

Analysis of Female Images in Remedios Varo's Works based on Jung's Theory

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ABSTRACT

Surrealism is an important art school after the first World War. It is famous for its absurdity and rebellion against the real society. As surrealism is greatly influenced by Freud's psychoanalysis and Jung's neo-psychoanalysis in psychology, this paper analyzes the paintings of surrealist painter Remedios Varo from Jung's subconscious and archetype theories. The surrealism style in Remedios Varo's paintings is revealed from the theory of the unconscious. And through studying the Animus archetype and the personality mask archetype in Remedios Varo's paintings, this paper reveals brave, independent, intelligent and rebelling traits of female images.

Keywords: Remedios Varo; Surrealism; Neo-psychoanalysis; The archetype

1. INTRODUCTION

Remedios Varo is a great surrealist painter in the 19th century. Her works show her strong interest in science and the image of free and brave women in her subconscious. Her works have been studied by many researchers throughout the history in all kinds of methods. This paper studies the female images in Remedios Varo's works based on Jung's archetypal theory, providing a psychological perspective for studying her works.

2. SURREALISM

Europe in the 1920s was full of turmoil and change. With the outbreak of World War I and the technological innovation brought by the Industrial Revolution, there was an air of rebellion and reform in society. Naturally, the most sensitive group of artists became the leaders of the innovation movement, they began to turn their attentions to artistic innovation, trying to find a new artistic language. The surrealism movement originated from DaDa, inspired by Freud's study of the unconscious, and devoted to rebelling against bourgeois rationalism, was one of the most influential art schools during this period[1]. The surrealists were shocked by the cannibalism of human beings in war and believed that civilization did not bring human satisfaction but suppressed humanity. Therefore, they were shocked by and quite agreed with Freud's theory of the unconscious, which indicated people suppress ideas that civilization

disagrees with into the unconscious and enter the subconscious through dreams. Inspired by the theory of unconsciousness and dreams, surrealism artists tried to get rid of reason and rules and pursued the purest expression of dreams and minds. In the First Declaration of Surrealism, Andre Breton (1924) defined surrealism in this way: " Surrealism, noun, masc., Pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought[2]. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations."

Because surrealism expresses irrational and unconscious content, surrealist paintings often do not conform to reality and are incompatible with real life. For example The distorted clocks of Dali, the contradictions of Magritte, Ernst's collages and rubbings and so on[3]. These artists completely freed from the constraints of reality, and tried to present the unconscious content on the drawing paper. They used completely subvert the traditional new painting language to enlighten people to realize the unconscious which was depressed by themselves. Since surrealism is different from traditional painting and highlights the pure reaction to the mind, the understanding of surrealism painting should not be limited to pure artistic methods, but should learn from other disciplines, especially psychology.

3. JUNG'S THEORY

3.1 *The unconscious*

Jung was a student of Freud and developed Freud's theories, and on many topics, Jung and Freud had different views. For the core source of surrealism--unconscious, they also had diverse opinions. Jung further expanded the content of unconsciousness, defining the unconsciousness proposed by Freud as the individual unconsciousness, and indicated that there is a broader collective unconsciousness below the individual unconsciousness[4]. Therefore, although surrealism is influenced by Freud's theory, it can still be analyzed from Jung's theoretical point of view. What is more, compared with Freud's theory, Jung's theory is more abundant and suitable for a broader analysis of paintings.

Jung believed that psychology is composed of consciousness and unconsciousness. The unconsciousness includes the personal unconsciousness (the contents that consciousness cannot deal with temporarily or repressed) and the collective unconsciousness derived from heredity. The unconscious has a strong ability to balance consciousness and can absorb nutrients from human experience so that people can face the world in a more moderate way. That is, unconsciousness plays a decisive role in mental activities and plays an important role in balancing psychology.

Jung's theory of art is also based on his understanding of the unconscious. Jung believed that art could express the connotation of the subconscious in the form of art, eliminate psychological anxiety, and produce strong vitality to correct the deviation of The Times[5]. That is to say, the emergence of art is of great social significance.

3.2 *The archetype*

Archetypes are an important part of the collective unconscious. "Archetype is an innate tendency in the collective unconscious, a prior determinant of psychological tests, and a universal and consistent transcendental form of all psychological responses, which enables individuals to act in the way shown in similar situations faced by their original ancestors[6]. That is, human beings have the same reaction mode to some problems. For example, in many cultures, there are heroes, wise old people, the sun and so on. Archetypes include birth archetype, regeneration archetype, death archetype, Wisdom old archetype, hero archetype, mother earth archetype and many natural objects such as sun archetype, moon archetype, animal archetype. The extroverted expression of the archetype is an archetypal image. The main archetypal images include the mask of personality, Anima, Animus, wise old man, shadow and self.

Because art is the expression of the subconscious, there are artistic archetypal images in many works of art. These prototype images are an important breakthrough to analyze the connotation of the works.

3.2.1 *The archetype -- The anima archetype and the Animus archetype*

"Anima" archetype is the female side of male psychology, "Animus" archetype is the male side of female psychology, that is, the opposite sex personality in psychology. Jung believed that if the individual personality is expected to grow healthily and harmonically, the opposite factors in personality should be allowed to be shown to a certain extent in individual consciousness and behavior. Otherwise, these opposite factors will be suppressed deep in consciousness and gradually accumulated, which will eventually endanger the existence of life subjects[7]. The "Anima" and "Animus" archetypes that exist in people's unconsciousness are born with heredity, but are deeply suppressed in the subconscious due to social norms and value orientation. In real life, it is difficult for people to have the opportunity to show their heterosexual factors, but in art, especially in surrealist works, artists can wantonly awaken the heterosexual factors suppressed in their subconscious, and bring back the ambivalence.

3.2.2 *The archetype -- The personality mask archetype*

The archetype of personality mask is also a very important type of archetype, which refers to "a result of harmonization between individuals and society in the question of 'what a person should behave like'"[8]. In other words, in order to survive better in society, people decide their own behavior according to the norms and expectations of society. People wear thick personality masks in society in order to gain more social recognition. But in art, artists are like psychological consultants, taking off the masks of people's personalities and revealing their true hearts.

4. REMEDIOS VARO

Remedios Varo was born in Catalonia Spain in 1908. At that time, Spain was totally a patriarchal society, regarding females as poverty and setting strict social norms for women, but her father Rodrigo Varo y Zagalvo was totally different from other fathers, and Remedios Varo benefited a lot from her father's Avant-garde education. Her father recognized her artistic talents and always inspired her to think independently, providing her with science, adventure, and philosophy books, which left her deep impression and was reflected in her later paintings[9]. These early experiences strengthened her faith in art and science. Although she was later sent to a traditional religious school, her passion for art was not

extinguished. With a love of art, Remedios Varo finally decided to turn away from traditional religion school, and went to the Academia de San Fernando, one of the famous art schools at that time which was also well-known surrealism artist Salvador Dalí's school[10].

The times she lived in were very tough for women, women could not have the freedom to express their thoughts and even did not have right to be independent. At that time, there was a very strong ideology of patriarchal fatherhood, and many male surrealist artists also treated women as attachments[11]. However, where there is oppression, there is resistance. Many feminist movements prevailed at that time, and Remedios Varo was deeply influenced by these movements. Especially, when she left Paris which was dominated by male artists for Mexico, she started creating amazing paintings.

Mexico gave Remedios Varo a free free creative space, where she was not restricted as a woman without thoughts, and she could paint what she wanted, regardless of other male artists' s thoughts or any social norms on female. During this period, alchemy, psychoanalysis, and scientific discovery began to appear in her paintings, and she also started to show female images getting rid of social norms, which were real from the unconscious[11]. Remedios Varo was an extraordinary surrealism artist, and she made a remarkable contribution to surrealism, especially showing the pure unconscious about women.

5. WORKS OF REMEDIOS VARO

5.1 Exploration of the Sources of the Orinoco River

This painting was created in 1959. The origin of the Orinoco River was a very famous mystery, so Remedios Varo combined her real-life exploration on the Orinoco River with this enigma to create one of her famous paintings *Exploration of the Source of the Orinoco River*. The painting depicts a woman in casual clothes driving an orange boat through the woods to find the source of a river. The upper part of the orange boat is connected to the woman's dress by a thin white thread that runs into her left hand. In her right hand she pulled a thick twine, which joined her dress to the lower part of the boat. Look closely; the orange boat is a coat turned into. Coats were buttoned together into eggshell-shaped boats, pockets of paper, and straps arched up to hold a compass at the top. The two collars spread out to the sides, and the hat of the coat extended upward, gradually deepening into a certain brown round hat, which was placed on the woman's head. A feathered wing was attached to the hat, and down the wing, a fishtail device was attached to the back of the boat. The woman in the boat, dressed in a neutral casual coat, looked steadfastly at the water pouring out of the middle glass. The glass stands on a small round table in a hollow tree trunk with two arches. The background of the

painting is full of dark fog and a few bare tree trunks, and there are black beak birds staring at the woman in the boat.

This work is a very typical surrealist painting, because the atmosphere of this painting is weird and absurd, full of the content contrary to objective rationality, and directly show the unconsciousness of painter, which is the core of the surrealism. The boat turned into a coat, the tall glass that spews water and the smooth wall in the tree trunk are all contrary to the objective world. Remedios Varo's subconscious thoughts are totally suppressed by the objective world and civilized society. However, through the awakening of the unconscious, the painter represents the content that has been buried in the personal subconscious and brings it to the level of consciousness. In the painting, all the shackles are broken, the artist's personal subconscious is released, and the repressed ideas are freely expressed. Everything change -- Ships that could sail far and explore no longer need elaborate machinery; Simple casual clothes can help explorers adapt to the harsh conditions of adventure, even the source of the river sought by countless explorers turned out to be a tall glass. What's even more remarkable is that the surrealist technique was applied to the protagonist, presenting a female image repressed by social norms into the subconscious. Women of that time do not have right to be independent, but woman in this paint is very free, even exploring the source of the river. This image obviously does not conform to the social norms at that time, but it is the most real female image in the artist's subconscious, and Remedios Varo brings it to the drawing paper.

Of course, this painting is the presentation of the personal subconscious of women, but the image that the painter puts on the woman is also with the broader and far-reaching collective subconscious which is under the personal subconscious. The Animus archetype, the archetypal image in the collective subconscious, is the male image in the female psychology. The animus archetype of the image of female in this painting is fully reflected, that is, the heroine has many traditional male characteristics. The woman in the painting is dressed in unisex casual clothes and is alone exploring a secret place full of danger and uncertainty. She is determined, free and brave, independent and intelligent, which were seen at the time as uniquely male. Obviously the artist awakens the archetype of Animus in the female body, presenting a woman with bisexual nature, a person with integrity and balance psychology. This way of presenting a female image is groundbreaking and subversive. Compared with other male surrealist painters of the same period, Remedios Varo's shaping of female images is more unconscious. Other male painters were temporarily influenced by the society and only took women as a foil. They did not discover the female image in their subconscious, let alone the archetype of Animus that aroused the female image. Remedios Varo's paintings can

therefore be described as more thoroughly surrealist paintings.

5.2 Character

The Animus archetype is an important collective subconscious image in Remedios Varo's paintings. In character, a woman sits on a machine supported by many wheels, looking ahead, holding a joystick in her left hand and a small book in her right. The woman wore loose orange clothing and a long sleeveless coat with a high collar. Many filaments extend from the head, upper body and under the seat. The ends of the wires that extend out from under the seat are connected to numerous wheels, a lever and two spinner wheels. Perhaps machines are part of clothing, or perhaps they are closely related to clothing, as in the *Exploration of the Sources of the Orinoco River*. The background of the picture is very simple, mainly rendered by color blocks.

The content of this painting is not complicated, but it also expresses the female image in the artist's subconscious very succinctly and powerfully, having a strong sense of surrealism. The vehicle the woman rides is very simple and not have any power system, just some wheels. Besides, woman's clothes is also very strange and unusual. All these outlandish elements symbolize this painting is a typical surrealist work. As in the previous painting, the artist does not portray women as objects, but as subjects. Women rely on their own strength to explore forward, being independent and brave. The artist awakens the animus archetype of the female in the painting and reflects it on the female body, thus creating a female image with bi-sexual nature. This woman whose animus archetype is awoken has many traditionally male traits, such as independence, bravery and determination. In this painting, woman rides a vehicle on her own with a small booklet calmly, not like women in other paintings. In most of paintings at that age, women are beautiful and just appendages that are watched by men. And the woman in this work is very similar to the painter, as if she is the artist's subconscious, or the animus archetype of the painter.

5.3 Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst

The painting depicts a woman in a courtyard wearing a thick green cloak. She is holding a man's head in her left hand through her white beard, ready to throw the man's head into the well. In his right hand he carried a basket containing the man's belongings: eyes, clocks, keys, etc. The veil fell off the woman's face, and the mask that had once been removed. Note the sign with the letters "FJA" engraved on it next to the door to the left of the background. This is supposed to be the initials of famous psychologists Freud, Jung and Adler. On the whole, the woman's posture is relaxed, natural and graceful. The dark clouds above the circular courtyard create a

depressing and eerie atmosphere for the whole painting, which increases the intimidating power of the woman virtually.

The archetype of personality mask is fully embodied in this painting. The mask on the green robe used to be the mask of the woman's personality, the woman that society expected, the woman that society regulated. In order to adapt to society, women hide their true colors and live in the way that society or men expect. They wear the personality mask that is compliant, stupid and no free thinking. But the woman in the painting took off the mask of personality worn on her face in the past and welcomed the future with her real face. That means the woman decides to get rid of the personality mask which represents social norms and show a true self. Not only that, as in the previous two paintings, the woman in the painting is undoubtedly the protagonist, and Remedios Varo also makes the archetype of Animus, which contains traits of reason, decisiveness and even cruelty. The woman cast off the man's head without expression, without the slightest panic and disorder, and a strong aura has a strong deterrent effect. She expresses the artist's strong tendency to shed the mask of personality and awaken the archetype of Animus.

The three works are Remedios Varo's depictions of female images, which are extremely pioneering and subversive. Remedios Varo's works must have a social effect according to Jung's view of the nature of art. Remedios Varo's works eliminate psychological unease and correct historical bias by showing subconscious archetypes in her paintings. Remedios Varo lives in an extremely patriarchal era where men dominate and women are appendages and property. In those days, the first half of a woman's life belonged to her father and the second half to her husband. Women never had autonomy, let alone freedom. Therefore, oppressed women began to rebel against patriarchy and patriarchy in order to fight for their own rights. Remedios Varo is deeply influenced by the feminist movement, so the female images in his works are totally different from those in the past. Her works are great and enduring works that can eliminate women's psychological anxiety and correct the male-dominated social bias.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the archetypal theory of Jung's collective subconscious, this paper analyzes the female images in three works of Remedios Varo (*Exploration of the Sources of the Orinoco River*; *Character*; *Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst*) and the social significance of the works. Her paintings present the archetype of Animus on the female image, removing the female personality mask, and depicting a real and free female image, which is groundbreaking and subversive. These female images can eliminate women's psychological anxiety and

balance the trend of the times, which reflects the greatness of her paintings.

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