tianyi's *Mr Warwick*, exaggeration not only serves as a means of artistic expression, but also carries its profound satirical significance. Through the exaggerated depiction of *Mr Warwick* and his environment, he cleverly reveals the falsity and absurdity of the society of that era, as well as the alienation and confusion of individuals in the society. The fusion of exaggeration and satire not only enhances the artistic beauty of the work, but also endows

it with profound critical and far-reaching ideological power. With its distinctive artistic features and unique language style, *Mr Warwick* is an outstanding chapter in Zhang Tianyi's literary and artistic treasury. It makes people reflect in laughter and gain enlightenment in satire, guiding them to deeply examine and explore the complex human nature and social reality through the work. The series of satirical works created by Zhang Tianyi, represented by *Mr Warwick*, not only revealed the shortcomings of the Kuomintang-ruled areas in the early years of the War, but also provided an important reference paradigm for subsequent satirical literature. Zhang Tianyi's caricatured style, exaggerated language and typecast characterisation had a profound influence on modern Chinese writers' subsequent explorations in the field of satirical literature, thus enabling him to occupy an important place in the long history of modern Chinese literature.

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