The Contrast of Local Feeling Between Mo Yan and Alice Munro

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Keywords: Local Feelings, Cultural Background, Regional Characteristics, Female Ecology

Abstract. The Nobel Winners- Mo Yan and Munro play significant role in world literary circles because of their unique charms which lie in the expressions of their homeland feelings. The two writers with different nationality have described homeland lives in reality, and they both sentimentally attached to their homelands which make their works appear a kind of feeling to their homelands, which cannot be erased in western and Chinese literature. Although they both show their attachment to their homeland, the ways to express the feeling are different because they live in different environments and they have different life experiences and cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, the thesis will adopt paralleled method to compare the two writers’ different living environment and cultural backgrounds. It aims to present readers different and unique homelands; to make readers personally sense writers’ feelings towards their homelands and read the works from different cultures. Only in this way, will readers’ understanding on the uniqueness of local culture be deepened. Meanwhile, in the process of analyzing the sentimental feeling, the thesis hope to combine nature and women together using ecofeminism to analyze the similarity to express the themes, which aims to reveal authors’ views on the relationship between nature and women, fatherly, to show worldwide literature.

1. Introduction

Mo Yan and Munro, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012 and 2013 respectively, have won such huge awards and held a prominent place in the history of Chinese and Western literature because the authors themselves and their works have been well received by readers. And meanwhile the author themselves are closely related to the natural environments in their works. The novels written by those two authors are based on hometown, which permeates the local feelings in the process of storytelling, and makes their works more real and regional.

The rural life is always the center of Mo Yan's narration. With his creation, Mo Yan constructed a symbolic rural world of Dongbei Township in Gao Mi County, Shandong Province. This is the place which the stories in every one of his novels begin. He mentioned the significance of his hometown to the writer and to himself several times: Looking at the history of world literature, most writers with unique style have a kingdom of literature.

In the complex world of Canadian and even world literature, with its strong realism, meticulous characterization and deep psychological analysis, Munro's novels are, in essence, regional literature. The rural towns in southwest Ontario in her works are familiar to Canadians, and the rural towns Munro describes are representative. The strong local complex and strong regional color are the commonness of Monroe's works and the source of the charm of here literary works.

Although the works of the two writers show strong local feelings, due to their differences in the natural environment, customs and personal characteristics and cultural background, etc. the two are also different in the way they express their local feelings in their works. This paper compares the background and works of the two authors, using a parallel approach from the comparative literature. The purpose of this paper is to compare the similarities and differences of the native feelings expressed by Mo Yan and Munro through the analysis of the living conditions, the expressions of the native feelings, and the themes in
their works. At the same time, in the process of analyzing their feelings towards the countryside, nature and women are combined together, and the ecofeminism theory is used to analyze the similarities in the themes of the two works and it shows the common understanding of different cultural writers on the topic of the relationship between nature and women, and furtherly reveals the worldwide nature of literature.

2. Literature Review

There are few studies on contrast of the two writers and their works abroad, mainly focusing on the systematic study of Munro's works and the translation of Mo Yan's works. But after Munro won the prize, Chen Xiaoming declared that although there is a strong contrast between the works of Mo Yan and Munro, there is also a certain similarity, that is, each brings his own artistic characteristics to the extreme, thoroughly revealing human nature and life nature.

The subsequent comparative reviews of the two works have emerged one after another. such as Mo Yan and Monroe's “story”, Literature and National Cultural Identity from the works of Mo Yan and Alice Munro; On the Similarity of Narrative Style Between Munro and Mo Yan's novels, although the comparative study of the two writers and their works has made some progress in China, there is no systematic study, and the scope of the study only focus on the comparison between writers and a comparison of Munro's text with other texts. It does not focus on the identity, so the comparative study of the two is still very weak. Therefore, this paper uses the research results of foreign countries for reference and adopts the parallel research method of the comparative literature to study the works, which will help to excavate the truth of art and deepen the understanding of the theme and local characteristics of the works.

3. A Comparison between Mo Yan's and Munro's Local Feelings

3.1. The Different Way of Expressing Local Feelings

Different writers express their local feelings will be different according to their different growing conditions and different cultural backgrounds.

3.1.1. Comparison of Descriptions of Natural Environment

Both writers set their stories in the natural environment of their respective hometowns. In their works, they wrote the characteristics of their native land, showing us the true feelings of the native land. The nostalgia of Mo Yan's works is reflected in his love-hate relationship with the northeast village of Gao Mi. In the Red Sorghum, Mo Yan once said, “the Northeast Township of Gao Mi is undoubtedly the most beautiful and ugly, the most detached from the most secular, the most holy and most disgusting.” [1] Mo Yan was born into a peasant family in Gao Mi county. Due to the persecution of the Japanese puppet army and the Kuomintang on the area and people, Mo Yan as a child always suffered hunger, poverty and backwardness, so his hometown did not leave him any good impression. He hated his hometown, but all which, along with the region's rich cultural heritage, has provided Mo Yan with a steady stream of creative material and therefore, in spirit, Mo Yan could not leave his hometown. Since then, Mo Yan has turned his hometown into words, expressing his deep feeling of resentment and homesickness.

All of Mo Yan's works are based on Gao Mi, which exudes a strong local flavor from the aspects of character description, language narration and natural scenes, which is related not only to his personal experience, but also to his peasant character. He was too familiar with rural life, and has inseparable links with farmers, so his feeling on the country is more profound, more down-to-earth.

From the description of characters, it is not so much a peasant temperament, but rather a real farmer. Mo Yan writes about his hometown characters in his novels and transforms them into the characters in the novel. For example, Liu Lian ren becomes my grandpa Yu Zhan Ao in Red Sorghum and Niao Erhan
in Big Breast and Wide Hips and Sun Yat-sen becomes Sun Bing in Sandalwood Death. Mo Yan has even inserted his fellow villagers into the plot of the novel. These events from Gaomi’s are absorbed into the narrative of the novel, which not only increases the ups and downs of the plot of the novel, but also brings to Mo Yan's novels a thick folk and local character which gives Mo Yan's unbridled narrative a sense of local reality that is unique to Gao Mi's northeastern countryside. The narrative language of the narrator and the language of some of the characters in Mo Yan's novels embody the local characteristics of the whole language of Mo Yan's novels.

The local flavor of the novel language can better reflect Mo Yan's strong local feelings. Due to the influence of a specific history, Mo Yan had to drop out of primary school in the third grade to work as a farmer and did not receive much formal education, but in his works, there is a simple and local flavor between the lines, which is closer to the original ecology of rural life. This kind of simple and natural local flavor flows in Mo Yan's works inadvertently, and also forms Mo Yan's outstanding language style.

Because the characters in Mo Yan's works are all native peasants, the words he speaks are some local dialect or slang. And only those who have some experience in rural life can use these languages to bring the characters to life. Therefore Mo Yan's closeness to the soil of rural life experience the work more deeply on rural flavor of his works, for example:

“"My great-grandfather stared at my grandmother's eyelashes and said angrily, "you don't need to fake deafness with me by grinding your eye hairs. You'll have to be dead, and you'll be a ghost of the family. ” [2]

“The wheels were broken and the Chi Chi was deflating. The car roared, the Harrows clattered back, and my father shook his neck in pain like a serpent that had swallowed a hedgehog.” [3]

Onomatopoeic words such as "Chi Chi" and "clatter" obviously have strong local characteristics. But the Harrow Tooth, the snake which devoured the Hedgehog, and the writhing neck of the snake are more obvious traces of the country life experience.

In a word, the success of Mo Yan's rural feelings comes from his unique rural experience which makes the rural feelings more real. On the other hand, it is the description of the region scene that makes the reader feel the unique Chinese style of the scene description.

As Mo Yan's Gao Mi village in Shandong Province, Munro's homesickness comes from the small town of Wingham, Ontario, Canada. Munro grew up in a slum in the small town of Wingham, where she worked after school as a waitress, tobacco picker and librarian. At the age of 20, she married James Monroe, dropped out of school and had four daughters, but the second daughter died less than a day which gave her an unforgettable experience. So her stories, set mostly in this remote town, far from the center of the city, but not in the countryside, which is regarded as a kind of middle ground, the life and reality of a typical Canadian town. The daily routines of ordinary life, such as the various desserts and farm work mentioned in the novel; the girls and women who used to keep diaries and exchange letters; the sight of wild chrysanthemums, maple leaves, holes and lines on the stalls and other scenery are also very regional temperament of Canada. The description of the natural environment of the small town also occupies a large space in Escape, which mentions the forest, Lake, grassland and other Canadian regional characteristic landscape. It shows that the author is sentimentally attached to the life and environment of his hometown.

The author's attachment to his hometown is also reflected in the primitive life of the characters in his works. In Escape, the people in the small town live more primitive rural lives, such as Karla and Cluck, who run horse farms for a living, and Juliette, who live in the city and return to the town for a living.

The protagonist's love of the original environment once again confirms the author's attachment to the natural life of the town. Her characters and she doesn’t complain about it, they are content to live a simple life.

Of course, although Munro's work may appear to be a very ordinary and trivial life on the surface, the reader can see something more profound in her work, namely, she embodies the nostalgia of the town in
her deep humanitarian spirit. And this spirit is not based on compassion, but reflected in the lives of small-town people.

Many of the stories in *Dance of the Happy Shadows*, a collection of short stories published in 1968, are set in the small town of Wingham. She focuses on the difficulties women encounter in marriage and love, and the choices they make in marriage. At the same time it records their own ordinary life and family trifles. In the opening story of Dance of The Happy Shadows, Munro vividly shows her family members through the eyes of a teenage girl, “My father raised silver foxes and sold their skins for cloaks, clothes and gloves. When prices fell, my father always hoped for a good price in the coming year, but when prices fell again and again, he hoped for the next year or the next, until he finally ran out of hope and ran up a huge debt to the feed company.” [4]

And in the face of such a difficult situation, a mother can take it in stride. Walking gracefully past the housewife with their bare armpits and baggy, strapless dresses, as if they were a noble shopper. Munro paints a portrait of a passionate mother and an escapist father with subtlety and real emotion.

In a word, the expression of Munro's local feelings is mainly reflected in her seemingly trivial local sketches, which are actually meaningful and she expresses the delicate local feelings as a female writer and lets the readers appreciate the unique small town scenery in Canadian.

### 3.1.2 Comparison of the Cultural Background

In addition to the influence of the writer's growing environment, the expression of the local feelings is different due to the difference of cultural background.

In Chinese literature, the author reveals his local feelings in the early literary text *Poetry*, in which the local culture is a wanderer in the world, a nostalgic chant of personal destiny and life. In the later period, Confucian culture advocated individual group member status or thought with social personality, and the expression of local feelings blended the thinking of the Times, destiny, politics and society. Collectivism Culture was deeply rooted in China. Therefore, Chinese local literature no longer exists solely in the form of personal sentimentalism, but in a deeper meaning.

The development of Western literature mainly depends on two civilizations, namely, ancient Greek civilization and Hebrew civilization. However, the literature formed under the influence of these two civilizations is full of deep attachment to native land. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus returns to his hometown after a decade, despite all the difficulties and obstacles, and Odysseus sees returning home as his only goal. The sentiment, therefore, is always framed around Odysseus's firm belief in returning home. While the ancient Greece nurtures the rational tradition which runs through the Western culture, it also irrigates a flower which values the individual freedom. In history, the Greek nation had to pay attention to itself in its struggle against nature and take a proactive and challenging attitude from its own interests. But this individualism is not so clear, with the development of Western society, especially the establishment of the Anglo-American capitalist market, the pursuit of private property has become a reasonable and legitimate pursuit. Britain's Thomas Hobbes was the first to put the individual above reproach. He believed that all men were absolutely equal in physical and mental ability, and that all men did as they pleased. The pursuit of individual interests and rights became a matter of course, which gradually perfected the western tradition of individualism. This tradition is not only reflected in religion and politics, but also in literary creation, and individualism is revealed unconsciously through the author. Therefore, the local feeling of Western literature is a kind of individualistic feelings of returning home.

Because the two writers have different cultural backgrounds, the expressions of their nostalgia for their own land are also different. Mo Yan expresses his feelings by telling the story of his family, and his feelings towards his hometown are not his personal feelings, but the homeland feelings and consciousness of the whole nation. Therefore, his description of his hometown is a combination of fiction and reality to arouse the national consciousness. Of course, Mo Yan's first writing was not intentional, he just told the story of the storyteller to his mother, so Mo Yan's local feelings is unconscious to throw his
feelings into the national interests. While Munro actually pays more attention to the backwardness of his hometown environment and the perplexity and conflict of ideas brought by the development of the times. The local feelings expressed by her are mainly based on the purely personal basis, in order to describe and reflect on her personal memories of home. She strives to tell the true and accurate stories that remain in her personal memory. Although she refers to her childhood adaptation of the story she heard, it was not unconsciously written, but, according to her, she did not like the ending of the story she had read, but consciously altered the story in her own way. Therefore, Munro's homesickness is a typical self-conscious expression in western literature.

Of course, no matter how different the two writers writing style, their nostalgia for the country are the author himself from the heart of the true expression.

3.2 Similarities between the Local Feelings

3.2.1 True Expression of the Emotions

Everyone has a land in his heart, and there is an immutable feeling lingering in their hearts, which is the local feeling. No matter where you are and what kind of life you are experiencing, homesickness and sentimentally attached to your hometown always pull you. Even if your hometown is not well-developed, not beautiful, even if you have been away from home for many years, but you still love your hometown, and this kind of love is buried in the bones. As Ai Qing wrote at the time, “why do I always have tears in my eyes? Because I love this land so much.” [5]

Mo Yan and Munro also have a strong local complex in their works, although they reflect their different cultural aesthetic and values. But the strong local feelings, the pure and simple beauty of human nature and the quest to return to a better home, bring the same warmth and resonance to the readers.

3.2.2 Thematic Presentation

The rural feelings in Munro and Mo Yan's works not only come from the real rural life, but also are higher than the life. It can also be said that the highest level of local feelings lies in the expression of the theme of the work. Both writers have successfully used ecological theory to express a strong local feeling. Munro and Mo Yan not only endow nature and women with subjectivity, but also express the good wish of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, which contains rich ecofeminism thoughts.

The basic idea of the ecofeminism is to combine feminism with ecology, and to analyze the inherent connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature, with the aim of liberating women and nature and making them coexist harmoniously.

In Mo Yan's novel Frog, there are three images of frog, Wawa and Nuwa, which are closely related to the heroine who suffers from many misfortunes. My aunt was a female doctor, carrying a medicine box, holding an umbrella, rolling her trouser legs, and fighting with a group of frogs. She introduced a new method of delivering babies instead of the brutal delivery by the midwife, and eventually built her career on Nuwa's passion for making babies, not only for people but also for animals. Aunt perfectly embodies the harmonious existence between man and nature. Second, my aunt was “a sad-looking, half-dressed woman doctor with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth”. [6] The night she retired, she was surrounded and attacked by thousands of frogs, who tore her naked. But too loyal and fanatical, she sacrificed her own moral sense and female consciousness, resulting in three maternal deaths. As a result, she lost her earlier respect and compassion for life. The contrast of my aunt's attitude to nature destroyed the harmonious relationship between man and nature. But for aunt's inner tangle, the author also attempts to find a way out for aunt, even for the Chinese people to find a way out. So my aunt was attacked by a frog and got well and married Hao Dashou. She collaborated with Hao to create two thousand, eight hundred clay dolls with a family name, which is saving her soul. It was only in this way that she sought a psychological and natural balance. In fact, my aunt spent her whole life looking for spiritual sustenance, and in the end nature gave her a firm belief, which is to show that women tend to draw strength, to gain courage, to restore female consciousness from nature.
Every woman aspires to be a mother, and the maternal consciousness of every woman will also urge women to be kind to animals and care for animals. As in *Escape*, the lamb Flora symbolizes the heroine, Karla. Flora in Kara's process of escaping cannot be ignored. She vanishes, reappears, vanishes, reappears, and finally becomes a “deadly needle in her lung” [7], which pricks Karla with hatred and bleeds. Throughout the story, Flora is a constant presence. While the image of the lamb shrinks and enlarges, the heroine's relationship with lamb is constantly changing. As a child, Karla attached great importance to Flora. The most upsetting thing for Karla was the loss of Flora. Thus, the image of the lamb was enlarged, but in the later stages, the image of the lamb was always absent and diminished. It wasn't until Karla gave up running and returned home that her husband, Cluck, confronted Karla and clashed. “What appeared was a white goat, a little white sheep, almost no bigger than a sheepdog”[8]. Then the image of the lamb is magnified again. The return of the lamb coincided with the return of Carla. But Karla's compromise and submission had not earned her husband's affection, and she was desperate. It was then that Flora disappeared again, giving Karla the courage and strength to reassess her marriage and wake up. Carla regained her sense of independence and decided to run away from her unhappy marriage again. Thus, lamb and the heroine's escape form a close bond, and the reader sees Flora as Carla and Karla as Flora. Here, the female characters merge with nature.

In short, a writer with a sense of social responsibility should consciously use their own creation as a female spokesman. Both Mo Yan and Munro show the greatness of women when they narrate the tragic fate of women, that is, when they realize their situation, they adjust their relationship with nature in time. At the same time, the female characters also bear the reflection of the times and the nation, which is beneficial to the development of feminism ecology and the historical mission of contemporary writers.

4. Summary

Whether it is the northeast of Gao Mi or the small Canadian town, both writers have a unique way of bringing their stories and ordinary lives to life. It makes readers participate in the interpretation of the text and feel the author's strong local feelings, which also confirms the conclusion that the literature of different regions is unique and cosmopolitan. Only by absorbing the literature of other regions and nations can the literature of one region be called excellent, and only by paying attention to the common topics of the world can it be more vigorous and more promising.

Acknowledgement

This research is the research result of *How to Promote the Ideological and Political Construction in the Course of Appreciation of English Short Stories*. Subject approval number: 2019S028. Project Fund: Eastern Liaoning University

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