

# Exploration of *Frog* and *Light in August* in the View of Modernity and Post-Modernity

Zhengying Wu

English Department, Anhui Sanlian College, Hefei, Anhui, China  
642918756@qq.com

Keywords: Modernity and Post-Modernity, Yan Mo, Faulkner, *Frog*, *Light in August*.

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to illustrate in comparative literature that Modernity and Post-modernity were united, and this unified theory manifested people's ideological attitude and behavior mode. This paper explored *Frog* and *Light in August* in the view of unified theory "modernity and post-modernity". By horizontal comparing the interweaving of modernity and post-modernity in these two masterpieces, it disclosed synthesized historical forces, writer's subject consciousness and cultural mentality behind language. The study shows us Modernity and Post-modernity cannot be separated completely.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Theory of modernity and post-modernity is an important node of knowledge web, and also the significant viewpoint with which we observe and understand our time we live in. Some scholars are in favor of "dissevering relationship" between them, believing "modernity is the situation of unfinished modernization, and post-modernity corresponds to finishing modernization" (Fengzhen Wang, 2003), that is to say, modernity and post-modernity are two separately phases appeared in turn during the capitalism development. Other scholars, while, proclaim the "inheritance" between them. They have essential relationship that post-modernity is bred in modernity itself from the beginning, and absorbing the "nutrition" from modernity, and post-modernity is going on continually deducing and surpassing. Some of them make it unequivocally clear that it still belongs to modernity scope nowadays, convincing modernity is an "unfinishing project" (Habermas, 2004).

We approve of "inheritance" between them. The essential feature of Modernity is human beings' absolute conquering nature, i.e., subjects conquer objects. Its basic concept derives from rational Enlightenment spirit. Different from sensibility and will, rationality is an ability, manifesting itself very often as thinking, introspection, logic judgment and reasoning ability. We can say, the primary spirit of

rationality is introspection, critique and doubt. Habermas consider modernity's formation as the course of "self-understanding and self-confirmation". This course, which began from Enlightenment period, shapes its modern reasonable pattern in the way of rationalism. Giddens utilizes self-reflection to define this course, pointing out that self-reflection is the fundamental risk of modernity. People construct future society and culture according to their own understanding and designing of modernity and this construction itself is full of uncertainty.

In the following parts, we analyze Yan Mo's *Frog* and Faulkner's *Light in August* with the above clarified theory, grasp more macroscopically and vividly these two masterpieces' literary and cultural characterization, outline the multiple historical united forces behind the context, and discriminate inner motivation hidden behind the phenomenon and explore writers' values and cultural psychology.

## 2 INTERPRETING *FROG* WITH MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY

Yan Mo is the only literary Nobel prize owner in China up to now. In one of his representative works *Frog*, Yan Mo thinks about rationally and

objectively Chinese family planning policy. On one hand, he wants to convey government rational politics through context, just as he says “delivering children in new way indicates scientific modernity as well as the beginning of national will to control traditional concept of birth. Henceforth, breeding, an individual act of nature, is one part of the process of national modernization”(Hui Li, 2015); and on the other hand, he discloses people’s helpless thinking and endless struggle, expressing objectively his question to humanity behind national policy and his rethinking and doubting in this resolution. We must realize that in China with large population family planning policy plays an important role during the whole process of modernization from early poor founding period to prosperous present. The formation of Chinese modernity is also a course of “self-understanding and self-confirmation”. This course is shaped in form of rationalism such as population policy, and this designing and construction itself is full of uncertainty, doubting, critique and self-reflection.

*Frog* is a typical reflective work. In harvest time, aunt Xin Wan saved lots of pregnant women and babies with scientific method, and became “a talented near-mythic obstetrician” (Yan Mo, 2012). She believed in science and advocated equality of men and women. In delieving, “she experienced pure human beings’ happiness”(Yan Mo, 2012). At the end of 1965, the first climax of family planning policy began. Aunt, a firm executor of this policy with strong Party spirit, set off a vigorous “male ligation” campaign with staff of Family Planning Office, and in the campaign they pulled down houses of relatives or neighbors to capture illegal pregnant women. She fervently believed in that “the birth rate must be reduced at all costs, and this was also a great contribution of China to the whole world.”(Yan Mo, 2012). In stark contrast, Aunt was almost in collapse when she was more than 70 years old at the end of 90s. She held that the shout of frogs in the evening was the cry of thousands of newborn babies, and therefore, she consecrated 2,800 clay children made by her husband to reappear babies she had aborted before, kneeling, praying and attempting to use this way to make up for her heart guilt. “I” in the novel was always in the course of self-understanding, self-confirming and self-reflection. For example, sympathy and respect towards Gan Wang showed “my” praise of human beings’ pure love. When “I” was facing hundreds of babies’ pictures, “I” felt the most solemn feeling in the world —— love of life. Along with

the pursuit of love was reflection and complete loss: “I felt I was a rotten wood floating on the surface of water, and went straight ahead only when someone gave me a push.”(Yan Mo, 2012), and “it’s not a social problem, but a problem of myself”(Yan Mo, 2012).

In northeast of Gaomi, “frog” symbolizes strong vitality and reproductive capacity. Some heroes in this novel such as Dan Wang, Renmei Wang and “Little lion”, just like frogs, were eager for life breeding, showing their worship and praise of life. This is also a strong embodiment of human-oriented idea. Meanwhile, *Frog* presented the ugly aspects of society and corrupted soul of people destroyed by money. In the latter part of the novel, the big bullfrog statue at the gate of Bullfrog Farm and the Farm’s substantive activities——Surrogate Center unfolded money’s corrosion on human nature, intellectuals’ confusion in modern society and the distortion of people’s birth concept. All these presented strong ridicule and irony in postmodern literature.

### 3 INTERPRETING *LIGHT IN AUGUST WITH MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY*

Faulkner, also a Nobel prize owner, has great influence on Yan Mo. Most of his masterpieces advocate tolerance, rationality, sympathy and understanding, and meanwhile show modern people’s alienation, loneliness and nothingness which just are distinct manifestation of modernity and post-modernity. There are two main clues in *Light in August*——one is story of Lena Grove, and the other is story of Jo Kristmas. Lena’s story and Jo’s story are interwoven, the former at the beginning and the end of the novel and the latter throughout the middle of the whole novel.

Lena was a woman of firmness and stubbornness, and she often walked slowly, leisurely with big belly and unruffled calm to look for her “husband”, believing “It must not be difficult to find baby’s father”(Faulkner, 2015). On the way she was well treated by passers-by. Superficially Byron thought human beings were nothing, and “I, she and all other folks involved in were all only words without any meanings”(Faulkner, 2015). However, he was always pursuing helpness and happiness he could give others, which just proved the meaning of human beings’ existence. It’s easy to find the repetition rate of the words

“calm/sober/quiet/still” was so high, and throughout the whole story, except for Jo Kristmas, there are full of rational and reasonable figures, such as yellow haired woman, the former waitress, Byron, Lena, Hightower, Miss Burton, and foster parents, etc..

Jo Kristmas was lonely very much, because he belonged to neither the white nor the black, only drifting between two races. He rejected the blacks instinctively and yearned for whites' leisure life, just as it said in the novel “he tried to breathe in blacks' smell, deep and inscrutable thought and temperament, and then breathe out intentionally whites' blood, thought and temperament”(Faulkner, 2015). But unfortunately from his dark childhood, he was branded as “black - white bastard”, and even Brown who should have been his friend so misunderstood and disregarded him. The changing trajectory of his short life was as follows: ignorant—confused and uneasy — — resentful, angry, indifferent, despaired, irritable, hostile and resisted — — going astray and falling into the abyss step by step. His road of life was just like the cold insensible street, and “his experience and feeling in each phase were all nothing”(Faulkner, 2015). Being lonely for long time let him torture himself, treat the “passion” of love between Miss Burton and him with indifference, and take cold revenge on everyone who loved, cared for and depended on him. On him we cannot find rationality, but the intense emotion, catharsis beyond reason and self doubt and negation.

In a word, on one hand, the author transmitted completely opposite information: Lena was active, optimistic, calm, strong, self-confident, and people around her were also kind and helpful, but Kristmas was contrarily unrested, puzzled, doubtful, negative and the world around him was full of indifferent people; on the other hand, we can find reasonable and high-spirited modernity and negative and vacant post-modernity simultaneously existed in main body of the novel, Kristmas's story, presenting characters of both sides vividly through variety of figures.

#### 4 COPYRIGHT FORM

Zhengying Wu, August 25,2016

## 5 CONCLUSION

Here we compare Yan Mo's *Frog* and Faulner's *Light in August* without noting which one is better, but intending to stress the common characters of the times and spirit. In the horizontal comparison of masterpieces written by two writers in different time and countries but with similar materials, it's not difficult for us to see the pursuit of rationality and equality in the modern order and clearer modernity itself's reflection and doubt towards the above spirits. As for the relationship of the three aspects of humanistic discourse “language, world and awareness”, Spewack emphasized that we perceived the world and awareness via language, that is to say, we analyze how were the world and awareness presented through words. Factually, exploring the externality of modernity and post-modernity in this crisscrossing three-dimension humanistic world, we can find writers' questioning the meaning of life and the foundation of existence, touch social production, awareness and alienation, and arouse further thinking about freedom, active subjectivity, and unity and difference among subjects.

This paper is the result of the project research.

Name of the projects:

Comprehensive Reform of English Major (2013zy086); A Comparative Study of Mo Yan and Faulkner's Works from the Perspective of Modern and Post modernity (sk2014a245); Discussion on the Path of Constructing the System of Literary Words with Chinese characteristics in the Comparison of Literature — — Mo Yan and Faulkner's Classical Works as Examples

## REFERENCES

- Faulkner, 2015. *Light in August*, Yilin Translation Publishing House. Beijing, 1<sup>st</sup> edition.
- Fengzhen Wang, 2003. *Cultural Studies Interviewl*, China Social Sciences Press. Beijing, 1st edition.
- Habermas, 2004. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Yilin Translation Publishing House. Beijing, 1<sup>st</sup> edition.
- Hui Li, 2015. Guilt and Redemption in Yan Mo's Works. *Journal of Zibo Normal College*.
- Yan Mo, 2012. *Frog*, Writers Publishing House. Beijing, 1<sup>st</sup> edition.