

The Influence of Development of Feminism on Creation of Suspense Novels: Analysis from the Perspective of Ecofeminism

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Abstract:

This study focuses on the feminist interpretation of female criminal factors in suspense novels by female writers and explores the impact of the evolution of feminist thought on the creation of female writers in different eras. The research background is based on the two major factors of “castration emotion” and “patriarchal resistance” in female criminal psychology, combined with the expressions of female writers on life and death issues, taking into account the impact of the development of feminism on female writers in the era, and reflecting on the internal society Paradox emphasizes that gender equality and nature conservation are closely linked. Through text analysis, document analysis, and comparative analysis, starting from ecofeminism, the feminist thoughts on the female homicide cases in the text are analyzed. The study found that the change in narrative perspective from Agatha to Tokarczuk reflects the improvement of feminist consciousness. The evolution of female roles from male subordinates to independent individuals reflects the development of feminism. Finally, the transformation of female subject consciousness emphasizes the progress of women’s thinking as independent individuals. This study shows that the works created by female writers were influenced by the feminist movement at that time to varying degrees. The highlight of the research is to make up for the scarcity of research on ecofeminism and Tokarczuk in China. Through comparison, the comparative perspective of the texts of the two female writers is supplemented.

Keywords: Agatha Christie; Ecofeminism; Suspense Novels.

1. Introduction

The study focuses on the feminist interpretation of female criminal factors in suspense novels by female writers and explores the evolution of feminist thought in different eras and its impact on the creation of female writers. From the perspective of criminal psychology, “castration emotions” and “patriarchal resistance” are two factors that affect female crimes. They are also common problems in female homicides in suspense novels. The third wave of feminist development came to ecofeminism, which emphasized the commonality between ecology and women, pointed out that ecological crisis is closely related to social inequality, and emphasized the commonality between social stratification and patriarchal oppression. This is very meaningful for studying the impact of feminist thought on female writers at that time, and for reflecting on social contradictions.

The study selected two representative female writers from different eras - Agatha Christie and Olga Tokarczuk. The

study uses an ecofeminist perspective to think about the different feminist attitudes displayed by female characters in the same extreme events (such as murder) in the era. Agatha Christie’s period was influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the early feminist movement in the 19th century. Tokarczuk lived in the 1960s to 1980s, at the height of the second wave of the feminist movement and the rise of ecofeminism, when women’s struggle for equal rights was widely launched. Based on the historical background of the two writers, this article adopts the comparative method of influence research and is based on the theory of historical consciousness in Chen Dun and Liu Xiangyu’s *Introduction to Comparative Literature* to explore the differences in female consciousness when writers create in the two historical backgrounds. At the same time, according to the text analysis method, go deep into the original texts of Agatha’s *After the Funeral* and Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, taking ecofeminism as the starting point, and analyzing the feminist thoughts contained in them through the issue

of life and death. Use the literature analysis method to search and read relevant materials and documents, and analyze the trends and situations of the development of ecofeminism as a theoretical criticism in China and internationally, as well as the evolution of feminist ideas in the works of two female writers. The goal of the research is to explore the context and limitations of the influence of feminist thought in the era by analyzing and comparing the evolution of feminist thought in the works of female writers, and at the same time have a clearer understanding and outlook for the development of feminism.

2. Literature Reviews

2.1 Agatha Christie's *After the Funeral*

As a famous British suspense novelist, Agatha's texts and thoughts have become the research object of many scholars due to her outstanding writing ability and the title of "female writer".

After the Funeral mainly tells the story of the serial murders triggered by old rich Richard's death, and finally the story of detective Poirot surrounding this ancient Victorian family to find the real murderer [1]. Since the popularity and reading experience of this novel are not as good as other famous works, there is almost zero text research on *After the Funeral* in China. However, the background of this novel is war, and even the murderer's murderous intention was inspired by war. Such a creation that reflects on war coincides with the concept of ecofeminism many years later. The traditional marriage model in which men are superior to women also reflects Agatha's feminist thoughts. As a traditional Victorian woman, her feminist thoughts were limited by the times.

2.2 Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*

Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead mainly tells the story of a series of mysterious „animal revenge“ deaths, in which the sinful behavior of destroying the ecology is revealed from Janina's perspective [2]. Research on Tokarczuk mainly focuses on narrative and themes, including the characteristics of time and space narratives, ecological views, magical realism female writing, etc., with a focus on the issue of female loneliness. However, there are very few studies on ecofeminism in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, which mainly focus on the integration of women and nature, attention to marginalized groups, confrontation of binary oppositions, and deconstruction of male-centrism and anthropocentrism. These studies affirm the unique significance of female writing and emphasize female self-awareness. In addition, some studies mentioned that the protagonist's behavior

of valuing animals over humans and killing humans for animals is too extreme, expressing concerns about the feasibility of ecofeminism in maintaining social stability [3].

2.3 Ecofeminism

In 1974, French scholar Françoise d'Eaubonne first proposed the term "ecofeminism" in her book *Écologie féminisme: Révolution ou mutation?*, emphasizing the close connection between ecology and gender inequality [4].

At present, ecofeminist criticism of suspense novels is not widely used in China. A search on *China National Knowledge Infrastructure* shows that relevant research mostly focuses on the works of Atwood and the Bronte sisters, while there is less discussion of suspense novels. There are examples in this specific genre. Kong Fanli analyzed the close connection between women and nature through A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, revealed gender inequality, and envisioned a vision of gender harmony [5]. Zhao Na analyzed the layout in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Black Cat* and pointed out that under the surface of male dominance, it implies a profound theme of women and animals uniting to fight against patriarchy, showing the awakening of the power of ecological women [6]. Zhou Yunqiu's interpretation of *Where the Crawdads Sing* further reflects the development of ecofeminism in cultural criticism, emphasizing the common predicament of women and nature in a patriarchal society [7].

Due to various factors, the dissemination and in-depth research of ecofeminism in China faces challenges. Ecofeminist criticism of suspense novels and other literary works has great room for theoretical expansion and text analysis.

2.4 Female Criminal Psychology

When receiving the paper, assume that the corresponding authors grant the copyright to use. In the 1980s, Japanese scholar Koichi Kikuta emphasized the differences between gender crimes in *Criminology* and began to pay attention to homicides involving women as the subject [8]. Due to the physiological differences between the sexes, as well as the impact of gender oppression in the patriarchal era on women and the differences in social practice in later periods, the development of psychological research on female crime is necessary for crime prevention and litigation of the duty of care. As the crime rate among women around the world increases, academic circles have strengthened research on gender crimes and paid attention to the impact of social and environmental factors on women.

Professor Liu Jianqing of China University of Political Science and Law emphasized two criminal factors: „castration emotions“ and „patriarchal resistance“ in his research on female criminal psychology [9]. The purpose

of gender crime research is not only to promote the development of gender equality but also to provide powerful assistance in crime prevention.

3. Discussion

3.1 Change of Narrative Perspective

There is a clear shift in the narrative perspective between the two novels *After the Funeral* and *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. The former adopts a male perspective for reliable narration, while the latter uses a female perspective. This change shows the female writers in the two eras. The evolution of consciousness reflects the influence of feminism on creation.

Since masculinity has been considered rational and calm since ancient times, writers generally choose to write suspense novels from a male perspective, and male characters often possess absolute power. The two male narrative characters (Entwistle and Poirot) set in Agatha's *After the Funeral* are both men with high social status and mature minds, who are lawyers and detectives respectively. The novel uses their rationality, thinking, and reasoning to analyze and narrate cases. From this externally focused male perspective, the text is limited by patriarchal ideas and displays male values, such as the description of female images and the indifferent attitude towards war. While the text writes about Cora, the author uses some words like being tall and clumsy, without any charm, and stupid [1]. Also, there are some descriptions of Entwistle's sexual fantasies about female beauty and a fixed rhetoric about war [1]. From the male perspective, the story is told from the outside in the tone of a bystander through third-person narration [10]. The female image and consciousness are suppressed by the dominant male perspective and are in a state of aphasia.

Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* starts from a female perspective, focusing on the old woman Janina, and constructs a world where nature and humans coexist harmoniously apart from the tough and cold male world. Through Janina's inner world, the article shows female thoughts and strength, such as her concern for ecology, helping the weak, and her lonely social experience and survival dilemma [2]. By depicting Janina's identification with animals, the work expresses the marginalized group's resistance to patriarchy. As the author said: "We see the world through the eyes of 'I' and hear the world in the name of 'I' [2]." She uses Janina's perspective to focus on biological equality and self. On the contrary, the perspective of a female teacher in the suspense novel *The Turn of the Screw* a century ago is a typical unreliable narrative and the change of female narrative from unreliable to reliable shows Tokarczuk's affirmation

of women and unique view of women [11].

The shift from a male perspective to a female perspective not only reveals the underlying male-centered ideas in Agatha's works but also highlights Tokarczuk's efforts to break the male-centered structure of suspense novels and more directly highlights her continued development of feminism consciousness.

3.2 The Evolution of Female Relationship Shaping

Since the beginning of the 15th century, when Christine de Pizan, the first female writer in Europe, wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*, women have opened a window for literary voices. Although according to modern feminism, this work still has limitations, she emphasized her opposition to the social atmosphere that ignored women at that time and demanded that women's glory be faced squarely, which gave women at that time great spiritual strength.

There is a gap of 56 years between Agatha's *After the Funeral* and Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. Based on the suspenseful works created by these two female writers, can see how they shaped the relationship between women, affected by different times.

After the Funeral was created in 1953, just after World War II. Agatha created five couples through two periods: the war and the aftermath. Timothy and Maude, Pierre and Cora, Leo and Helen, three traditional wartime marriages dominated by men [1]. Susan and Greg, Rosamund and Michael are two post-war anti-gender stereotype marriages in which women are slightly stronger [1]. Strong postwar marriage against male-female stereotypes. The internal connection between ecological crisis and social crisis is one of the main theories of ecofeminism [12]. Agatha's wartime couple enjoys the wife's full dedication to marriage and family. This kind of dedication is an act of otherness that gives up the self and loses independent initiative. For example, Helen, who has lost her husband, is trapped in the outside world's evaluation of her loyalty; Cora, who rebels for love, is superstitious about the talent of her "artist" husband; Maude is imprisoned by her husband. Women are dominated by men [1]. Even if society develops into the post-war recovery period, it is still difficult for people to change their minds.

Although Agatha no longer adhered to the patriarchal marriage relationship when writing about the marriage relationship of the younger generation, two outstanding and intelligent women, Susan and Rosamund, were still trapped in the emotional relationship between men and women. Susan loved her husband so much that he ran away. Rosamund believed that pregnancy would tie her husband's heart. It is not difficult to see that Agatha is still limited by the ideas of the times, and her works are

also permeated with the aesthetic standards of women in the Victorian era. Women's identities are still limited to housewives and good wives and mothers [13].

From the perspective of ecofeminism, Agatha saw the consciousness of ecofeminism through the shaping of women's relationships by war, that is, the destruction of nature and society caused by war guided by patriarchy, resulting in the tragedy of bloody murders. But Agatha and her female characters are still trapped in the relationship between the sexes, and even the murderer in her novel has not found the real object of revenge (patriarchy), making the female quarrel between Miss Gilchrist and Cora nothing more than it was just a murder to satisfy selfish desires [14].

Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead was published in 2009. In terms of shaping the character relationship, Tokarczuk was not bound by the traditional emotions between men and women and created the profound friendship between Janina and Tiga, an old man and a young man. From an ecofeminist perspective, although Tiga is a male, he is a thin and fragile man, even "like a little girl" in Janina's eyes [2]. He is a poor person on the margins of society who can be fired at any time.

Ecofeminism believes that human plunder of nature and men's oppression of women reflect anthropocentrism. The deconstruction of these two binary oppositions requires the use of "androgyny" and "gender dialogue" [15]. And "androgyny" means that the male power and the female power in the same individual can coexist harmoniously, cooperate equally, and achieve harmony.

Both at the physical level and at the social level, Tiga and Janina belong to the vulnerable groups in society. Tokarczuk's portrayal of a man as so kind, intelligent, sensitive, and fragile is a bold attempt at the "androgyny" model of ecofeminism and a challenge to male dominance in patriarchy. Such a challenge is reflected in Janina. The moment when the sword was raised and fell against the destroyers of nature, the peak of resistance was reached.

By analyzing the changes in the shaping of character relationships in the two works, it is not difficult to see that feminism has a positive impact on writers, which is no longer limited to passive character relationships in patriarchy. At the same time, ecofeminism not only pays attention to women themselves but also emphasizes the mutually reinforcing relationship between protecting nature and maintaining social stability, pointing out the important intimate relationship between women and nature, which provides forward-looking arguments for urgent issues of the times such as environmental protection.

3.3 The Evolution of Female Subject Con-

sciousness

The definition of female subject consciousness in this study is based on Wei Guoying's definition in *Introduction to Women's Studies*. Female subject consciousness refers to women's clear understanding of their status, role, and value in the objective world, and their conscious recognition and awareness of, their historical mission, social responsibility, and life obligations [16]. The development of female subject consciousness goes through three stages: naturalness, self-awareness, and self-improvement.

Research has found that in Agatha's classic works, female murderers are mostly dependent on men or driven by emotions and lack independent subject consciousness and desires. For example, in *Death on the Nile*, Jacqueline's out-of-control and crazy love is doomed to tragedy. *And Then There Were None* Vera murders to cover up an inappropriate relationship. Historically, women have been marginalized due to the social division of labor and the private property system, losing their participation in social production and being confined to the family, resulting in a lack of subject consciousness. Therefore, these female characters are still in their natural state, lacking self-awareness and subjectivity.

Published in 1948, *Taken at the Flood* and *After the Funeral* both focused on the complex entanglement of funerals and wills. Although Rosaleen in *Taken at The Flood* is not completely independent, she has awakened her female consciousness and chose to deviate from love. It reflects the independence of women's voices after the property rights of capitalist society are enhanced, and women's consciousness leaps from instinct to self-knowledge [14].

Miss Gilchrist in *After the Funeral* is a transformation of Rosaleen. To rebuild the teahouse, she cleverly plots a scam, targeting Cora's paintings. Her actions were thorough and skillful, from disguising her identity to attend the funeral to cleverly designing self-poisoning to remove suspicion, all of which demonstrated her extraordinary resourcefulness and execution ability. After being arrested, she complained about social injustice and questioned why people like Cora, who lacked artistic talent, could enjoy wealth, while her talent led to a life of maids and crime. This accusation reflects her deep reflection on her identity and social status. She has realized the unequal relationship between herself and the social structure. The emergence of her spirit of pursuing self-worth and changing destiny marks the beginning of the self-improvement stage of female subject consciousness. She transforms the internal and external environment with a strong sense of subjectivity, maximizes her self-worth, and demonstrates the resilience of women in adversity.

But as mentioned before, female characters in works are

usually trapped by family and love. Even after the first feminist movement, such self-reliant female characters are still a drop in the ocean in works, which is enough to show that the progress of the feminist movement is still difficult.

Tokarczuk specializes in “border” narratives, and her writings are full of marginalized characters. In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, there is Janina who knows astrology, Tiga who loves poetry, and the lonely old man “Ghost”. These are people who have been excluded from the system, whose lives are somewhat removed from the dominant culture and full of heterogeneous plurality. In *Ecofeminism: Revolution or Transformation?* Françoise d’Eaubonne emphasizes that gendered labels are often used by the powerful to maintain marginalized groups low in social hierarchies [17]. She reveals the complex relationship between gender and power, and how social inequalities are entrenched and maintained through language and labels. Tokarczuk’s concern for marginalized groups in the world makes her creations coincide with Françoise d’Eaubonne’s thoughts. In the 1970s, the female-led ecological movement emerged, revealing the inherent connection between gender oppression and natural exploitation, and advocating for women’s liberation to go hand in hand with ecological protection. From Janina’s animistic narrative, people can see that Tokarczuk was deeply influenced by the third wave of feminism.

In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, Bigfoot accidentally died when a deer bone got stuck in his throat, and the other two of the dead were “killed by a deer” and “suffocated by bugs” respectively [2]. These two extreme actions were taken by Janina to protect animals. She was not motivated by money or love, but purely out of the purity of her heart. Her behavior of protecting animals seems to be of no benefit to humans, but it shows her firm belief as a lonely alien. Although there is no emotional foreshadowing in the article, the ghost’s promise of “I will marry her when she is released from prison” is not obtrusive, because it expresses the author’s deep sympathy and care for this loner.

From the evolution of female subject consciousness in Agatha’s works to the women in Tokarczuk’s works who break away from love and walk alone, people can see the different development stages of feminist thought.

4. Conclusion

Research has found that suspense novels often reflect male-centered views, but female writers gradually break away from the shackles of patriarchy in their creations and pay keen attention to all marginalized groups in society. Women’s relationships have changed from single

to plural to harmonious, and female images have become more three-dimensional. Rich and self-conscious. From Agatha’s *After the Funeral* to Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, feminist trends promote female writing by female writers and help social equality and ecological stability. However, the impact of the feminist movement on female writers is limited. Their works are restricted by the general environment and sometimes still show male-centered issues. The problem of male centralization still appears.

The main contribution of this article is to conduct a comparative study of the works of female writers, explore the impact of the development of the feminist movement on female writers, and reflect on the relationship between the two to provide a reference for subsequent related research. Due to the scarcity of research texts on ecofeminism in China, there is less textual information to refer to, which has certain limitations on the objects analyzed in the current study. Future research directions suggest exploring relevant content about international ecofeminism, ensuring the timeliness and breadth of research, rationally screening theories, and exploring the development of different theories to adapt to the diversity and complexity of society. Ecofeminism is an emerging trend. In the future, there may be more works written from a female-centered perspective or with broader gender ideas. Future research can further explore the above shortcomings and provide a basis for subsequent feminism. Provide a powerful ladder and support for the development of ideas. It is hoped that in the future, this research can more fully discuss female subject consciousness and provide more answers for female survival and ecological balance.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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