

Novel of Evil

Another Interpretation of *Armed Alley**

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Abstract—Kuroshima Denji revealed numerous inside stories in *Armed Alley*, describing various “evils” existing in Jinan incisively and vividly. According to Georges Bataille’s literature theory, Kuroshima Denji rebelled against the then Japanese militarism by virtue of the advocacy of the Proletarian Cultural Movement. In the Japanese view, it is naturally the individual against collective morality, in other words, it is “evil”.

Keywords—*Armed Alley*; literature of evil; proletarian literature

I. INTRODUCTION

Armed Alley, the only full-length novel of Kuroshima Denji, is mainly written based on the material of Jinan Massacre taken place on May 3, 1928. For a long time, the Chinese researchers always pay much attention to the profound proletariat thought in this novel, because this novel has revealed the crimes committed by Japanese imperialism in Jinan; however, in Japan, “he is generally called ‘Farmer Writer’, ‘Antiwar Writer’”¹, and the research mainly focus on his anti-war ideological aspects. As a result, it seems that the perspective of studying this novel is slight single. This paper tries to interpret it from another perspective using postmodern literary theory via text analysis.

II. “SEWAGE” AND GEORGES BATAILLE’S WRITING ABOUT DRAINAGE

The stories in *Armed Alley* taken place in Jinan, which is famous for its spring. Among the world renowned seventy-two springs, the most famous one is Baotu Spring with tens of centimeters-high spring spewing, sweet and delicious, having the reputation of the world's first spring². Jinan Fulong Match Company and the places where Japanese constructed combat fortifications are located at the current west gate area, namely near the Baotu Spring. But looking at the description of water in this novel, there is no positive description of clear spring. In other words, *Armed Alley* does not describe the positive

meaning of water because of Jinan’s “clear spring”. The sentence containing “water” appears in Chapter Five for the first time, but what it describes is “sewage”: “there is a dirty street filled with sewage near Shi Wang Dian”.³

George Bataille (1897-1962), a French philosopher, having great impact on deconstructivism, post-structuralism and post-modernism. In 1928, he wrote avant-garde literary masterpiece “Story of the Eye” (l’Histoire de l’œil). Peter-André Alt (1960-) analyzed Story of the Eye in his famous “Evil Aesthetics Course: One Romanticism Interpretation” (Ästhetik des Bösen, 2014),⁴ indicating that there are a lot of abnormal description in the unfinished works of Story of Eye, including algolagnia, masochist, necrophilia, urine addiction tendency, namely to describe people’s urination or defecation frequently. In contrast, there is also such description at the beginning of *Armed Alley*: “behind the sorghum stalk used for protecting against wind for the shanties in slum, children are urinating and defecating... and then play the excrement of themselves.”⁵

In addition to the above description of sewage, urination or defecation, there are also such description as saliva, sweat, blood and other excreta in *Armed Alley*: “Xiaoshan puts the unprocessed stalk on his palm to check, but then drops it on the ground to the dirty corridor lick spitting”⁶. “Suddenly, the third prisoner raised his head, and the wine flowing down as saliva.”⁷ “Yamazaki... joyful like having picked up a gold, and it still can be seen from his spittle being sprayed onto the variegated table”⁸, “... a spittle dropped down from the rickshaw, and said contemptuously.”⁹ “As a kind of excreta, sweat appears many times in *Armed Alley*, for example, there is such description of no water to drink or bath after sweating: “The soldiers are sticky all over due to sweat and dirt, no water.

³ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.27

⁴ Peter-André Alt, 1960-, the sacred pornography (George Bataille, Jean Genet, Michel Foucault), *Evil Aesthetics Course: One Romanticism Interpretation* (Ästhetik des Bösen), Translated by Ning Ying, Wang Defeng and Zhong Changsheng. Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2014, P394-415.

⁵ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.1

⁶ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.9

⁷ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.58

⁸ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.19

⁹ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.19

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¹ Selected Short Stories of Kuroshima Denji. Translated by Li Mang. Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1981, p.2.

² Baotu Spring: Located in Baotu Spring Park outside the west gate of Jinan City, Shandong Province, having tens of centimeters-high spring spewing. See Ci Hai.

Only a little, even if there is any, which is dirty, undrinkable. If they drink, their intestines and stomach will tweet like thunder. Soldiers haven't had a bath for a long time. Seven days, no, it has exceeded 15 days"¹. In fact, the place where Japanese soldiers constructed the Combat fortifications is located at west gate area, and there is spring nearby. At that time, clear spring run through the slabstone at the Huaqiangzi Street and Jianzi Lane, west of the Baotu Spring. The soldiers can have a footbath to refresh themselves, but there is no reflection about it in the novel.

Lu Xun mentioned the folk custom of treating a disease by human blood steamed bread, and there is similar description in *Armed Alley*: a woman dips steamed bread in the blood flowing from the beheaded bandit, and the blood is naturally the fluid discharged from body:

Suddenly, a black woman with bound feet run from the crowd, and then another two to three people run out, men and women. They hold skinned steamed bread with a long chopstick inserted in, laughing and moving close to the corpse immediate after the non-commissioned officers and soldiers' withdrawal, and put the steamed bread on the shrunken wound due to completion of beheading. The steamed bread is very soft, and soon it becomes the cooked shrimp-like red color.²

The novel not only describes a large number of such excreta, but the Japanese appeared in this novel seem to suffer from male manic disorder with extremely irritable temper. *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* of Robert Louis Stevenson, (1850-94) of is one of the classic works about male manic disorder. After drinking the medicine, the hero Jack incarnated into the evil Mr. Hyde to do evil (murder) everywhere³. In the second half of *Armed Alley*, the Japanese supervisors were self-assured for having soldiers' protection to rely on, they imposed the torture of acupuncture into the finger to make the purple blood flow out, which is also the most horrible description in addition to beheading in this novel: "Rusty needle pierce into the nail till the crescent, with purple blood penetrating under the translucent nails".⁴

Moreover, the clear spring is not described passively in this works, but used as a torture, for example, the water appears in Section Seventeenth is "water-dampened". Yu Liling once served as one of the representatives of workers, requiring the manufacturer to pay workers' salaries, so the manufacture bears a grudge against him. After Japanese soldiers stationed in the factory, the Japanese capitalists felt they have the support, so they had nothing to fear, beating up workers willfully:

"You are fearless! ---- Li, bring the water-dampened whip, bring the water-dampened whip!"⁵

¹ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.110

² *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.56

³ *Diamond Jed*, (1943-), *The Irritable Male Syndrome: Managing the 4 Key Causes of Depression & Aggression*, translated by Xu Jinfu. Taipei: Jiuzhou Culture, 2008.

⁴ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.127

⁵ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing

Yu Liling's screams and Xiaoshan's ferocious voice sounded again; the water-dampened whip beat on Yu Liling, making the sound like cutting something.

At this time, a bold and somewhat rude soldier jumped out.⁶

The water-dampened whip is taken over by the gradually awakened soldiers.

III. "HETEROTOPIA" OF "CARNIVAL" LITERATURE AND PROLETARIAN LITERATURE

Mikhail Bakhtin holds the opinion in *Problem of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) that one of the novel's theme resources is the ancient carnival (carnivalistic)⁷, or the influence from the carnival is the greatest. Proposed a theory of "laugh culture", and call it "carnival culture", thinking that the novel's "carnival culture" comes from the ancient carnival. Carnival literature has the following features that make the language and behavior vulgar, that is to say such literature pay special attention to the hell and the lower half of the body (genitals) and the description of the opening organ of the body, such as the mouth (eating and drinking), nose (one of the excretory systems), genitals, anus. There is quite a lot description about excrement, childbirth and sexual intercourse.⁸

Bakhtin also explains carnivalization by virtue of Menippean Satire in this book, and lists fourteen features of carnival-style literature. Among which, the third feature is often that the protagonist will go to heaven or hell. For instance, the soldiers in this novel come from the hell-like Japan: "The workplace in Japan is also full of hunger, drive and squeeze, which can be called the unemployment hell"⁹. And in Jinan, the tiredness from construction of fortifications, the visible poor life of workers, the greed of capitalist, and the squeeze toward the low-level soldiers seem to push them into another hell. The eighth feature describes people's abnormal psychological state, such as mental disorder, nearly mad desires and suicide, which is consistent with the description of Japanese supervisor after taking drugs; "the body suffering from heroin addiction is more uncomfortable than going to the hell; he was he was groaning with pain under the humiliation and contempt of the police officers on duty"¹⁰; "Like an ant fell into the hell, he cannot quit no matter how he struggles and tosses,"¹¹ and so on.

House. 2015, p.127

⁶ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.7-8

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problem of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, translated by Bai Chunren and Gu Yaling. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1988, p.159.

⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin. *Study on Rabelais/ Complete Works of Mikhail Bakhtin*. Translated by Li Zhaolin, Xia Zhongxian and others. Shijiazhuang: Hebei Education Press, 1998, p.368.

⁹ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.137

¹⁰ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.149

¹¹ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.29

The eleventh of the fourteen features is to "describe utopian society". In Foucault's opinion, the difference between "Utopia" and "Heterotopia" invented by him is that the former does not really exist, whereas the latter actually exists, but need to understand by means of imagination. Lu Chao once studied the old Shanghai under the perspective of "defamiliarization" using foreigners' written records¹, and there may be the same effect to study *Armed Valley* using this method. *Armed Valley* is also a kind of Heterotopia of Kuroshima Denji literature. He described Jinan from Marxism's "grand narrative" perspective, including the description of capitalism emerging from industrial revolution, and from capitalism to imperialism². Kuroshima Denji analyzes what he has witnessed using the early proletarian literary point of view. This novel clearly belongs to the "heterotopias" of proletarian literature. Japanese Proletarian Literature was promoted after creation of "Literary Front" in 1924, which was subsequently banned and ended in February 1934 after Knapp dissolution. As we all know, the premise of proletarian literature is to deny capitalism. "Reuse capitalism" was finally proposed in China after a decade of Cultural Revolution ("southern tour speech", January 18 to February 21, 1992), characterized by focusing on economic development, which has been settled and will not be repeated in this paper. In fact, Marxism does not deny capitalism totally like proletarian culture. So in this sense, Kuroshima Denji's description of Jinan problem starting from denying capitalism is not the Utopia of Marxism, but the Heterotopia of proletarian culture. Jinan has become the "Heterotopias" of Kuroshima Denji Literature.

Kuroshima Denji once gave deep sympathy to Chinese people, and condemned strongly of the despicable behavior of robbers who "are the foreigners living in the vast yet chaos mainland China, and regarding both the hard and soft work³ as³ as real work"⁴, emitting sorrowful cries for the squeezing suffered by the Chinese workers. But the limitation is that the first half of *Armed Alley* concentrated on the contradictions between factory and work, which is the traditional Marxist thinking pattern. In the present era, people's workload has been reduced greatly after using of the computers, and the number of labor workers will be reduced in the future after general introduction of robots, which has become the new trend of social development.

The "proletariat" in theory of Bogdanov, Father of proletarian culture, refers to the workers concerned. He thinks that the "proletarian art" and "farmer art" shall be distinguished. Farmers have a "tendency to individualism, personal interests and the private property," longing for bourgeois life⁵. *Armed Alley* contains the early proletarian literature denying farmers, thinking that farmers have bourgeois tendencies. Kuroshima

Denji has described the scene of beheading the "bandit", saying "Men and women. They hold skinned steamed bread with a long chopstick inserted in, laughing and moving close to the corpse immediate..., and put the steamed bread on the shrunken wound due to completion of beheading⁶. As what has been mentioned above, it has intertextuality with human blood steamed bread written by Lu Xun.

IV. "EVIL" LITERATURE

KUWABARA Takeo (1904-1988)⁷ has compared the Good and Evil appeared in Bataille's Literature of Evil using the words in the following table in his Literature Preface:

TABLE I. COMPARISON OF GOOD AND EVIL APPEARED IN LITERATURE OF EVIL

Good	Evil
Birth	Death
Collective (together)	Individual (alone)
Future	Present
Reason	Sensibility
Increase (grow)	Consume (destroy)
Work	Happy
Action (useful)	Dream (worthless)
Progress	Noble
Adult	Child
Order	Freedom
Essay	Poem

According to Kuwabara Takeo's Explanation: 1) birth is good, death is evil; 2) rebelling against the collective with individual advocacy is evil; 3) to seek immediate satisfaction is evil; 4) arbitrariness is evil; 5) enjoyment is evil, which refers to wine, narcotics and prostitute; 6) the pursuit of "progress" is the values of industrial society, resulting in capitalism, mediocrity, mechanization and popularity. On the contrary, people with classic aristocratic upbringing are dissatisfied with it.⁸

Kuroshima Denji reveals numerous inside stories in *Armed Alley*, which is filled with description of various "evils" exist in Jinan: coolies, heroin addicts, match factories, labor disputes, (Japanese) army, Cossack soldier, as well as Chinese workers who act as Japanese spies, smuggle guns, and have yellow phosphorus poisoning, and there are also terrible execution ground, fearful street fighting and numerous corpses, as well as progressive soldiers are shot and so on, how the Japanese army who invaded China and Korean Peninsula produce and sell opium, heroin, and codeine to poison the Chinese people ..., Kuroshima Denji wrote all the "evils" he learned about into his novel. Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) analyzed deeply the unabashed plunder means of imperialism, such as force, fraud, oppression and theft, in Theory of Capital Accumulation Theory of 1913⁹, however, in Japanese army employed in

¹ Lv Chao: *Maritime Foreign Land—Image of Shanghai in Western Cultural Perspective*. Harbin: Heilongjiang University Press, 2010.

² Zou Chongming: *Flow, Plunder and Struggle: Geographical Criticism on Capitalism* by David Harvey. Taipei: Homeward Publishing, 2015, p.70-71.

³ In the novel, hard work refers to selling guns, and soft work refers to selling drugs.

⁴ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House, 2015, p.20.

⁵ Bogdanov. *The Criticism of Proletarian Art*. Translated by Su Wen. Bai Sihong: *Material Selection of Proletarian Culture*, 39.

⁶ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House, 2015, p.65

⁷ Kuwabara Takeo is the Japanese famous critic, graduated from Kyoto University majored in French, and is noted for studying French Revolution, Encyclopedia and the thinker Rousseau. He once acted as French Professor in Institute of Humanities of Kyoto University, and he is the author of ten volumes of Kuwabara Takeo Collection.

⁸ Kuwabara Takeo, *Preface to Literature*, translated by Sun Ge. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1991, p.173.

⁹ Zou Chongming: *Flow, Plunder and Struggle: Geographical Criticism on*

Armed Alley in order to use torture to suppress the Chinese workers. The Japanese supervisors supervise the workers in the following manners:

(Japanese Supervisor) brings whip and pistol with them. There are Chinese gangmasters under his control, and the gangmasters bring sticks in their hands. No matter whom this stick will hit on, it will be all right even if the soft hand and feet were broken. But in fact, for the frightened workers in front of Japanese and gangmasters, there is no need for sticks and pistols.¹

Kuroshima Denji struggled against the then Japanese militarism with the claim of proletarian cultural movement. In the Japanese eyes, it is naturally the individual versus collective. In other words, it is "evil". Reviewing on the realism of the 18th and 19th centuries, it came into being in the form of critiquing society, such as Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), Stendhal (1783-1842), and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), "in their works, evil has been meticulously manifested, but they have not fundamentally taken the attitude of supporting such negative values"². Proletarian literature concerns about people's sufferings, reveals the lower social darkness in their works, leading to the appearance of "Literature of Evil" in quantity. There are scenes of beheading bandits and treating Chinese workers with torture in *Armed Alley*, which are performance of evil in human nature; the uncontrolled sewage also represents the city's odiousness³. This "evil" is filled with complaints about the invaders in Jinan at that time. Therefore, it is to be expected that this novel was prohibited from issuing as it touched the Japanese authorities' sensitive nerves at that time.

V. CONCLUSION

At that time, in Japan where truth was tightly closed and distorted, Kuroshima Denji was insightful, standing in the position of the proletariat, and he said, "It is only to protect the interests of Japan in Manchuria while combating, because for these people, Manchuria is the most important. ... There is no other reason to send us (the Japanese soldiers) to the factory than suppressing the workers and protecting the factory"⁴. Although the novel is full of description about "evil", we can feel the writer's sympathy to Jinan people who suffered from sufferings. In evaluation of the works of Kuroshima Denji, Li Mang said: "Some (literary works) like a stream trickling from the spring, without causing many people's attention. However, with the passage of time, that spring becomes bigger and bigger, and the tickle becomes a river with clear water and wave, which is gurgling melodious. Kuroshima Denji belongs to the latter type"⁵. This is where the value and charm of Kuroshima Denji literature lie in.

Capitalism by David Harvey. Taipei: Homeward Publishing, 2015, p.70-71.

¹ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. 2015, p.7

² Kuwabara Takeo, Preface to Literature, translated by Sun Ge. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1991, p.176.

³ Chen Xiaolan, *City Image—Cities in English Literature*. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006.

⁴ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing House. Version 2015, p.223.

⁵ *Armed Alley*, translated by Li Guangzhen. Shandong People's Publishing

House. Version 2015, p.1.