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Simple and Sad Painting of Childhood – Exploring the Children’s Narrative of Xiao Hong’s “March in a Small Town”

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Abstract: Xiao Hong is a modern female writer in China, and she is also known as “the goddess of literature in the 1930s”. Xiao Hong is good at adopting children’s narrative perspective, which makes her articles more delicate and affinity. The most representative one is “March in a Small Town”, which adopts the unique children’s perspective to analyse the speech description, discourse system description, colour description and tragedy colour description in the article, and highlights the sadness tone with simple words, which makes Aunt Cui’s image more and more three-dimensional.

Keywords: Children’s Narrative Perspective; March in a Small Town; Aunt Cui

1. Introduction

Xiao Hong’s *March in a Small Town* tells a poignant love story in the tone of a female high school student. The story is about Aunt Cui who was forced to get engaged because she dared not disobey her parents’ order. Although her heart had already belonged to her at that time, she was unable to pursue her love and could only torture her body and silently fight against the old feudal forces until she died. At the same time, Xiao Hong changed her writing style and adopted a unique children’s perspective to narrate the story, which made the whole article more delicate, real, intimate and natural. The so-called “children’s perspective” refers to observing things with children’s eyes, so as to express the feelings and opinions about the world with children’s thinking and mentality, and to show the originality which is not easy to be perceived by adults.

Most of the previous researchers only analysed the tragic fate of Aunt Cui in *March in a Small Town*, and studied less about narrative perspective, especially children’s narrative perspective. Therefore, this paper analyses the children’s narrative perspective in *March in a Small Town*, elaborates the children’s narrative in an all-round way through language description, detail description and colour description, and highlights the tone of sadness with concise language, so as to make the image of Aunt Cui more and more three-dimensional.

2. Simple Verbal Description from the Perspective of Children’s Narrative: Demonstrating Simplicity and Innocence

Xiao Hong’s verbal description is very simple and common, she seems to tell the story in a bystander’s tone, but in fact it is a kind of self-confession, which not only describes the coercion of the old times on women, but also shows the sympathy and helplessness for women.

The narrative point of view of the book is told in the tone of an innocent child, who becomes the one person in the whole play who is able to enter into Aunt Cui’s heart without any barrier. The language and vocabulary used in the book can be described as extremely simple, usually using repetitive vocabulary and superlatives as well as onomatopoeia, which makes the text more vivid and shows the simple and innocent side of children. This is especially true of the book’s “descriptions of sheep bleating, crows standing on the ice looking for small fish to eat, and grasses with seed-swollen shells on their heads burrowing merrily out of the mud”^[1], Aunt Cui’s interaction with the grass seeds in the grave and the white goat shows her love, closeness and reverence for nature, further demonstrating her inner purity and kindness.

In addition, the use of children’s perspective language description, without deliberately trying to figure out the usage of words and phrases, constructs seemingly simple vocabulary and imagery into a linguistic space rich in simplicity and innocence, and very often simply depicts what the child sees and hears, leaving the reader with more space for reverie. Especially when describing the brother’s time spent with Aunt Cui, simple vocabulary is always used to depict what the child innocently “sees”, giving the reader a kind of hazy emotion. For example, at first, Aunt Cui, my cousin and “I” played cards together. In the past, my cousin always beat me at cards, but this time, he kept losing, as if he wanted to stabilise “me” and wanted to leave more time to spend with Aunt Cui, which also reflected his subtle emotions towards Aunt Cui. On a later occasion it is Cousin who takes the initiative to play on Aunt Cui’s flute, and she runs home sheepishly, leaving Cousin standing

still, staring at the door curtains in disbelief. The reader can't help but wonder how Aunt Cui and Cousin see each other deep down.

3. Sensitive detail description from children's perspective: highlighting the unique charm of the main character's personality

March in a Small Town" is narrated from the perspective of an uninitiated little girl, who has an innate sensitivity to discovering and pursuing beauty, so it is easy for her to discover details not found by adults, and to appreciate Aunt Cui's ambivalence of longing for freedom but not daring to pursue it.

"I" am a keen observer,"I" can notice Aunt Cui's subtle movements, and "I" can easily see the difference between Aunt Cui and other girls. Aunt Cui was more interested in observing and then taking action than in new things. When velvet rope shoes were popular, most people bought them to catch up with the trend, but Aunt Cui didn't follow the trend, she observed first and then acted carefully. When she found them, she was secretly delighted, and when she couldn't find them, she fell into deep guilt. Especially when she sighs to herself "My life, it won't be good" after failing to buy the velvet rope shoes, it makes the readers also fall into a grief that can't be calmed for a long time.

Through the delicate depiction of the children's perspective, it can highlight Aunt Cui's ambivalence, not only in the beautiful things, but also in the pursuit of love, such as the velvet shoes, dare not take the initiative to take a stand and fight for it, resulting in the withering and fading of the flower of love. This is not only due to her timid and fearful character, but also because of the thousands of years of feudalistic thinking, so that she can only settle for the status quo.

"Therein lies the secret of her love, which she seems to take to the grave and never speak of". This sentence also reflects the naivety and childishness of "I". The deep meaning of the seemingly banal statement is not as simple as it appears on the surface. The deep meaning of the seemingly banal statement is saddening. It allows the reader to experience Aunt Cui's helplessness and bitterness in dealing with love and her inability to break free from the feudal yoke.

4. Children's point of view of the colour description: "bright colours" secretly set off the "sad" tone of the whole text

"Bright colours can both bring out a positive and sunny meaning, and at the same time underline the sadness of the emotional tone. "The article describes Aunt Cui's sister's "pompom shoes" and compares the ball of wool in the shoes to "a big red date," with the red colour highlighting the children's energetic appearance. Although most of the colours in the book are bright and colourful, only the word "spring", which originally refers to the vibrant green, representing new life, hope and light, is transformed into the imagery of a "cage". The word "spring" originally meant vibrant green, representing new life, hope and light. "Spring, as the external environment and the background of the story, can not only tie together each individual fragment, but also render the atmosphere of blandness and sadness created by the characters. From Aunt Cui's point of view, when the young and naive girl meets "Spring" but is torn between love, she is happy and beautiful at that time. The good times don't last long, "when the small northern town ushered in the March of the new year, Auntie Jade was permanently laid to rest underground", "Spring" quietly transformed at this time, and became a "cage" wrapped in deep sadness. "The arrival of spring symbolises the new outlook of the town with the idea of emancipation, but behind it lies the shackles of the traditional feudal culture.

In addition, the gaudy colours of the gowns can also set off the sadness. For example, before her engagement, Auntie Cui wore a blue satin gown studded with gold flowers as a bride, but she couldn't be happy, although the gown was very colourful, but couldn't hide the sadness in her heart.

5. Xiao Hong's Shadow Hidden in the Children's Narrative: The Call for Women's Equality and Autonomy

In March in a Small Town, the children's point of view is used in the narrative, which seems to be a bystander's perspective to witness the tragedy of women's encounters, but in fact it is Xiao Hong who puts all of herself on Aunt Cui, recalls her own past, and slowly shows the awakening of women's consciousness of equality and autonomy.

Through the characterisation of "Aunt Cui", the awakening of Xiao Hong's female consciousness is revealed. In the children's narrative of March in a Small Town, the author reveals the real face and inner struggle of women in the emotional world. This revelation not only shows the richness and complexity of women's emotions, but also feels Xiao Hong's understanding and empathy for the emotional world. And Xiao Hong's own emotional experience also provides rich material for shaping women's emotions. She has experienced the sweetness and bitterness of love, as well as loneliness and helplessness. She is a woman who is incredibly infatuated, even at the expense of turning against her family to pursue her own love and freedom, these experiences make her have a more profound understanding and appreciation of women's emotions, and can also present the emotional world of women more realistically.

In addition, Xiao Hong's unremitting struggle against women's destiny and the quality of fighting for autonomy are also implied. The book describes Aunt Cui's experiences, which can capture some of the shadows of the adult Xiao Hong, and the resilience and wisdom she shows in the face of difficulties and challenges make her a strong person who chooses her own destiny and actively fights against injustice. This spirit of resistance not only embodies women's sense of equality and autonomy, but also sees Xiao Hong's deep concern and thinking about women's destiny. At the same time, Xiao Hong's whole life is going through the bleakness of drifting and suffering a lot of trials and tribulations, and her scrutiny and Aunt Cui have similar experiences.

6. Tragic destiny revealed from a child's perspective: the old society's constraints and shackles on women

Children's point of view is innocent, it knows nothing about the rules of the adult world and feudal ethics, so it cannot understand the struggle and pain of "Aunt Cui", which can better highlight the bondage and oppression of the feudal society on women, as well as the feudal concept of the family, and all these factors force "Aunt Cui" to go step by step towards a tragic end. She is forced by all these factors to come to a tragic end step by step.

The thinking of the old society binds women in the shackles of feudal ethics and morals, unable to escape from their destiny. The era in which the story takes place happens to be a time when old and new ideas are intertwined. People should have eliminated the old feudal ideas and jumped out of the shackles, but they still have the feudal concepts in their bones.

"I" was too young to understand Aunt Cui's plight; even Aunt Cui's mother and her cousin, who had been exposed to Western ideas and culture, did not understand her. In the book, Aunt Cui's mother only asks her daughter if she needs to arrange other dowries, but not why she is unhappy; and the cousin is just an empty shell baptised with new ideas, but his heart is very traditional. On a deeper level, both the enlightened "I" family and the cousins have a feudalistic mindset that cannot be dispersed.^[2]

In addition, the social root of Aunt Cui's tragedy also comes from the feudalism of "parents' order". At that time, marriage was arranged by parents, and no one could refuse it, and it was unfilial to refuse it. The old society's neglect and indifference to the value of women also led to the tragic fate of Aunt Cui. In those days, the status of women was low, and their value was often neglected or devalued. "Although Aunt Cui is smart, beautiful and longs for freedom and true love, she is unable to escape from the constraints and oppression of the society, and ultimately she can only lead to a tragic end."^[3]

7. Conclusion

"March in a Small Town" does not adopt the traditional literary narrative method, but adopts the perspective of a child as innocent as a girl, "I" is not only a bystander, but also a participant and a witness, because children have not been exposed to the complexity and darkness of the society, and it just tells the tragedy of Auntie Cui's life in a light tone, creating a loose cultural mood to deepen the tragedy. It creates a loose mood to deepen the tragedy. Through the analysis of simple language, colourful description and tragic colours, Aunt Cui's image becomes more and more three-dimensional by highlighting the tone of sadness with simple language.

References

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