

## Symptomatic Analysis of the Gender Relationship in Qiao Ye's Novels

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**Abstract:** From a semiotic point of view, Symptomatic criticism refers to the analysis of the works to seek for the differences between the author's intention, textual meaning and explanatory meaning, and to analyze the paradoxes, divergences, breaks and errors caused in the texts, so as to reinterpret the new meaning of the works. Using symptomatic analysis, we found that the intention meaning and practical meaning of Qiao Ye's novels are contradictory, and the gender relationship is not as she said in an interview "I think it's not easy for men too, so I understand gender issues better", or as some commentators think "The gender relationship is harmonious in the collision", but ambiguous, nervous, or even confrontational. More importantly, as to the gender relationship, Qiao Ye's creation fell into the trap of feminism. She abandoned the binary opposition in characterization. The character image is unipolar, both female and male characters are demonized.

### 1. Introduction

Qiao Ye's novels are famous for portraying female images, in her works, whether it is a countryside woman, such as the Grandmother in *The Slowest Is Alive*, Chaizhi and Chaihe in *The Nail Blossom*, or the marginal women who struggle in the urban and rural fringe, such as Ye Xiaoling in *Ye Xiao-ling's Medical History* and Jin Jin in *The Confession Book*, or the senior white-collar workers wandering in the city to find themselves, such as You You in *The Aphasia* and Liu Pa in *I Admit I Am Most Afraid of Dark*, they all are strong, independent, intelligent and resilient. On the other hand, among the few male characters in Qiao Ye's works, the hero is either the rapist, the whoremaster, or the keeper of the mistress, such as "He" in *Warming*, Dou Xincheng in *The Negative*, the husband named Hua in *The Good Night*; or a swindler or a liar who plays with women's love, such as Chen Ge in *He Must Love You Very Much*, Lao Cheng in *The Marriage Mutual Aid Group*; or a honest, stiff man who doesn't understand amorous feelings, like "He" in *Golden Hour*, the husband in *Stretch Marks*; Or a bureaucrat who is playful or ignorant, such as Director Hu in *Lighter* and Chen Que in *The Aphasia*, which are almost vague and flat in Qiao Ye's novels. This paper attempts to explore the gender relationship in Qiao Ye's novels by means of symptomatic analysis.

### 2. Symptomatic analysis

There are two landmark figures in Symptomatic Theory, one is Freud, who first proposed the term symptom in the clinical treatment of mental patients. He thinks that the symptom is a sign of the subconscious that the patient shows, "it is a substitute for not being satisfied." [1]. Only when we go deep into the patient's consciousness, dig out the cause of the disease, understand the true meaning of the symptoms, and carry out psychological intervention and counseling, the symptoms will be eliminated and the patient's disease will be cured. Freud applied this method to analyze the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex*, which was the tragedy of ancient Greece. He found that the story of Oedipus killing his father and marrying his mother fits a common pattern of unconscious psychological structure, which is the boy's attachment to his mother and rejection of his father. The other is Althusser, who applies symptomatic reading to theoretical text analysis in *Reading Das Kapital*. Althusser pointed out that when reading Marx's classic works, we should not only see the seen things in the original works, but also read out the hidden things hidden between the lines.

Althusser thinks that symptomatic reading is to "use special means to distinguish the two parts contained in the object, namely, the essential and the non essential" [2], and excavate the content hidden in the depth of unconsciousness from silence, blank and defects.

Lan Dizhi is the first one to apply symptomatic analysis to text analysis in China. When he interprets modern classical works, he finds that there are gaps, paradoxes and breaks in some works. He suggests "The analysis of literary works can be carried out on several levels. What the writer says is one thing, and what he wants to say is another thing. What the works actually means, what it symbolizes or implies, is another level, and so is the lack of a clear sense of what the writer is trying to say and what he has said [3]. Therefore, when studying a writer's works, we can explore the writer's explicit consciousness and subconscious through analyzing the different levels of literary works, find out the blank, silence, paradox, ambiguity, abnormality and crack in the text, and then explain the profound and complex connotation of the work.

Due to the interference of the writer's subconscious, the writer's intention meaning and the actual meaning become quite different, which makes the text appear a great gap, crack and paradox, hence provides the possibility for the interpretation of the text. Meanwhile, the text carries a lot of information, including a large number of surface accompanying text and deep accompanying text. "Symptomatic Reading proposed by Althusser, aiming to explore the deep text. Althusser thinks that behind the clear discourse of the text, there is the silent discourse of ideology. Reading can be done on the text level according to the meaning of the text, but it is more important to pay attention to the blank, silence, error and distortion of the text, to see the ideological truth behind these cracks and find out the meaning level that the text cannot reach [4]. Therefore, we think that symptomatic criticism is to analyze the differences between the intention meaning, text meaning and interpretation meaning of the writer when analyzing the works of the writer, and to explore the paradox, difference, crack and errors caused by this in the text, and then reinterpret the new meaning of the work.

### 3. The gender relationship in Qiao Ye's novels

According to the symptomatic theory, we try to analyze the gender relationship in Qiao ye's novels, and to study whether the intention meaning and the actual meaning, the intention meaning and the text meaning of Qiaoye's novels are consistent in the three stages of creation, reading and criticism? Will the meaning of interpretation come to a paradoxical conclusion?

Qiao Ye was originally an essayist before she wrote novels, and a number of essay collections had been published, including *The Lonely Paper Lantern*, *Dancing Against the Dust*, *Love Negatives*, *Dances of Thin Ice* and *Between Like and Love*. Many people are puzzled by the great transformation of Qiaoye. Qiao Ye explained the intention of rewriting the novel many times in different occasions. She said, "If my prose is fresh fish, how could I, as a cook, not know what else is in the kitchen: broken scales, bright red guts, ambiguous and sticky smells, sharp and messy bones and thorns and so on. These are the ingredients of a rich novel, long hidden in my heart." [5]. We may as well understand this passage in this way: Qiao Ye used fresh fish as material in his prose writing, and used the garbage left after killing fish in his novels. Qiao Ye further explained that her intention in writing was "Through the novel to know oneself more clearly, to know others, to know darkness and also to know light, and to know the vast zone between oneself and others, between darkness and light" [6]. These two statements are consistent with Qiao Ye's intention in writing her novels, that is, to sing in praise of "light" through people and things similar to garbage, and to expose "darkness" and "vast areas between darkness and light". According to the theory of symptomatic criticism, we study Qiao Ye's novels, not to see what she said, but to explore the deep things hidden in her novels through the appearance of Qiao Ye's words.

We take Qiao Ye's *The Extension of An Afternoon* as an example to study whether her writing intention is consistent with her actual intention, and what is the text intention of her novel? This novel is the first work of Qiao Ye's novel, written on an afternoon in the summer of 1997. With the strong mark of Qiao Ye's prose, this novel wrote that "I" met the office director on the first day when I went to work in the publicity department, "We" had a friendly and secret conversation in an afternoon

because of our work relationship, this "hazy" relationship was extended for a long time because he was married, and extended to my work, study and life. The novel is implicit and restrained, and the relationship between them is also "from affection to courtesy". It is reasonable to say, since Qiao Ye has made great efforts to write a novel out of the garbage left by fish making in the kitchen, she should practice her writing intention in her novel and treat this ambiguous relationship as garbage. But Qiao Ye did not criticize this kind of ambiguous relationship, contrarily she seems to be very infatuated with this kind of ambiguous relationship between men and women, which is contrary to her writing intention. Many of Qiao Ye's novels are filled with this kind of ambiguity, such as *Warming*, in which there is ambiguity between a rapist and a woman who has been raped. This is one of Qiao Ye's few novels with men as the hero, in which Qiao Ye well describes men's sexual psychology. A man college student who has been suffering from desire for many years, constantly ponders the behavior of the female boss and mistakenly regards the sincere hospitality of the female boss as the temptation of pornography. Qiao Ye quietly mobilized all means to create an ambiguous atmosphere by using people's pornographic eyes.

If this ambiguity is Qiao Ye's trying to be mysterious, then in the *Stretch Marks*, it can not only be summed up with ambiguity that A couple of passionate married men and women repeatedly flirt. Try to see:

Cruel sister, I'm sick, why do not you greet me?

What disease? Did you see the doctor?

Lovesickness aroused by you.

Then continue to be sick.

Waiting for you to take the medicine.

No, no.

.....

I'd like to ask you the way.

You're here?

Yeah.

Where?

Outside your heart. Tell me, how can I get to your heart?

.....[7]

Qiao Ye described the flirting process of the married man and woman very meticulously, and she seemed to be intoxicated with it, such as:

It was the first time they had sex, and the only time. She had been dripping with rain all over her body: eyes, face, neck, breast, armpits, lower body..... In the wet rain, the cells all over her body were shouted with their mouths open and her hands stretched out. Finally, she felt like she was starting to float up. She floated and floated and on. If it hadn't been for the phone line, she would have flown [7].

From a literary point of view, Qiao Ye's writing of the matter between men and women is beautiful and readable, and his skill in writing is definitely commendable. But excluding the literary nature, this is no longer ideologically ambiguous, but a naked erotic temptation. In the novel, "She" not only commits mental infidelity, but also breaks through the barriers physically. It was just in the crucial moment, the heroine had a mental breakdown and ended this terrible behavior because she was worried that the stretch marks on her belly would make him resent her. The end of the novel is melancholy. The man Su "took out the card and cut off the power" and left sadly, while the woman "she" looked in a dull mirror alone, "She knew she was crazy". Was she crazy just because of the termination of the physical infidelity, or because of the entire infidelity? The novel has symptoms here. Let's judge Qiao Ye's writing intention. She supports this kind of infidelity and criticizes the suppression of women by the patriarchal thought and the incomplete liberation of the heroine's mind? Or does she want to expose this invisible "dark" behavior? Qiao Ye's attitude is very ambiguous, even a little regrettable. This is obviously misleading to readers and is suspected of encouraging women to cheat on their partners.

In order to liberate women from the barriers of husband power, some women writers vigorously

advocate women's rights and sexual liberation. Sexual proliferation has become an important phenomenon in the texts of some women writers. Women's liberation slogans have been put forward for more than one hundred years, and women's social status in China has been significantly improved. If women's red apricots or men's cheating are used as a writing strategy, wouldn't it be out of fashion and set off new men and women confrontation? In addition, infidelity, regardless of men and women, regardless of ancient and modern Chinese and foreign, will be criticized. Even if the infidelity is for love, even if the writer writes it so heartily, even if such a work becomes a classic, the infidelity itself will be nailed to the pillar of moral shame. On the other hand, in Qiao Ye's novels, men go whoring and raise a mistress, while women work as prostitutes and cheat on their partners, which have become the main themes. In *That's the Love Letter I Wrote*, Maizi committed mental infidelity with Wei, Yu Zhen in *Lighter* committed infidelity with Director Hu, and You You committed infidelity with Cheng Yi in *The Aphasia*, and even in *The Slowest Is Alive* Grandma cheated on Mao Cadre in order to survive. ...The key is that these women dislike the poor and love the rich and abandon love, On the other hand, after their marriage, they feel that their husbands are uninteresting and do not care about them, and they have no common language; They naturally enjoy the material comforts that men provide for them, at the same time had affair with other men behind his husband's back, such as You You in *The Aphasia* and She in *Stretch Marks*. Then why do women in Qiao Ye's novels cheat? Is it because the gender relationship is tense and women do not trust the men in marriage? Or it's a question of Qiao Ye's values? which is a question of inquiry.

Cheating and betrayal are commonplace in Qiao Ye's novels, and killing men is the ultimate goal of women. Such as *Golden Time*, she and he were full of sweetness at the beginning of their wedding, but soon the woman got bored, indulged in her own little world and couldn't extricate herself, complained and felt that men were mediocre, didn't care about her, and never bought her flowers, didn't pay attention to her period, didn't kiss her neck and collarbone. She even transferred the deposit beforehand, planning to divorce the man. When the man disagrees with the divorce, the woman performed a beautiful family of three in front of people, but committed domestic violence against him: do not do housework, ignore men, not allow men to enter the bedroom, and also sleep with another boy. When a man gets old and accidentally falls down, a woman can obviously extend a rescue hand, but she deliberately delays the golden rescue time and indirectly kills the man. In a whole novel, Qiao Ye whispered, objective and neutral, and we can't judge her preferences. But the heroine's tendency in her works is clear. When her husband, who has lived with her for eighteen years, is in danger, the woman not only sits on the sidelines, but also gloats for misfortune. The writer did not make any condemnation of this, but relished the subtle psychological portrayal of women. If the attitude of the heroine is the attitude of the writer, it is a bit arbitrary, but at least it can be seen that the writer himself is silent about this incident. In fact, silence is also an attitude.

There are serious misunderstandings in Qiao Ye's novels, which can easily make people suspicious of women, and make the gender relationship that have been eased become tense again. Qiao Ye was also aware of the seriousness of the problem, and for this she defended, "I have always tried my best to 'de-moral'. I tried my best to ignore the moral principles that we all adhere to by convention. Just as Herman Blow said, novelists only need to follow the morals of the novel. I think this is a golden rule." [5]. This seems very reasonable. The task of the writer is to "expose the illness and attract the attention to the treatment", not to battle personally and give prescriptions to cure illnesses and save people. But "de-moral" does not mean that there will be no morality. These things that belong to "broken scales, bright red internal organs, and ambiguous fishy smell" are obviously the "darkness" that Qiao Ye said, or "between darkness and light." In Qiao Ye's novels, the writer repeatedly defends women's infidelity, betrayal, and indirect murder from the perspective of women. It can be said that many times Qiao Ye's novels she walks in "the vast area between darkness and light." Qiao Ye strongly argued that "women's problems are also common to men." [6]. No matter how Qiao Ye explains, Qiao Ye's creative intentions and actual intentions are contradictory, and her intentions and textual meanings are split. When we interpreted Qiao Ye's gender relationship, we found that it was not at all like what she said in an interview, "I think it is not easy for men, so I understand gender issues" [8], much less like some commentators think "The gender relationship is harmonious in the

collision" [9], but it is ambiguous, tense, and even opposite.

#### 4. The characters fall into the trap of the feminist literature

Feminist criticized, "in the male texts, there are two forms of female image: angels and temptresses. Angels are the embodiment of men's aesthetic ideals, while temptresses express their misogyny psychology [10]. When female writers "emerging from the surface of history", they still follow the stereotypical words of men, also portray women as "angels" and "temptresses", and men as heroes and scoundrels [11]. which is in a trend of polarization. Qiao Ye denies that she is a feminist writer. And she thought "no matter men and women, he is human first. So I don't emphasize men or women, but to emphasize human nature, which is the first" [5]. Throughout all the texts of Qiao Ye's novels, we find that Qiao Ye's writing intention is seriously out of touch with the meaning of the text, and she has stepped into the trap of feminist literature: the women in her works seem independent, tough and intelligent on the surface, but they have the tendency of "temptresses" in their bones; The male images in her works are vague and flat, dull and boring, eating, drinking whoring and gambling, irresponsible and tend to be demonized.

##### 4.1 Women demonization

Qiao Ye "hate to say that men are very playful, aren't women? When a woman meets the opportunity, she may also be very playful" [5]. Qiao Ye obviously has a sense of fighting against it. She thinks that "compared with married men, married women have more reasons for deviance" [12]. At the same time, she quibbled, "the married men are not satisfied with familiar bodies, and the married women are not satisfied with diluted love, so there is a fundamental difference between them: the most important thing for married men is to experience the body different from their wife, while the married women are mostly for love, The most important thing is love, in order to hear the voice of love-expressing again." [12]. This sounds grand, and it also provides a good excuse for women to commit infidelity. Men are living creatures who are Just for the physical happiness, while women are cheating for seeking love. Does she realize her intention in her novels? Let's first look at Her in *Stretch Marks*, she just read two crooked poems, with the ease and comfort life, some strange ideas came to her mind, so she even wanted to hold the handsome brother working in the credit department and stick her face on his back neck to smell his sweat. The reason why she didn't do it may be because of the scrupulous social public opinion. Finally, she got to know Su in a strange dinner. She took the step of cheating when the conditions were mature.

Another example is Liu Pa in *I Admit That I Am Most Afraid Of Dark*, because her husband Xiao Luo had gone whoring and betrayed herself, she resolutely divorced, lived an outside rental life. When night falls, Liu Pa's night is ambiguous, she is lonely and sleepless, and invites the man she likes to spend the night together at the fingertips. She refused his one night stand because of Zhang Jianhong's clever calculation; She refused to remarry Xiao Luo because he was unfaithful to love; But she gave her body again and again to a migrant worker who went into the room and robbed her. Even under the violence of him, she enjoyed the happiness that she had never had as a woman. What is more shameful is, facing police interrogation, Liu Pa also actively finds excuses for the burglars and rapists, saying she is voluntary. Qiao Ye originally wanted to write a story about a woman who was pursuing true love in the commercialized society, but instead created a woman who acts a little casually, doesn't understand love, and indulges herself in sexual fantasies. Liu Pa was muddled moved, and she gave her first time as a girl to an unknown art student; She married Xiao Luo not for love, but because she was of marriageable age; She had so-called primitive passion of love with the burglar, but also declared bankruptcy for migrant worker's cowardice. It can be seen that Liu Pa's so-called love is completely untenable. This is a serious contradiction with Qiao Ye's declared intention meaning, but also let the reader have a terrible misreading: the women portrayed by Qiaoye not only did not pursue love, but also were willful and dissolute under the so-called cover of love; They openly blame men, calling men irresponsible and full of shit, but in the bottom of their hearts they desire to be raped.

If Liu Pa's debauchery is a little excessive, then Jinjin in *The Confession Book* can be said to ignore

morality and is almost shameless. In order to stay in the small county town, she seduced her classmates with her body who didn't love at all, and then she abandoned him after reaching her goal. Later she can not survive in the small town, then wandered in the provincial capital, between different men, and changed men like changing clothes. She had no feelings for Liang Zhi, but she still flirted with him meticulously; although she knew Liang Zhi had a wife and daughter, she took the initiative to throw herself into his arms; she said that she did not want Liang Zhi to be responsible, however, when Liang Zhi left her, she married Liang Zhi's brother Liang Xin in order to revenge Liang Zhi for ignoring ethics and morality. Her desperate revenge led to losing several lives.

This is the female in qiaoye's writing, which has a serious tendency of "demonization". According to the author's preliminary statistics, almost every novel of Qiao Ye involves infidelity, betrayal, "the other man/woman" and sex and other sex topics. In Qiao Ye's novels, women commit infidelity or act as the other woman, not for love, as Qiao Ye said. Objectively speaking, in all of Qiao Ye's novels, apart from *The Story of Hiding Jewels*, there is no love between men and women at all. Some of them may be the mutual need between man and woman.

#### 4.2 Demonizing men

There are few novels about Qiao Ye who take men as their protagonists. The famous one are Li Zhongmin in *Rusty Hoe*, The man in *Warming* and Chen Ge in *He Must Love You*, and so on. When Qiao Ye portrays the male image, she starts from the female perspective. Most of her male images are unbearable, horny and whoring, or emotional swindlers, such as Li Zhongmin, who is a successful person, who has strived to become a food manufacturer from an educated youth, is weak at heart and strong at the outside, but can't satisfy his lover's "desire" and let his lover amuse herself with molds; In the society, he looks very well, but is very weak while facing the burglar Shi Er Bao. He sells horse meat as beefsteak: he hung a rust hoe on the red wall of the living room to commemorate that period of educated youth and remind himself not to forget his root. In fact, he hated the countryside and had long forgotten everything in the countryside; When Shi Erbao exposed his secret, Li Zhongmin became angry. He wisely took advantage of Shi Erbao's relaxation of vigilance and killed the farmer Shi Erbao with the hoe that used to hoe the land. The death of Shi Erbao completely declared Li Zhongmin's treachery. It is worth noting that Qiao Ye gave Li Zhongmin a very ironic Name: "Zhongmin", which means loyal to the farmers. In *Warming*, He is full of sexual fantasies and rapes a drunken woman. After being released from the prison, he should have changed his mind to be a new man, but he was hard to change his temperament and mistook the kind boss's wife for that kind of woman.

Almost all other men in Qiao Ye's novels are nearly supporting characters, and they are some typed symbols. For example, Dou Xincheng in *The Negative* is a symbol of clients; Chen Ge in *He Must Love You* is a symbol of swindlers; "He" in *Golden Hour* is a male symbol that is honest and rigid, and does not understand the customs; the husband surnamed Hua in *The Good Night* is a philandering male symbol; Director Hoo in *Lighter* is the symbol of playful bureaucrats. The only exception is Wei in *That Is a Love Letter I Wrote*, whom Qiao Ye writes as a male god. But we discover that Wei is an outwardly dashing gentleman who is actually a bureaucrat using nepotism to climb the ladder. He did not love the plain, neurotic Mei, but he married her for the sake of his future. For this he dressed himself as a martyr, and argued to Maizi that Mei cut her wrists to kill herself when he asked to break up. He knew that Maizi loved him, but he never made it clear, carefully maintained a soul relationship with Maizi. Knowing that his wife Mei was mentally ill and unable to take care of himself, he left her at home alone, resulting that she was killed by a burglar. If it is reluctant to say that Wei killed Mei, Wei has to bear a certain responsibility for Mei's going crazy. Qiao Ye unconsciously wrote Mei as the crazy woman in the pavilion in *Jane Eyre*, which made us see Wei's real face. Because the whole novel is totally from the perspective of Maizi, as the saying goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, many details that damage Wei's image were filtered out, Wei has become one of the few positive images in Qiao Ye's novels, but in fact, Wei is a respectable hypocrite.

Qiao Ye is more paranoid in shaping the image of characters, and she is more extreme than the common feminists. She abandoned their binary opposition in characterization, only taking single

level, so both female and male characters are demonized. This is a writing strategy, but Qiao Ye unconsciously slips into the trap of feminist literature, which leads to further tensions between men and women.

## 5. Summary

To sum up, we use the symptomatic analysis method to find that there are many symptoms in Qiao Ye's novel creation, her intention meaning and practical meaning are contradictory, and her novel text has multiple meanings. Therefore, through the interpretation of Qiao Ye's creation talks and novel texts, we think that in Qiao Ye's novels, the gender relationship is ambiguous and tense. Qiao Ye falls into the trap of feminist literature when he portrays the characters. The characters are unipolar, both female and male characters are demonized.

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