

Love, debauchery? On body writing from the perspective of the city--taking "A Man's War" as an example

Bian Zheng

School of Humanities, Changzhou Institute of Technology, Changzhou, Jiangsu 213022, China

maxbian0925@gmail.com

Abstract

The Chinese urban literary context of the 1990s has brought the liberation of Chinese urban women's desires to a considerable depth. Some female writers, mainly Lin Bai, who were famous for their "body writing", introduced some unexpressed female body desires into literature for the first time. However, the rise of consumer culture destroyed this beautiful picture. The voyeuristic desire of men and society has also led to a part of women's culture that is gradually becoming vulgar, inferior, and commercially deviant. This paper focuses on "One Man's War" and analyzes the difference between "body writing" "traditional writing" and "love writing" in the context of urban culture by reading the original text and combining it with Sisu's "body writing" theory. By reading the original text and combining Sisu's "body writing" theory, we analyze the difference between "body writing" and "traditional writing", "love writing" and "erotic writing" in the context of urban culture, and reposition the value of "body writing" to explore its literary-historical significance.

Keywords

"Body writing", urban literature, "A Man's War", Lin Bai.

1. Introduction

With the feminist movement becoming more and more prevalent all over the world, feminism has become the peak of the discussion of the times. Due to China's male-centered cultural tradition, men hold the right to create and interpret discourse, while women have long been deprived of the right to speak, banished to the margins of history, and evaporated into a state of discourse.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when economic and cultural development was booming, women's literature began to flourish in the context of Chinese urban literature. They began to value themselves, to express themselves, to express their biological and existential experiences that are different from those of men. Women had to create a feminine discourse that suited their needs and create a "purely feminine way of expression", i.e., female body writing. This paper intends to take Lin Bai's "One Man's War" as an example, to explore the pursuit of desires and personal emotions of independent women in the city, using urban literature as a literary background, and to explore the impact of "body writing" on women's body experiences of desires in the context of urban culture in China in the 1990s, from the small to the large, from the special to the universal. To explore the role of "body writing" in the 90s in China's urban cultural context, it has contributed to the self-expression and awakening of women's consciousness, and summarize the spiritual core of its writing, cultural experience, and sustainable development.

2. "Body Writing" in the Context of Modern Chinese Urban Literature

The great satisfaction of materialism has led to the commercialization and materialization of life as the spiritual support of urban men and women, and the impact of desire on traditional morality, the dissolution of ideals, and the imbalance of values have pushed both sexes into the trap of materialization. The cultural impact of the alternation between the old and new eras not only showed in the literature of the time the atmosphere of desire-based writing for men and women of food and drink, blind material

worship but also more about inner anxiety and loneliness, reflection, and resistance to the phenomenon of women's previous loss of voice in literature. In the 1990s, the diversification of China's urban literary context also led to a certain level of liberation of female desire. Some female novelists who focused on writing about women's lust, such as Chen Dye and Lin Bai, introduced into literature for the first time some unique private desires of women's psychology and physiology that had never been expressed in China before.

Lin Bai's novel *A War of One's Own*, published in 1994, caused a great reaction in domestic literary circles for its profound display of female experience and its meticulous depiction of the female body and female desire. To counter the criticism, feminist critics obtained theoretical support from French feminist theorist Hélène Cissou. To counter the criticism, feminist critics obtained theoretical support from French feminist theorist Hélène Cissou, who named the physical narratives in Lin Bai's works as "body writing" and regarded "One Man's War" as "the first piece of body writing in China. In *Le rire de la M duse* (1975), Sisu provides a restorative introduction to body writing, stating: "When I say 'women,' I mean women of the world who are being awakened and returning to their historical significance. " "Women must write themselves into the text as embedded in the world and history through their struggles." [1] It was under the patronage of Sisu, a French New Wave feminist literary critic of the 1970s, that the body narratives of women writers gained legitimacy. Body writing was able to form an overwhelming trend in recent Chinese urban literature in the 1990s.

There is no doubt that the influx of Western feminist theory into China, which was developing rapidly in terms of ideas and economy, directly contributed to the flourishing of feminist culture and women's literature in China in the 1990s. However, a considerable degree of Western feminist discourse overshadowed Chinese feminist culture in the 1990s, and "body writing" was held hostage by commercialization and male voyeurism, especially after 1995 when feminist culture went flat, and the negative effects of Western feminist discourse began to emerge slowly. Later, the works of Mian Mian and Jiu Dan and other female writers were called "lower body writing", and their works were bold, unrestrained, exposed, and naked, so much so that they were once called "prostitute literature".

3. Comparative study of female images in "body writing"

"Body writing" is very different from "traditional writing", which is the abolition of female desire in the ascetic literature of male-dominated society, and also different from "love writing", which is the romance novel, where women are obsessed with love. Unlike "love writing" romance novels, where women are obsessed with the artifice of love, and "erotic writing", where women are obsessed with the vulgarity of sex, "body writing" means that women authors start with feminine language and a feminine perspective, stand in the position of women themselves, focus on women's own experience, mind, and personal desires, and write with feminist The "body writing" refers to the writing in which women authors take the standpoint of women themselves, focus on women's own experiences, mind, and personal desires, write about their personal life feelings with feminist rhetorical strategies, re-examine the distorted

image of women in historical texts, pay attention to women's fate, emotions, thinking and life state, and give women a historical and textual repositioning.

3.1. "Body Writing" and "Traditional Writing"

In literature, the female figure is an important part. The status of women in traditional Chinese and Western cultures is similar, as they are both covered by the power of male culture and have no power of speech. From the perspective of "sex", the social consciousness of traditional writing is based on the dichotomy of good and evil for women, and good women are those who abide by the "woman's way", the three virtues, loyalty and devotion, and even widow their husbands when they die. On the contrary, they are bad women. Therefore, the image of women in traditional writing in women's literature is reserved. Of course, the "reserve" shown by women in traditional Chinese culture is not all out of self-discipline, but only in the other discipline of society. In line with these subordinate positions, there is a variety of behavioral norms for women. Another characteristic of this norm is that it equates women with objects, ignores their physical and spiritual needs, and imposes moral standards and rules on them.

Body writing, on the other hand, is the opposite of traditional writing. It took advantage of the new era of intellectual emancipation and allowed women writers to regain the right to speak. The urban literary context of the 1990s has deepened the liberation of women's desires, and private writing has been favored. This is also called "personalized writing", which focuses on the expression of personal desire and personalized emotional expression. In depicting desire, Lin Bai's "A War of One's Own" is extremely detailed. With the growth of the female protagonist as the main content, the work depicts the narrative of female desire from the perspectives of women and self, women, and society, women and men, women and women, etc. It breaks the traditional literary "abstinence" of women and the three virtues, and makes a brave breakthrough from the "other law". The main character, Domi, is a female subject who grows up in the absence of "patriarchy". The work comprehensively expresses the growth process of the girl's desire, from her curiosity about sex at an early age, to her entry into society with enthusiasm as a teenager, to her story of being seduced, raped, used, and betrayed, and after experiencing the failure of heterosexual and homosexual love, she finally chooses to "escape" and return to her innermost despair. After the failure of heterosexual love and homosexual love, she finally chooses to "escape" and return to the closed and desperate situation within herself, and enters into "someone's war" to achieve her wish through herself and complete self-fulfillment. This is a "deviation" from the traditional perspective of writing. In their book *50 Years of Republican Literature*, edited by Yang Kuang-Han and Meng Fan-Hua, they write: "Lin Bai's novel *A War of One's Own* begins with the depiction of the female body and the precise portrayal of sensuality and its sensual areas to illustrate a woman's growing self-consciousness. The orthodox, male-dominated literary history does not allow women to reveal their hidden desires in such a way. The writing of the female body and desire in *One Man's War* is explosive and powerful."

3.2. "Body Writing" and "Love Writing"

"Love writing" is a popular form of writing created by a market to satisfy consumers, focusing on the aesthetic function of bridging the psychological and everyday space of readers. It is a relatively closed producer's text. Looking at "love writing" through the lens of gender roles, male writers usually write about love based on "Ferrers-centrism," placing women in the position of "being seen," or distorting, misleading, and obscuring the woman's identity. The male writers usually write about love on a "Ferrers-centric" basis, putting women in the position of "being seen" or distorting, misleading, or hiding the actual feelings of women. Women writers, on the other hand, try to dismantle "male centrism" and change from "being seen" to "seeing" to achieve gender equality and harmony in discourse power. Both male and female writers focus on the word "love" in their "love writing", especially the "love" between

men and women, which leads to the female characters in "love writing" having almost everything motivated by love as the ending. The main purpose of "love writing" is to let the reader enjoy the pleasure of earthly love, which is an inherent spirit of romance novels, both past and present.

"Love writing" in the process of love to pay all the physical, and psychological pay, the final male and female will be mutual admiration, mutual commitment. In contrast, the "body writers" obviously reject the love dominated by male discourse, and the frustration after love makes them devote themselves to loving and pleasing themselves. Just like Lin Bai's poetic expression in *The War of One's Own*: "The war of one's own means a slap to oneself, a wall to block oneself, a flower to destroy oneself, and the war of one's own means a woman to marry herself." [2] They use their own words to express their feelings. [3] They use their bodies to feel the world and expand their consciousness, describing the growing female desires, bringing out the Chinese women's literature's independence from the male discourse field in a nicknamed style.

3.3. "Body Writing" and "Erotic Writing"

According to Lin Shuming, Xisu's "female body writing" emphasizes a more intimate and richer conveyance of emotion and meaning, rather than the mere venting of female physical qualities or the nudity of the body. It aims to deconstruct the control of masculine ideology over women's bodies, subvert the male-centered dichotomous paradigm, and construct a new cultural orientation and writing space for women. [4] Pornographic literature, as Lawrence once defined it, is "an insult to and a spoiling of sex. Some experts have analyzed the language of pornographic literature, saying that the sexual descriptions and metaphors in pornographic literature are often arbitrary, inconsistent, and sometimes exaggerated to the point of being unbelievable and that the language is poor and clichéd, lacking the ability to explore and illustrate the themes that need to be described in detail. [5]

It is easy to see that "body writing" is a way for women to express their desires and emotional needs through their bodies, deconstructing masculine ideologies and being one of the artistic forms of feminism. On the other hand, "erotic writing" is an insult to sexuality, a product to satisfy the desire of male prying eyes, and it is anti-feminist. There is an essential difference between the two, but "body writing" has been misunderstood or maliciously created as "pornographic writing" many times. From the 1990s to the present, after "body writing" has helped women writers gain a lot of market share in the cultural market, it has become complicit in a patriarchal culture. After Lin Bai, a new generation of female writers has been more bold and unrestrained in experimenting with the female body in literature. Under the orchestration of the commercial media, "the narrative of the human body was simply rewritten as an indulgent display of bodily desire and fantasy, and body writing became a private story about a woman's lower abdomen".

4. Aesthetic Reconstruction of Body Writing

The problems faced by "body writing" are not only external, which needs to counter the malicious interpretation of the male gaze in a patriarchal society, but also more importantly, internal, which is the difference between "traditional writing", "love writing" and "erotic writing" in terms of literary creation. Love writing" and "pornographic writing", and not to deviate from the original intention of "body writing" and not to fall into the misunderstanding of "love" and "lust" in the author's creation. The "lascivious" misunderstanding. This is the biggest problem that "body writing" has encountered so far. How to make "body writing" out of the circle of vulgarization and commercialization, and reconstruct it artistically is a very critical issue.

4.1. Theory construction

4.1.1. Establish a correct understanding of the body's desires.

The bodily matters such as human desires and physical passions become common sense and the standard of life, and all the activities of people's thoughts and writings proceed with them. But the emphasis on the body does not mean that it is just a hedonistic, carnal body; we must recognize that there is a soul and spirit within the body and that there is a body before there is a soul, so the body is the home of the soul. If there is only a body without a soul, then that body is no different from an animal. In the past discourse pattern, there was an overemphasis on the soul-spirit metaphysics, and the body as the carrier of the soul, and the spirit was neglected as a body in itself. Therefore, only by combining body and soul can we create good works. The theoretical nature of the body and the physical nature of the body are mutually discriminatory, a unity between the physical and the theoretical, and only when the two are one can the human body be considered sound, otherwise it can only be called flesh, but flesh does not become the cornerstone of writing. Elaine Schowalter Schowalter points out the weakness of Sisu's aesthetic thinking on women's fiction in a nutshell: "The feminine aesthetic's emphasis on the importance of the female physical experience comes dangerously close to sexist essentialism." [6] The same point applies to contemporary Chinese "body writing". The question of reconstructing the dimension of the body is very important. The body is open and should refuse to be controlled by something outside; the body is free, but this freedom should not be abused within the appropriate limits; the body is erotic but beyond the shackles of desire. Most importantly, the body is independent and has a strong personality. The physiological body needs to be combined with the linguistic body and the communicative body for the theory of the body to be complete.

4.1.2. Recognition of the harmony of two sexes

In ancient China, it is said that "Yin and Yang are in harmony". Chinese intersex culture does not advocate the abolition of the differences between men and women but prefers harmonious interaction between the two sexes. Society is composed of men and women, and a society in which both sexes are in harmony is the ideal human society. A male or female society is flawed, and the absence of either women or men in writing creates hegemonic power. Feminist "body writing" uses male discourse as its opponent and the banner of resistance to the hegemony of male discourse, although it is necessary for the current social situation, it cannot be considered as an end, but only as a means. The purpose of resistance is to fight for equal discourse power, not to establish a new female hegemony. "Body writing" should also be open to fair criticism from men, because not all male criticism carries male hegemony. The concept of a pluralistic, co-prosperous, intersexual, and harmonious society should not only be cultivated in men's consciousness, but women should not forget it either.

4.2. Self-construction: control of desires, transcendence of fame and fortune

In a consumer society, desire is both the body ethic and the discourse ethic of our time. "Body writing" needs to get out of the misunderstanding of commercialization and reconstruct itself aesthetically, which requires the authors to control their material desires and improve their philosophical and aesthetic qualities. It also requires a deeper artistic ambition and the quality of silence and contemplation necessary for writing. In terms of contemporary physical writing in China, the main problem of Lin Bai and Chen Deng is that while expressing their cultural demands, they have to get out of their closed mindset and explore a wider spiritual space. After all, using purely personal spiritual experience as a resource for writing is limited. "Body Writing" needs to be based on the author's personal growth and independence, which also puts high demands on the author's quality, as he or she must not only have his or her own ideas and creative style, but also can handle the relationship between his or her personal discourse space and the public discourse space, and find the right fit to form a new The authors must not only

have their own ideas and creative styles, but also can deal with the relationship between their personal discourse space and the public discourse space, and find the right fit, to form a new public, and start a new creative practice and experiment.

5. Conclusion

The development of urban economy and culture has given feminism room to grow and women can express themselves freely. The development of Chinese urban literature has also led to the development of women's literature, but the influence of excessive urban desirability and commercialization has also "tarnished" women's literature. To meet the market's desire for women's prying eyes and sexual fantasies, "body writing" has begun to drift in the direction of "romance" and "pornography" only, and the scattered themes have led to a decrease in the ideological nature of the works. The scattered themes lead to a decrease in the thoughtfulness of the works. How to show the life, work, emotions, and desires of contemporary women in a more profound and uncomplicated way, preserve the contemporary female experience, and reconstruct the aesthetics of "body writing" is an important part of its perfection.

References

- [1] Hélène, C. (2023) *The Laugh of the Medusa* by Hélène Cixous. Shanghai People's Publishing House, Shanghai.
- [2] Fanhua Ming.(1999) End and Start - "50 Years of Republic Literature - Conclusion", *Contemporary Literature Research Materials and Information*, 1999:15-18
- [3] Bai Lin. (2004) *A Man's War*. Beijing Literature and Art Publishing House, October, Beijing.
- [4] Shuming, Lin (2001) Poetic transcendence of body/ mind Binary opposition. *Foreign Literature Review* 2001(2): 15-23.
- [5] Danya Lin (2004) Interpretive Index: From "Body" to "Baby"--- Record of a Seminar. *Journal of School of Chinese Language and Culture Nanjing Normal University*, 2004 (04): 39- 45.
- [6] Elaine, S. (1992) *Criticism of Our Own: Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory*. Peking University Press, Beijing.