

Analysis of The Kukotsky Enigma from the Perspective of Post-Realism

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ABSTRACT

Post-realistic literature eliminates the opposition between post-modernism and realism. It has been one of the most important literary schools in Russian literature in recent years with certain literary research value. *The Kukotsky Enigma*, composed by the Russian female writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya, is a work of post-realistic features. Exploring the post-realistic features of this work from the perspective of marginalized characters is of great significance for readers to better understand the development of post-realistic literature and this still rising trend of Russian literature.

Keywords: Russian, post-realism, *The Kukotsky Enigma*

1. INTRODUCTION

Lyudmila Ulitskaya (Людмила Евгеньевна Улицкая in German) is a famous Russian writer and has been a hot candidate in the Nobel Prize for Literature in recent years. Her work *The Kukotsky Enigma* is a typical post-realistic literary work. This novel unfolds the Kukotsky family's hundred-year vicissitude and shows people's depressing state of existence under the complex social change in Russia. In recent years, post-realistic literature has set off a wave of literature in Russia with unique creatin ways, and many scholars in China and abroad are studying its literary features. The work *The Kukotsky Enigma* is of great research value.

As a unique way of human existence in Russian post-realistic literary works, marginalization refers to the state of the person who has grown up in the old society but has to face the collision with the new culture when the new era comes. Figures in this state is called as the marginal figures. Marginal figures cover a wide range of areas, among which the most noteworthy is the group of intellectuals with a certain status. Most of them have complex personalities, and they cannot achieve their inner exploration or have to violate their beliefs in social life, which make them unable to meet their own pursuit in life. They are extremely contradictory and fail to seek freedom, so that they cannot escape from the pain without finding any relief. Even so, these figures are always actively exploring their idealized life and looking for a way for their souls. The marginal characters portrayed by post-realistic writers make the tone of the

whole story heavy, giving the readers a thought-provoking experience in reading this work. By analyzing the artistic expression of post-realism in this work, this paper explores the living conditions of marginal figures in Russian traditional society and further investigates the significance of life and ideal from the perspective of the post-realistic literary characteristics of arbitrary space and objective criticism.

2. SUBJECT: THE EXISTENCE VALUE OF THE SUBJECT IDENTITY

Doctor Kukotsky represents a typical intellectual image with advanced ideas in Russian society. He has been striving for the rights and interests of women throughout his life, he has been committed to the legalization of female abortion in Russia, and he has been studying female childbirths and diseases. In the ideological Russian society of patriarchy, women, with low status, have always been a subsidiary of men, which dooms the impossibility for Dr. Kukotsky's efforts to gain a good result, so he feels painful and cannot find a way out. On the other hand, Kukotsky meets her wife on the operation table, and he removes his wife's uterus by himself. In this sense, when he runs for the legalization of female abortion, he ignores his own wife's sensitive psychology after her losing fertility, which results in the breakdown of his family relations. Under the dual pressure of career and family, Dr. Kukotsky begins to be indulged in drinking. The failure in life leads to his lifelong pursuit becoming a joke, and he finally becomes a marginalized person in society. Kukotsky's existence

represents the intellectual image of marginal people in post-realistic works. Such people are lonely and painful, unable to achieve their own aspirations but unwilling to compromise with the reality. They have to be abandoned by society, which is an inevitable fate.

Dr. Kukotsky's friend Goldberg, a geneticist, has been obsessed with scientific research and dedicated to advancing human progress. He is not afraid of power, always committed to defend his beliefs, and tirelessly engaged in scientific research. Goldberg always maintains a great enthusiasm for scientific research and positive optimism in his life, but doesn't receive good treatment for his integrity. Instead, because of his unbending personality, he makes sharp statements in his scientific research reports, which leads to the disaster of his imprisonment. He is put into the concentration camp for three times under serious persecution. Goldberg is also a typical intellectual marginal figure.

As a child growing up in a commune, Yelena has been educated by Tolstoyism and Orthodoxism. In her mind, no woman would refuse to have her own children, and the greatest value of women is to raise their children. Under the male-dominated Russian social system, she believes that the existence value of women is reflected in family life, that is, the importance of women in dominating family life to back up their husbands. Yelena, who has such a value, cannot accept her husband's efforts to legalize female abortion. She believes that her husband Kukotsky is indifferent and ruthless in treating children, so she feels hopeless and helpless. Her husband says: 'You have no right to speak. You don't have this organ. You're not a woman. Since you can't get pregnant, you can't make judgement.' [1] After these words, Yelena has completely become a marginalized person in society. She has lost the 'female' identity, and she is so desperate that she would rather fall into a dream. The character image of Yelena fully shows the depressed image of traditional women in the Russian society at that time who confined themselves in family life and could not achieve the ideal living state. The female image of Yelena not only appears in the Kukotsky family, but also represents such a group of women in society at that time.

3. OBJECT: THE VIRTUAL CHARACTER IN THE DREAMLAND

There are many virtual characters who are referred to with a code in Yelena's dream, while actually all those characters are compared with prototypes in real life. Among them, there are three relatively important roles: 'the bare head' corresponding to Kukotsky, 'John' corresponding to Goldberg, and 'the new woman' representing Yelena herself. There are other characters who are also marginal figures, such as 'the lame', 'the long hair' and 'the pregnant woman'.

In the space where time and whereabouts are unknown, John, as a leader, constantly leads people to the other shore. He is very firm when 'the bare head' asks if he wants to continue to move forward. At the same time, he gives advices to 'the bare head' on the way and guides him to eliminate confusion and find the reason to move forward. To some extent, this virtual character makes up for the defects of Goldberg's personality in reality, and portrays him as a leader, a character with organizational and communicative ability. His role in the dream is to point out the direction for all people on the way and to save the lost people. 'The bare head' is the person who leads everyone to move forward after the departure of 'John'. He is full of love and has carried out surgery for everyone on the way, breaking 'the blocked physical field' [2]. Most importantly, 'the bare head' s sutures the missing uterus into the body of 'the new women'. In Yelena's dream, 'the bare head' has the compassion that Kukotsky does not have in reality and the respect for young life, and even the respect for the female identity. 'The bare head' can fully understand Yelena's inner feelings, which is the ideal Doctor Kukotsky in Yelena's mind. The images of 'the bare head' and 'John' complement the missing aspects for the prototypes of characters in reality. It can be said that the existence of these two characters makes them realize self-awakening and completes the remodeling of the main characters. This is the value of the existence of virtual characters in depicting the characters more fully.

The return of the organs of 'the new woman' indicates the return of her female identity, which wakes Yelena up from the disordered space. She understands her identity and strengthens her value of existence. 'When a person is faced with problems that trouble him, the way he gets an answer is varied. It can be realized through books, through people, and even through dreams.' [3] Yelena has regained her sense of identity. She agrees with her female role in the family and completes her self-awakening. The experience of 'the new women' in the dream helps Yelena get rid of the pain in reality temporarily and completes the self-remodeling of the characters. She reconciles with her husband and returns to a happy family.

4. SEARCHING THE MEANING OF LIFE IN POST-REALISM

The Kukotsky Enigma has a strong humanitarian spirit and is full of deep thinking and exploration of love, death and religion. "What readers expect from the novel is to understand their own living conditions and better ways of life, as a result of which the so-called 'theme' has the right to appear on the stage in the world of novels along with various questions about the meaning of life." [4] In the constant conflicts of the Kukotsky family, the writer shows that the meaning of human life is indispensable in life and the basis of human existence.

4.1. Love: Soul & Body

In the early years, Kukotsky and his wife had a ten-year happy marriage. They supported each other. Yelena thought that her husband was a kind and loving doctor. Kukotsky thought that his wife was a gift from God. They were very compatible and full of love, and their family life was very lucky. But when Kukotsky knew that her husband had been aborting children for women all the time and trying his best to legalize female abortion, she was shocked and could no longer maintain happiness, leaving her family only a superficial shell. Yelena hated her husband for not understanding himself and for his ruthlessness. The distance between the two hearts was getting far away, love disappearing. Her husband, drank and slept in his study every day, and Yelena's door never opened to him. Yelena, who was suffering from disappointment, was constantly sinking into her dream, in which she wished to meet the perfect "Kukotsky". After waking up, she finally reconciled with her husband, and the happy family came back. Through the love story of Yelena and Kukotsky, the writer Ulitskaya tells the readers that the true love should be the combination of soul and body, and the lack of any part is incomplete.

Post-realist writers always advocate that love is a community of soul and body, that such kind of love is perfect, and that people should take pursuing such love as their goal. These writers are against pure spiritual love and pure physical love. They think that both of the two is the appearance of love, and the combination of spiritual and physical love can maintain the happiness of family for a long time.

4.2. Death: The continuation of life

When a child, Yelena had a exact feeling of death after her grandfather's passing away. In her dream she felt pain coming from all directions and got afraid. At the same time, it was not only the fear to the physical pain, but also the shadow of "death" experience. In her middle age, Yelena experienced the separation from her husband and the collapse of her family, and then she experienced death again. She witnessed the death of many people on her way to "the other side". After a lot of experience, she was no longer afraid, more like what everyone will experience as a part of life, showed a very calm appearance and overcame her fear. The author leads the readers across the vivid experience and feeling of death in different periods and expresses that death is just a concept, which is the end in the biological sense, not the end in the human sense. Especially in Yelena's dream of exploring life, she went to "the other side" and realized that death is not the end, but the rebirth. This concept blurs the boundary between life and death, and reflects her exploration and pursuit of the mystery of the eternal existence of life.

The adoptive daughter of Dr. Kukotsky was deviant and gave birth to Rannia, whose father was not sure and injected a new vitality into the suffering families of Goldberg and Kukotsky. After Tanya's illness and death, the two families did not cast too much shadow because of the existence of the little girl Rannia. Both Goldberg and Kucktsky put their hopes on Rannia, taking care of her new life and growing up, which was another continuation of Tanya's life. Life in nature disappeared and regenerated. Here death is the continuation of life in another form[5].

4.3. Religion: The eternity of the soul

The Kukotsky Enigma has strong religious overtones. The protagonist Yelena was influenced by the Orthodox Church, so she was kind and deeply influenced by the traditional ideas of women. The writer Ulitskaya is of Jewish origin. The Jewish people regard religion as their belief in survival, so religious ideas almost run through the whole plot of the novel. In her expression, religion is the way to save and being happiness. Yelena had a dream of her dead grandfather and grandmother, and the process of her non religious grandfather's death was long and painful. On her deathbed, she abused everyone and even cursed God. Yelena thought that the dead grandfather had killed many people because of his wrongdoing, so he was guilty and still could not get relief after his death. But in her opinion her grandmother who was a devout Orthodox was very calm when she died, even though she foreseed her own death and felt the call of God, so grandma's death was painless and respectable.

5. CONCLUSION

The existence of the subject identity of the novel represents the image of several types of people in Russian society at that time, which is both real and valuable. The object character is the ideal state created by marginal people when they are looking for a way for their life, which reflects the subject's reflection of the meaning of life. Under the contradiction between the ideal pursuit and the reality, the main characters fully release their minds in the virtual space and seek the reasons or media that can satisfy their free minds, so as to fulfill self-remodeling, get rid of the pain and reconcile with the reality. The marginal people portrayed in post-realistic literary works are all contradictory individuals. For example, Dr. Kukotsky has a sense of responsibility, but he disregards life to a certain extent. Yelena is full of compassion, but she lives in an egoistic way. All these marginal people have their own advantages and disadvantages, and it is complex in itself. In portraying characters, the writer does not simply divide them into good or bad people, but guiding readers to build their own frame of characters. In the plot, the writer uses arbitrary time and space to construct the framework of event development, but this is not only the creation of

mystery, but also a comparison with the reality through the illusion, depicting the face of the real society[6]. In characterization, the writer describes some marginal people who can't realize their dreams but constantly strive to create the ideal life, and portrays the images of most contradictory individuals under the background of a chaotic society. In narrative, the writer adds her own subjective views to the plot and criticize social phenomena. The three features lead to thinking about the meaning of human life and the value of dreams, driving readers to build their own texts.

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