Tragedy behind Daisy Miller’s Death: From the Perspective of Archetypal Criticism

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Abstract: The conflicts happened among those American expatriates in Europe is the main plot in Daisy Miller and also the main reason for Daisy’s death. The archetypal analysis on the conflicts shows that those American expatriates, who are constantly in the paradoxical and conflicting mental state between home culture and European culture, are much more eager to assert their identity, and thus Daisy, who behaves inconsistently with the European standard, becomes inevitably their target. Persona works a lot in those American expatriates and either too much use of it or Daisy’s too little use of it mainly account for the tragic ending of the novella.

Key Words: conflict; Archetypal Analysis; persona

Daisy Miller, one of Henry James’ popular novellas, has attracted many critics to interpret it from different angles of view since it was published. Some critics analyze it from the perspective of feminist criticism, some from the perspective of Henry James’ “international theme”, while some critics analyze the cultural conflict or the narrative techniques in it. This thesis will use the archetypal criticism to interpret it, focusing mainly on the question why insult and criticism on Daisy’s behaviour mostly come from American expatriates instead of those locals in Europe and what lies behind Daisy’s tragedy?

Based on his theory about the collective unconscious, Jung puts up with his idea of archetypes. According to Jung, the collective unconscious is “a part of psyche” (Jung 42) and it is

a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existing forms, the archetypes. (Jung 43)

Persona is one of the archetypes, which refers to as “the mask of the actor” (Jung 20). This means that people tend to cover their faces with the persona so as to show to the world the aspect they think good or suitable.

In Daisy Miller, those Americans who dwell in Europe have actually abandoned their home culture. Coming from America, but adhering strictly to the European culture, they have forced themselves to take on the persona in order to live in Europe. Mrs. Costello, Winterbourne’s aunt, is a widower with a fortune and who has lived in Europe for a long time. Though an American herself, she has adopted the stereotype of Europeans with high status in society, which has a strong sense of hierarchy. In judging Daisy’s intimate and friendly relations with the courier, she criticizes Daisy’s improper behaviour. “[D] beit treat the carrier like a familiar friend—like a gentleman. I shouldn’t wonder if he dines with them... He sits with them in the garden, in the evening” (James 528). According to her, a courier belongs to the low-class people, which indicates her arrogant attitude as a high-class member. On hearing that Winterbourne will accompany Daisy to the Chateau de Chillon, she cried “what a dreadful girl” (James 52), because according to the European tradition again, an unmarried girl must not go outside alone with a man, which Daisy undoubtedly has violated. Even Winterbourne, who seems to be an open-minded young people at first, also has a strong sense of hierarchy and a tendency to look down upon people who is socially lower than him. The first time he sees Giovanni, for instance, he asserts that “[h] e is not a gentleman... He is only a clever imitation of one” (James 542).

Therefore, people like Mrs. Costello or Winterbourne represents those who have adopted the European culture so as to survive in an entirely different environment from the previous one, namely the American culture.

But there is one question to be solved about the conflicts in this novella. That is those American expatriates can live their life according to their will, but is it necessary for them to be so harsh on Daisy’s behaviour while, after all, they come from the same culture with Daisy? In fact, this point is exactly where Jung’s archetypal analysis works. The American culture differs immensely with the European culture. The Americans advocate equality, democracy and freedom while the Europeans adhere strictly to the rules and hierarchy and have a harsh requirement on social etiquette. The great distinction, or even conflict between the two culture places the American expatriates in a difficult situation. They have to put aside the native culture to accept an entirely different one and behave accordingly to make themselves acceptable by the culture. But the complete abandonment of the native culture is impossible, since the culture has been existed in a form of, to some extent, various kinds of archetypes and “the concept of the archetyp, ... indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere” (Jung 42). Therefore, on one hand, the native American culture implants itself deep-rooted in their heads as the collective unconscious; on the other hand, the European culture plays its role as one that they have to accept or stick to. The result is that those American expatriates themselves are in a paradoxical and conflicting mental state. Therefore, they are in desperate need of an identification and affirmation from others, especially from those native Europeans, and from themselves. Then, the coming of Daisy and her improper actions in Europe provide them with such a chance. Their severe reprimand on Daisy’s irregular manner actually highlights their own need and hope to seek to identify themselves with the European culture. Mrs. Walker, for instance, is an American lady who has spent several years in Geneva. When she knows Daisy wants to walk outside alone with Mr. Giovanni, she immediately persuade her not going. Though Daisy doesn’t listen to her, she later tries for the second time to persuade her going back with her, trying to save her reputation. She says to Winterbourne that “it’s a pity to let the girl ruin herself” (James 543) and persuade Daisy that “it may be enchanting, dear child, but it is not the custom here” (James 544). However, innocent Daisy rejects her kindness bluntly, saying that “I never heard (下转第100页)
2.7 押头韵(alliteration)的运用

押头韵是一种在英文中较常见的修辞手法，其用法是连续几个单词的首字母相同，从而读起来朗朗上口，产生奇特的押头韵效果。

英国发行了一套都市观光旅游指南，囊括其大小主要城市。这套旅游指南的标题Hop On-Hop Off就是押头韵的修辞手法，意思是游客可以乘坐都市观光巴士，在都市各个重要景点自由上下车观光。这里简单四个单词却如传神之笔，将都市观光巴士所提供的便利和游客上下车的方便描述得淋漓尽致。

2.8 对仗(hyperbaton)的运用

倒装是一种改变常规句子语序的修辞手法，其目的是把句子的某一个部分放在句首，以达到引人注目、突出强调的目的。

英国皇家空军博物馆(Royal Air Force Museum)的旅游广告中有着这样的描述：Brand new for 2004 is the exciting exhibition hall ‘Milestones of Flight’，这句中brand new for 2004原先应该是句子的表语，为了强调2004年新展览厅而将其提前放在句首，这样让游客一眼就能看到该博物馆的全新展览内容，的确起到了吸引游客眼球的效果。

2.9 间接肯定法(litotes)的运用

间接肯定法是肯定的方法未表达肯定的含义，用not…no…never等否定词表示相反的含义。

在介绍拥有英国最大电影荧幕的伦敦电影院 BFI IMAX 时，旅游广告中巧妙地运用了间接肯定法。Take your seat for an experience your senses will never forget。这里的never forget(永不忘记)两词显然是正话反说，实际表达always remember(永远记得)的意思。如果在家里看电影者场电影就会让你终生难忘，那么这家电影院在硬件设施等方面必定是一流的。

Daisy, on the other hand, represents American culture, the innocence, the spirit of equality and so on. She doesn’t realize the great conflict existing between two entirely different cultures. Just as the saying says: when in Rome, do as the Romans do. She chooses to ignore the necessity of adhering to another system of conventions, even when there is someone who has warned her. In her improper actions, Daisy’s weakness is exposed to the reader, that she doesn’t fully understand the importance of the role persona plays in a society and fails to adopt one, which leads her to death.

Therefore, in order to assert their own identity in different cultures, those American expatriates treat Daisy’s behaviour with a severe system of European conventions and their undue fascination on this role, in fact, accounts partly for Daisy’s death. However, Daisy, on the other hand, fails to adopt persona in European environment and should hold much responsibility for her death.

Work Cited:

