

Original Paper

Research on Nobel Literature Prize winner Yan Mo's Transformations of Writing Styles from the Perspective of Magical Realism

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Received: October 29, 2024 Accepted: December 14, 2024 Online Published: January 01, 2025
doi:10.22158/assc.v6n6p80 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v6n6p80>

Abstract

Yan Mo, China's first Nobel Prize winner for literature, has largely experienced two transformations of writing styles. However, magical realism has always been the main characteristics of his writing creation. During the first period (between the year 1981 to the time he studied in PLA Academy of Arts) , he concentrated chiefly on his daily life in the army and his writing style was soft and fresh. Then using bold brushstrokes and unique perspectives, he turned to depict the colorful stories of numerous characters in his hometown with magical realism and rich imagination, leading him all the way to his winning of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2012. After experiencing about five years of creative silence, Yan Mo experienced another creative transformation from novels to dramas with the publication of the drama Crocodile as a representative. Dramas are significant components of Yan Mo's literary works, but most people only attach great importance to Yan Mo's researches on magical realism in his novels. Fewer people do researches about his dramas, with even fewer researchers making comparison between Yan Mo's Transformation of Writing styles. So this article is to use the textual analysis to explore the factors that account for his use of magical realism in the two transformations and analyze the inheritances and developments in his writing Characteristics of magical realism in the two stages. In a word, there are four purposes for this paper : (1) to explore the development of magical realism in Yan Mo's literary creation and the contributing factors. (2) to explore the transformations of magical realism before Yan Mo won the Nobel Prize for literature and its Unique characteristics. (3) to explore the differences of the use of magical Realism after he won the Noble Prize for literature in 2012. (4) to explore the reasons for Yan Mo's transformation and conclude the research gap.

Keywords

Yan Mo, Magical realism, Transformation, Writing Style

1. Introduction

Yan Mo is one of the best contemporary Chinese writers who began to make his figure in Chinese literary world in the 1980s with works such as *Transparent Carrot* (1985) and *Red Sorghum Family* (1987). By entering the keyword Yan Mo on Chinese CNKI, you can find about 5502 research papers on Yan Mo's novels. However, Yan Mo not only created many novels, but also produced essays, poems and dramas which are not so influential as his novels. Up to now, "He has published a total of 18 novels, 20 novellas, 138 short stories, 103 essays, and more than 10 poems and other works, and won the Mao Dun Literature Prize, Shi Naian Literature Prize, Zhu Ziqing Prose Award and many other awards (Feng & Wang, 2024, p. 50)". Many Chinese researchers have studied Yan Mo's works from different perspectives. Cuiying Gao studied Yan Mo's style transformation by dividing his works into three different stages and claimed that "Yan Mo's works have been showing more and more 'Chinese elements', 'Chinese style' and 'national background color' (Gao, 2010, p. 42)". Aisong Duan analyzed Yan Mo's long-running novel *Life and Death Are Wearing me Out* from the aspects of the compassionate circulation of life consciousness, the multiple structure of perspective and the wonderful irony of narrative language, claiming that this novel is "both an innovative creation in the sense of text, a huge impact and an exploration of the theme and the fate of characters (Duan, 2023, p. 181)." Yan Mo also becomes recognized throughout the world with his works translated into many kinds of languages and circulated in many countries for three decades. The famous American translator Howard Goldblatt deserves a lot of credit in the translation and dissemination of Yan Mo's novels in the English-speaking countries. In 1993, *The Red Sorghum Family* was translated by the famous American translator Howard Goldblatt and published in both the United States and the United Kingdom by Viking Penguin USA, marking the beginning of Yan Mo's works to enter the field of view of the English-speaking world. Then a series of works with local themes were translated and introduced around the world. In October 2012, Yan Mo won the Nobel Prize for Literature, completing his transformation from a local writer to a world-class writer—completing the process of consecration (Casanova, 2004, p. 126). So researches about Yan Mo and his works are on the rise. Centering on the overseas translation, publication, acceptance and research status of Yan Mo's works, Jiangkai Liu aims to "reveal and discuss some possible problems in the process of overseas dissemination of Chinese contemporary literature (Liu, 2011, p. 20)". Zhengbin and Xuebing studied the English translation of contemporary Chinese native literature based on Yan Mo and Pingwa Jia's translated works and compared the influences of their works in foreign countries, concluding that "The future translation of Chinese local literature in the English world Communication still has a long way to go (Feng & Wang, 2024, p. 57)." Yan Mo himself realized that it is very important for the successful translation and spread of a piece of writing to choose the proper translators and publishing house. Wang pointed out

that “Yan Mo is a wild and unrestrained novelist, but his essays are relatively standardized” (Wang, 2009, p. 88). On the Chinese CNKI, we can get about 30 researches about Yan Mo’s dramas. So based on the theory of magical realism, this paper is to investigate into the use of magical realism in Yan Mo’s works before and after he won the Nobel Prize. This paper is to achieve four purposes : (1) to explore the development of magical realism in Yan Mo’s literary creation and the contributing factors. (2) to explore the transformations of magical realism before Yan Mo won the Nobel Prize for literature and its Unique characteristics. (3) to explore the differences of the use of magical Realism after he won the Noble Prize for literature in 2012. (4) to explore the reasons for Yan Mo’s transformation and conclude the research gap.

2. Core Concept and Research Methods

2.1 *Magical Realism*

Magical realism, or magic realism, is an approach to literature that weaves fantasy and myth into everyday life. In the world of magical realism, the ordinary becomes extraordinary and the magical becomes commonplace (Craven, 2019). The term *Magischer Realismus* (Magic Realism) was coined by the critic Franz Roh (1890-1965) in 1925 to designate an artistic style that merged realism with elements of the fantastical, mythological, and dream-like. Through his theorizing, Roh sought to name the defamiliarizing experience whereby even the most mundane objects can appear strange and magical if you look long enough at them. The term only gave name to a movement in the 1940s in response to work produced in Latin America and the Caribbean (Dent, 2023). The value of magical realism lies not in the “illusion”, but in the real life under the “illusion”, which is different from other imaginary writings such as horror stories, ghost stories, science fiction, dystopian fiction. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, written by Colombian writer Garcia Marquez, is regarded as the main peak of magical realism literature in the world literary circle, and has been translated into more than 30 languages and published, selling more than 10 million copies (Yao, 2013, p. 151). In novels of magic realism, the writers skillfully combines reality with magic, fantasy and other elements to create a world full of mystery, fantasy and surreal atmosphere, making reality ambiguous and uncertain, allowing the reader to walk between reality and fantasy and experience a unique reading experience. The fables in contemporary novels of magic realism have a wide audience of readers, which not only attract the love of readers, but also attract the attention of many scholars. In contemporary magical realism novels, fables are usually presented in various ways. Some fables use animal images to symbolize certain traits or social groups of human beings, such as the Buendia family in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Each character is named after an animal, which means the primitive, instinct and madness they possess. Other fables describe such relationships as man and God, man and nature, only to show human’s desire for power and human’s blind obedience to faith as well as other themes. The content expressed in these fables often involves political, cultural, moral and other issues in social reality. For example, the novel

“Nightmare in Dreams” is set in a dream, describing a variety of strange events experienced by a person in a dream, suggesting the real life insecurity, fear and the desire to pursue freedom.

Today, magical realism is an international tendency with its expression in many countries and cultures. In contemporary magical realist novels, fables are common contents, through which some plots in the novel are better expressed, improving the overall quality of the novel. Chinese writers are also inspired and use fables to express the problems and issues in real society. In the 1980s, the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was introduced in China and shocked the entire Chinese literary world, and it has been called the greatest work of Spanish literature since *Don Quixote*, for it combines exaggeration, illusion, absurdity, irony, symbolism and other descriptive techniques, and integrates a large number of European myths, fables and folklore, which also makes its author Marquez become the winner of the Nobel Prize in literature.

2.2 Textual Analysis

In recent years, text analysis is a powerful research method for researchers to explore the nature of message content, and it is also one of the commonly used methods of cultural studies scholars. Text mainly refers to the information structure composed of certain symbols or codes, which can be expressed in different forms, such as language, text, image and so on. The text is made by a specific person, and its semantics will inevitably reflect the ideological content of the specific position, viewpoint, value and interest of the person.

2.3 Historical and Cultural Research Method

Historical and cultural research is to explore the characteristics of the era and cultural connotation reflected in the works by studying the social, political, cultural and other aspects reflected in the works. The literary works are compared and analyzed to come up with the similarities and differences between them. This method is helpful to reveal the inner relation and mutual influence between literary works and promote the understanding of the law of literary development. This method helps to understand the historical background and creative context of the work, so as to grasp the meaning and value of the work more comprehensively.

3. Research Results

3.1 Three Stages of Yan Mo's Literary Creation

Yan Mo is an extremely prolific writer. His works coexist beauty and ugliness, pain and joy, life and death cycle, creating strange artistic wonders in chaotic scenes. By reading through Yan Mo's works and related literature, Yan Mo's development of literary creation can be clearly appreciated and different researches have divided Yan Mo's literary creation into different stages. Cuiying Gao divided Yan Mo's creation of literary works (Cuiying, 2010, p. 42) as follows in Table One. Guan (2015) also thought Mo Yan's literary creation can also be divided into three stages, but with a different method as in Table Two. The two tables show that though Cuiying Gao and Xiaoxiao Guan both divided Yan Mo's literary creation into three stages, but neither of them has paid any attention to his literary

transformation after Yan Mo won the Nobel Prize in 2012 for his novel *Frog*, even less importance has been attached to the differences of magical realism which used in his works produced after he won the Nobel Prize for literature. So My attention is paid to investigating into the different characteristics of magical realism in these three stages and the main characteristics of magical realism in the drama *Crocodile* which was published in 2023.

Table 1. Three Stages of Yan Mo's Literary works

Three Stages of Yan Mo's Literary works				
Early stage (1981-1984)		Middle stage (1985-2000)		Third stage (2000-)
Copying stage	Golden period (1985-1986)	Shock period (1987)	Mature period (1988-2000)	Development period

Table 2. Three Stages of Guan Xiaoxiao's Literary Works

Three Stages of Guan Xiaoxiao's Literary Works		
Early stage (1981-1989)	Middle stage (1990-1999)	Third stage (2000-)
Breakthroughs and multiple explorations of literary creation driven by youthful passion	The consciousness and maturity of novel style	Rich carnival & transformation

The above two Tables show that though Cuiying Gao and Xiaoxiao Guan both divided Yan Mo's literary creation into three stages, but neither of them has paid any attention to his literary transformation after Yan Mo won the Nobel Prize in 2012 for his novel *Frog*. My attention is to summarize the different characteristics of magicals in these three stages and the main characteristics of magical realism in the drama *Crocodile* which was published in 2023.

3.1.1 Magical Realism in the First Stage

As is showed in Table one, the creation of Yan Mo's novels consists roughly of three stages. The first period is from 1981 to the autumn of 1984 when he was admitted to the Department of Literature, PLA Academy of Arts. His debut work is *A Rainy Night in Spring* which is a short story published in 1981. In the year 1984 only, he created altogether 8 novels, but his early works such as *A Rainy Night in Spring* and *Wind on the Island* mostly focused on military themes and did not touch on his life in his hometown Gaomi which Yan Mo later used magical realism to describe in his many novels such as *The Red Sorghum Family*.

Table 3. Transformations of Yan Mo's Magical Realism

Tansformations of Yan Mo's magical realism			
Stages	Early stage (1983)	Golden and mature stage (1985-2012)	Third stage (2012-)
Major Characteristics	Appearance of magical realism	Unrestrained momentum, fierce anti-tradition, magnificent and bizarre imagination, Latin magical realism, the pursuit of creative style changes	The magical realism is a crocodile that can understand and speak human language.
Respresentative Work	Folk Music	Thirteen Steps; Life and Death are Wearing me Out; Red Sorghum; Frog	Crocodile

The Road of Selling Cotton (1983) and Folk Music (1983) are considered to be Yan Mo's masterpieces in his early stage, which also shows his first attempts at magical realism because it was an imitation of the American female writer Carson McCullers' The Ballad of Sad Coffee. The imitation skills and rote copying in Folk Music was exposed as immature, which is especially true in the writing techniques. In other aspects, there is also considerable room for improvement. Yitian Zhang said "that is the reasons why he studied the inheritance of Folk Music from The Ballad of Sad Coffee (Yitian, 2016, p. 140)." Yan Mo's works in the first stage tend to use third person narration and adhere to traditional literary concepts, which inevitably bring traces of formulaic and patterning and show his utilitarian attitude and incomplete knowledge structure at that time. But these works show Yan Mo's writing talent and uniqueness.

3.1.2 Magical Realism in the Middle Stage

In the middle stage (1985-2000), Yan Mo published 7 important novels, nearly 30 novellas, about 100 short stories and essays. In 1985, Yan Mo published a total of 12 novellas and short stories, which was the year when Mo Yan stood out and grew into an influential young writer. Yan Mo's two years (1984-1985) at the PLA Art Academy are a "golden age" of his creation. Yan Mo's novella Transparent Carrot (1985) caused a stir in the entire Chinese literary world. In his "Autumn Water", the literary geographical name "Northeast Gaomi Township" appeared for the first time. In 1996, Mo Yan co-wrote the drama Farewell My Concubine at the invitation of the screenwriter Wang Shuzeng, marking his turning to drama.

During this stage, Yan Mo's novels are both typical of magic realism and full of mysterious oriental flavo. Yan Mo combines magic realism with Chinese folk culture and makes full use of "complex tonality" to create a unique style of magic realism, showing the unique artistic charm and realizing his

creation of a world through “nationality”. Many of Yan Mo’s novels reflect such a strong magical style in shaping its character image, story plot, language style, transformation of time and space (Tang, 2013). For example, the image of carrot in *Transparent Carrot* seems to be real and unreal. The character Fang Fugui in Yan Mo’s *Thirteen Steps* rose from the dead after being stuffed into a freezer and the plastic surgeon Yuchan Li transformed Fugui Fang into her husband Chiqiu Zhang. In *Humor and Fun*, the character San Wang, a university professor, turns into a monkey under the pressure of life and work. The leprechaun in *Wine Country* is a 14-year-old who sheds the layers of fish scales and returns to the body of a 2-year-old; The urine in *Red Sorghum* makes sorghum liquor more mellow. These series of grotesque images and plots make Yan Mo’s novels appear strange, bizarre and weird, getting people trance and blurred into the magical realm of integration of Oriental national culture (Gao, 2010, p.43). What’s more important, this technique touches the soul of the nation more deeply, expanding the aesthetic vision that the novels bring to the readers and conveying the reality of the legacy of society at that time vividly, completely and fully. As for the unique characteristics of Yan Mo’s magical realism, there are three factors to account for it.

3.1.3 Magical Realism in the Third Stage

Ten years after winning the Nobel Prize for literature, Mo Yan promoted the blockbuster drama *Crocodile* through Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House in June 2023, which is a great response to his seven years of silence in literary creation after winning the Nobel Prize. Mo Yan himself had said, “I will concentrate more on quality instead of pursuing the quantity of work as much as I did when I was younger. (Sun, 2019).” Yan Mo’s full-length drama *Crocodile* is a tragic fable full of modern connotations and psychological activities showing their true feelings about what they had done such as regret and selfishness. This transformation is not only a testament to the oath Yan Mo had made in front of the statue of Shakespeare’s former residence in 2019, but also his attempt to break the boundaries of the use of texts in various media. However, though this is a drama, there is much inheritance and differences from his novels and his former dramas in many respects, especially in the use of magical realism.

4. Discussion

4.1 Factors Contributing to Yan Mo’s Magical Realism

Mo Yan himself admits that his magic realism is influenced by Faulkner and Marquez, so even though Mo Yan is an Oriental magic realist writer, his works are more or less the shadow of Western magic realism (Yuanyuan, 2007). As for the unique characteristics of Yan Mo’s magical realism in the first two stages, there are three factors to account for it.

4.1.1 The Influence of Latin American Magic

In the 1980s, the door of China had opened to other countries and all kinds of foreign literary and artistic thoughts poured in. Chinese literature experienced from 1966 to 1976, which caused a cultural fault. And “root-seeking literature” was enthusiastically pursued in the background at that time. At the

same time those Chinese writers who have been hungry in spirit for a long time began to widely absorb western literary and philosophical trends, especially those of modernism such as black humor, stream of consciousness and Latin American magical realism, which have undoubtedly exerted a great influence on Yan Mo's creation of novels. On the other hand, Yan Mo was eager to obtain the recognition of others and was anxious to pursue the change of his writing style, which makes up the inner driving force for the change of Yan Mo's writing style in this period. After entering the Department of Literature, PLA Academy of Arts in 1984, Yan Mo's classmates such as Cunbao Li and Xuewu Song were already a little famous in China at that time, which brought Yan Mo great pressure. "some students were contemptuous to me and often mocked me. I'm not convinced. I think I can write something pretty good, but I don't know what to write and how to write them (Mo, 2003)." This makes Yan Mo think about his own creative outlet while reading. It is these internal and external factors that greatly changed his writing style at this stage. And then he found his "blood land" (Gaomi Northeast Township) and implanted the spirit of western modernism in the shell of local themes, finally forming his free, bizarre and magnificent novel world. Yan Mo himself admitted, In the early 1980s, Yan Mo came into contact with western literature and read Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Kafka's *Metamorph*, Kawabata Yasunari's *Snow Country* and many other works. He felt like waking up from a dream and began to understand that a novel could do that (Mo, 2007). So Yan Mo's magic realism style creation is greatly influenced by Latin American magic realism. So even though Yan Mo is an Oriental magic realist writer, his works are more or less the shadow of Western magic realism. In particular, Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* made Yan Mo realize the unique charm of realism. The Northeast Gaomi Township, Yan Mo's fictional space with mythological color, is isomorphic with Marquez's magical South American plateau (Wang, 2022).

4.1.2 The Influence of Oriental Folk Culture

As an important branch of postmodernism, "magic realism" in fact has existed in the Chinese literary world for thousands of years, whether as a creative method, literary school, narrative mode, or as a kind of literary work (Liu, 2023, p. 41). Classical Chinese literature works such as *Journey to the West*, *Liaozhai Tales* and other literary works are all full of mysterious magic romantic color, in addition to the description and criticism of the real society. These classical works of traditional Chinese literature predate *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which is known as the representative work of magical realism. Yanbing Zeng has pointed out, "from the Chinese point of view, postmodernism may be seen as the most recent trend of thought having come to China from the West. From the Western point of view, China is often seen as the source of postmodernist (Zeng, 2013, p. 202)." Two reasons can account for why these works have not been included in the list of magical realism novels by critics. On the one hand, at that time China was short of accomplished and influential literary critics in the academic circle and a promoter of Chinese literary theory to the world. On the other hand, most scholars only paid more attention to the reality, but ignore its magical color. It is argued that all memories are embodied and emotional (Vickhoff, 2023). While learning from Western creative techniques, Yan Mo has been

exploring his fusion with Chinese traditional culture and national spirit, recreating his own classical Chinese magical novels. Yan Mo had made more incisive use of folk resources in his writing of magical realism. In many of his novels, we can find folk sayings, slang, local dialects, children's songs and ballads, local operas, vulgar insults, funny sayings and so on. Especially after 2000, Yan Mo's novels have been showing more and more "Chinese elements", "Chinese style" and "national background". The traditional Chinese superstition such as "King of Hell, ox head and horse face, Mengpo Tang, the cycle of life and death and the ghost of injustice" was reflected effectively in the novel *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*. Pu Songling's love story of human and ghost in his *Tales of Liaozhai* also permeates Yan Mo's works. At the same time, Yan Mo's writing technique of magical realism was greatly influenced by the "lectures of famous Chinese scholars (Wang, 2022, p. 37)" which Yan Mo had attended when he studied in Department of Literature, PLA Academy. Many of Yan Mo's works, including *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* and *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, are parodies of Fangping Xi in *Tales of Liaozhai* and the Bible respectively. However, the ideological connotation and theme expressed by them are completely different from the text of parody. *Forty-one Guns* tells the story of the strange growing process of Xiaotong Luo, a rural teenager. In the creative technique, Latin American magic realism and the strange tone of Chinese classical novel *Liaozhai* were blended together with Xiaotong Luo's hallucinatory world and the real world, making it difficult for people to distinguish the true from the false. The plot of the whole book is paradoxical, giving people an extraordinary shock. So Ruiyun Lai claimed that "the influence of Yan Mo's great trans-boundary synaesthesia creation, including "magic", is more domestic, and the theory influenced by it is mainly local literature theory (Wang, 2022, p. 35)."

4.1.3 Experiences of Childhood

As the beginning of life experience, Childhood experience has a very important impact on people's life. Childhood experience consists of the psychological and emotional experiences that a writer has experienced and possessed in his childhood, which becomes the psychological background of the writer's creation, directly or indirectly affecting the writer's subject matter, language and creation style in his literary creation. Ernest Hemingway once said that an unhappy childhood is the cradle of a writer. The formation of a person's character is related to various experiences in childhood, and many writers' debut novels are often written from the perspective of childhood. "Faulkner's constant writing of his hometown which is as small as a postage on a stamp opened Mo Yan's surging passion for constructing the magnificent picture of the Northeast Gaomi Township literary kingdom (Ruiyun, 2022, p. 37). In his childhood, Yan Mo listened to the strange stories told by the old people in the village and he wrote solemn and mysterious folk beliefs in his novels, which laid the tone of magic and imagination in his literary works. So Yan Mo depicted many legendary stories which were based on the cultural elements in his hometown Gaomi-Northeast Township-in Shandong Province, China. The clay sculptures, paper-cuts, New Year pictures, melodies, folk art and folk culture that Yan Mo grew up with all entered Yan Mo's novels and plays, influencing and even determining the artistic style of his novels. " In the

process of creating my literary territory, Northeast Gaomi Township, William Faulkner of the United States and Garcia Marquez of Colombia gave me important inspiration. I did not read them seriously, but their pioneering spirit inspired me to understand that a writer must have a place of his own” (Zhan, 2021).

Most of the avant-garde writers and critics in the 1980s were born in the 1950s and 1960s. In their personal growth, they experienced the and ushered in the reform. From the closed environment of personality suppression to the social atmosphere of ideological liberation, the anguish brought by the upheaval of The Times and the gap between them and the outside world are the real survival experience of young people. In such an environment, the search for the individual spirit of the subject became a social appeal, the changes of living environment and living experience gave birth to the thinking of individual existence in literary and artistic activities, and experimental avant-garde art broke ground. The specific historical background brings Mo Yan the memory of his childhood and the survival experience, which also promotes his writing of novels. We can find that the magical meaning of Mo Yan’s narrative language and the strong sense of tension caused by it are both closely related to his childhood traumatic memory. On the one hand, the large historical background makes Mo Yan’s childhood and youth memories filled with fear and incomprehension; On the other hand, in Mo Yan’s childhood, there was no dilemma of individual survival.

4.2 Narrative Characteristics in Yan Mo’s Works of Magical Realism

Yan Mo’s novels often create a strange and magical tone through the creation of some abnormal characters. These characters not only have incomprehensible behavior, but their psychological changes are also very strange.

4.2.1 Situations and Events that Defy Logic

The character Jia Zhao in *Sandalwood Death* is a good example. Jia Zhao’s parents died when he was very young, having no way to make a living though living in the capital. At the beginning, Jia Zhao was very afraid to see the murder, but later he actually became the world famous chief executioner of the Criminal Department Lobby. In the novel, the author gives a detailed description of each execution scene, especially the abnormal psychological changes of Jia Zhao in every step of his execution. Jia Zhao regards killing as a sacred profession, and he will make detailed arrangements and plans in advance during the execution. Ironically, only when concentrating on killing people as an executioner, was Jia Zhao given preferential treatments by the supreme rulers of the time. For example, the Empress Dowager Cixi gave him Buddhist beads and the emperor made him sit on the dragon throne and so on. However, these phenomena would have been completely impossible. So Yan Yan uses both real and fake techniques to well show the animal nature hidden in Jia Zhao, thus mocking the extreme cruelty of the ruling class at that time. Mo Yan also constructs strange plots by describing some characters who do not exist in real life and enriches the characters in the process of continuous development of the plot. The combination of mysterious characters and strange plots makes readers in a magical scene of Yin and Yang symbiosis and the coexistence of gods and ghosts. In the novel *Adventure*, on his way home

the protagonist met his uncle San Zhao and exchanged pleasantries. However, the protagonist was told by his father that uncle San Zhao died three days ago. The most vivid use of the description of people and ghosts is in the novel *Our Uncle Seven*. When the the protagonist hears the news of Uncle Seven's death, he rushes home to mourn his uncle seven, only to see uncle Seven at the entrance to the village. Later the protagonist came to uncle seven's home and found the dead man lying on the mat was indeed uncle seven. However, he also found that uncle seven is still next to seven aunts, repairing a bike and chatting. So in Yan Mo's novels, this kind of life scene mixed with people and ghosts is very common, which is deeply influenced by the ghost narrative technique in Chinese traditional culture. "This strange scene of coexistence of people and ghosts not only creates a strong magical atmosphere, but also reasonably explains the ugly performance of some human beings, and also makes a severe criticism of some bad phenomena existing in the real society (Ye, 2023, p. 87) ."

4.2.2 Myths and Legends

Myth, one of the sources of folk literature, is a highly fantastical story created by people in ancient times to reflect the nature, the relationship between man and nature and the social form (Jingwen, 1980). The relationship between literature and folklore is of long standing and complementary. The fantastic imagination and conception in the early myths, legends and fables are much literary and are usually the base and source of much of the strangeness in magic realism. Legends and Myths from divergent areas and times are often juxtaposed to create startling anachronisms and dense, complex stories. The writer's imitation, transformation and application of myth in his novels also contain his own worship of ancestors and thoughts on the society of the time. Northeast Gaomi Township has always been Yan Mo's literary world. Jingjing Cao has pointed out "juxtaposition of the secular and the mythical is an important feature of Yan Mo's family narration. This feature of family narrative realizes the full blend of folk myth and legend with ethics, enriches the range and dimension of expression of contemporary far and makes family narrative not only possess the spirit of critical realism, but of transcendent romanticism (Cao, 2023). In *Red Sorghum Family*, The maternal ancestors in the family are often mythical and legendary. The divine fantasy and exaggeration of ancestors make them endowed with divine characteristics on top of human nature. And these divine characteristics are often connected with natural things and have supernatural power, becoming a symbol of mythology. Yan Mo adopts the way of isomorphism between family history and human history, and then transforms the age-old goddess worship of human beings into the pursuit of the mother goddess of the family. "My grandma", as the embodiment of Red sorghum, is told as a fairy tale after her death and the "Second Grandma" is possessed by a fox fairy. "When Grandma was unearthed, her appearance was as beautiful as a flower, and the tomb was dazzling and fragrant, just like in a fairy tale... As soon as Grandma's body was taken out of the grave, her splendour, sweetness and fragrance vanished into smoke, leaving only a snow-white skeleton (Yan, 2017, p. 28)." In Yan Mo's another novel *Roses Smell like Roses*, the grandmother is the symbol of the rose in nature. On the basis of preserving the authenticity of the family characters, The maternal ancestors in the family are fully mythologized, with

more than a little transcendental meaning, and they can be regarded as family myths. At the beginning of Yan Mo's novel "Autumn Water", he told the story of his grandfather and grandmother eloping to the Daouwa Valley in Gaomi Township in the northeast of the country. Then came torrential rains and floods. The raging flood turned the northeast Gaomi Township into a chaotic world. In this novel, the skyrocketing flood scene has the shadow of the flood myth, and the writer highlights the wild northeast township of Gaomi through the imitation and deformation of the flood myth. The harsh primitive living environment of the generation paved the way for the feud between the man in black and the woman in purple below, showing the writer's worship psychology of the ancestors' courage to break new ground and expand the territory of heroes and bandits.

4.2.4 Distorted Time and Sequence

Characters in magical realism may move backward, leap forward, or zigzag between the past and the future. Bizarre events are described in an offhand manner. Characters do not question the surreal situations they find themselves in. In the novel *Life and Death Are Wearing me Out*, Yan Mo creatively applied the Buddhist thought with Chinese national characteristics to the creation of magical realism. He also borrowed the "six paths of reincarnation" in Chinese Buddhism to attach respectively the soul of landlord Ximennao to some animals such as a donkey, a cow, a pig, a dog and a monkey, endowing them with some "super powers", so that the whole novel is infused with a mysterious magic color. The fate of the characters in the novel *Life and Death Are Wearing me Out* finally coincides with the Buddhist parables of "life is bitter" and "less desire and no action", which also gives the whole work a mysterious religious color. Such Buddhist language of "six paths of reincarnation" has also become an organic part of the Chinese magical realism resources of the work which is similar to Gabriel García Márquez's treating of time and events in his 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Sudden shifts in narrative and the omnipresence of ghosts and premonitions provided the reader with the sense that events cycle through an endless loop. Contemporary novels of magic realism with such uses of language not only show the contradictions and problems in real life, but also guide the readers to think and solve these problems. Such novels remind readers that in the face of various problems in real life, readers need to be more alert and reflective, to pay attention to and solve these problems. At the same time, these fables also encourage readers not to give up hope and courage in the face of difficulties and challenges, and to believe in the power of themselves and others to create a better future. So it can be seen that The most characteristic feature of magical realism is the dispassionate narrative voice. Bizarre events are always described in an offhand manner. Characters do not question the surreal situations they find themselves in.

4.3 Discussion of Magical Realism in Yan Mo's Drama *Crocodile*

Ten years after winning the Nobel Prize for literature, Mo Yan promoted the blockbuster drama *Crocodile* through Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House in June 2023, which is a great response to his seven years of silence in literary creation after winning the Nobel Prize. Yan Mo himself had said, "I will concentrate more on quality instead of pursuing the quantity of work as much

as I did when I was younger. (Sun, 2019).” Yan Mo’s full-length drama *Crocodile* is a tragic fable full of modern connotations and psychological activities showing their true feelings about what they had done such as regret and selfishness. This transformation is not only a testament to the oath Yan Mo had made in front of the statue of Shakespeare’s former residence in 2019, but also his attempt to break the boundaries of the use of texts in various media. However, though this is a drama, there is much inheritance and differences from his novels in many respects.

4.3.1 Different Magical Realism

The magical characters in Yan Mo’s Novels are mainly depicted to fully reveal the living status and fates of those small and weak people living at the bottom of the society and display the author’s lofty thinking about life (Wang, 2019, p. 74). In the drama *Crocodile*, however, magic realism is no longer a striking style symbol, but is reduced to the stage background of dramatic stories together with the social environment. The magic component turns from people to a crocodile, including the vague hint of the crocodile’s being able to understand people’s speech and the plot of crocodile’s dialogue with the protagonist Wudan Shan at the end.

Wudan: *“are you crying? There are cloudy tears in your eyes which you usually shed when chewing food. Now you are not chewing food, why are you shedding tears?”*

The crocodile: *It is a pity! It is a pity! You are me and I am you. We are both the slaves of our desire.*

Wudan Shan: *My god! You crocodile can write limericks.*

The crocodile: *If I eat you, I eat myself.*

Wudan Shan: *If you eat me, we become one.*

The crocodile: *Please hear my solemn sentence: Wudan Shan, 65 years old, an fugitive corrupt official. He has done many evil deeds, but his conscience remains intact. A fugitive who loves his country. I like women, but I am abandoned by women. Full of ambition but accomplishing nothing. Indulging desires leads to the destruction of families. You end up with a crocodile in your life.* (Mo, 2023, p. 183)

So that kind of wild fantasy in novels is no longer a significant style of constructing the text. Starting from the isomorphism of the protagonist Wudan Shan and the crocodile, Mo Yan writes about the common desire for life of human nature, deconstructs the schema of daily life and constructs the allegorical meaning of the text with the characteristics of the post-perspective that has lost the power center, the humorous language with the color of debate, and the dramatic tension of tragedy and comedy. The drama *Crocodile* is focused on the life, mentality and choices of a corrupt official who fled to the United States, opening with the desolation of a corrupt official who has lost his position at the center of power: “When I’m not dreaming, everything is a dream; Only when I dream, is everything real (Mo, 2023, p. 11).”

This shift may have something to do with Yan Mo’s anxiety about the medium of novels. “Although Mo Yan admits that being dramatic is one of the original driving forces of fiction, he has to face the fact that the archetypes of stories are exhausted and can only be packaged through language and

structure (Yin, 2017, p. 101).” When Yan Mo’s archetypal experience of his hometown and folklore was exhausted, he turned his eyes to contemporary life and created the modern drama *Crocodile* by combining his 10-year life experiences at *Pro-curatorial Daily*. From the narrative of novel to drama, Yan Mo’s dramatic creation characteristics have undergone some changes, which are well embodied in the new drama *Crocodile* and are pretty worth our thinking and learning.

4.3.2 Different Regional Space

Most of Yan Mo’s novels take Gaomi Northeast Township as the background, forming the series of novels of “Gaomi Northeast Township”. His early novels construct the rural space with primitive and wild atmosphere and full of vitality. In the novel *Red Sorghum Family*, the geographic space of Northeast Gaomi Township is described more clearly for the first time.

The drama *Crocodile* focuses on the development and personnel changes in the new era, concentrating on people’s changes in the new era from various aspects and reflecting on the problems existing in the great changes in hometown under the background of modern civilization, the alienation of human nature and the shrinking of vitality. Obviously, Gaomi Northeast Township in the drama is already a “new space” filled with desire, money and fame.

In the ten years from the protagonist Wudan Shan’s 55th birthday to his 65th birthday in a luxurious villa in a wealthy area of a city on the West Coast of the United States, the situation at home and abroad has undergone great changes, accompanied by various people around him. The drama starts with the opening ceremony of Qingyun Bridge, turning to Wudan Shan’s plan to return home and surrender himself as a break, and then turning to the collapse of the bridge as the last straw to overwhelm the protagonist Wudan Shan; From the beginning of the protagonist Wudan Shan’s interest in the “young crocodile” and gradual appreciation of the “young crocodiles”, to the constant communication and in-depth dialogue with the “young crocodiles”, until his son Xiaotao committed suicide due to drug addiction, and finally chose to die in the belly of the “giant crocodile”. Obviously, the bridge collapse and his son’s suicide mirror each other, which completely negates his courage and reason for living. The creation of *Crocodile* not only presents the proposition that “structure is politics” that Yan Mo has always insisted on, but also shows the three-dimensional form of human nature of “desire” and its implicit subject relationship that Yan Mo has always discussed. At the same time, the ending of the drama that the protagonist Wudan Shan was eaten by his own crocodile implies that human beings are often destroyed by their own greed and that the infinite desire of human nature with the characteristics of crocodile growth, which is worth the deep thinking of all of us. Starting from the new era background and historical environment, Yan Mo chooses the current hot topic of desire and corruption in his new drama and shows the dark side of human nature such as moral depravity and excessive desire of people in the new era, and reconstructed a new literary geographical space on the old site of the hometown.

4.3.3 Life Consciousness of Compassion Flow

The writing of the drama *Crocodile* is not only an innovation in the text sense and geographical space, but also a huge impact and exploration of the theme and the fate of the characters. Yan Mo's new drama *Crocodile* is the inheritance and development of his novels of magical realism. Among them, the pursuit of desire and catharsis, the intoxication of power are familiar and similar. Yan Mo's depictions of anti-corruption and human greed never stop. In addition to hometown and hunger, desire is another theme of Yan Mo's works. From *Yue Er Ding in the Country of Wine* to the protagonist Wudan Shan in *Crocodile*, this change of perspective has watered down the conflicts of drama and focused on the reflection of human nature. The protagonist Wudan Shan's desire is based on one of his birthday present from Laohei: a juvenile Orinoco crocodile. Then, the network of lovers, politicians, businessmen and relatives around the protagonist Wudan Shan radiates lust, sustaining a final compliment to the protagonist Wudan. It is for this reason that the protagonist Wudan can no longer command and restrict others as before when he was a mayor. Facing the kinds of contradictions, he can only do as the crocodile flipping around in the cabinet, having no other better methods. However, the perception of the happiness and life formed after he escaped to America is enlightening and thought-provoking. And this Buddha-nature is mainly reflected in his suffering, reincarnation and disillusionment.

5. Conclusion

Yan Mo is influenced by foreign literature, magic realism, symbolism and so on, which he perfectly used to create characters full of unique personal characteristics and local Chinese feelings." (Shengli, 2021, p. 1) " Studying Yan Mo's works helps to deepen our understanding of his personal creative process, the influence of his literary creation from the different stages and the way of his works becomes a mirror of the era, thus enriching the study of contemporary Chinese literature. The drama *Crocodile* shows Yan Mo's in-depth thinking about corruption, power and his reflection on human desire. The tragedy of the protagonist Wudan Shan's being swallowed by his own desires is not just a story in a play, but a warning to the live people in daily life. How to control their inner material desire is also worth pondering over. Only when the noble desire overpowers the instinctive material desire and avoids the occurrence of irreversibility, can we have a harmonious society or world.

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