

## Black humor and the awakening of personality

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### Abstract

**The book "A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" depicts a pig's "free and natural existence," a rebellion against the animal's loss of freedom, which is the true reality of the educated youth's existence. The pig's stubborn pursuit of freedom and resistance to discipline in its natural state creates a mottled light and shadow against the dark backdrop of its existence. The author laughs through tears, intentionally preventing the language from sinking into the dark abyss, which is precisely the technique of black humor.**

### Keywords

**Freedom, Naturality, Personality, Black Humor.**

### 1. Introduction

Wang Xiaobo's "A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" has become a classic text, where the humorous and lively writing style has drawn much attention. What also needs to be noted is how the existential truth is generated through this linguistic mode, and the wisdom in choosing humor over a solemn tone? What insights does this hold?

### 2. Pigs' "character" and human character

The first reading of "A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" is hilarious. The frank and anthropomorphic writing style is naturally a major reason, and the comparison of human and pig behavior choices is also a major reason. Moreover, it outlines an image with a specific "personality" and even a pig's "personality" in an anthropomorphic way - a lone nonconformist pig, and the inherent power it contains is worth noting.

The article opens with a clear statement, "When I was sent down to the countryside, I fed pigs and herded cattle. If no one came to manage them, these two animals would know very well how to live their lives." The author has quietly laid the foundation for the core idea of the article: experience and common sense tell us that every living being, according to its nature, has its own splendor and does not require external control. "They will roam freely, eat when hungry, drink when thirsty, and even fall in love when spring comes." This highlights the freedom through "roaming freely," while also expressing a natural respect for the animals' instincts for food and reproduction.

Using animals to speak about human affairs is a classic trope in both Chinese and foreign literature. Chinese literary classics such as "Journey to the West" feature characters like Sun Wukong and Zhu Bajie, while "Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio" has various fox spirits - all of which have deeply etched themselves in the public consciousness. The common stereotype of "pigs" in the general populace is likely tied to the image of Zhu Bajie in "Journey to the West". Using animals to speak about humans is an increasingly strong tradition in modern literature, with works like "Moby Dick", "I Am a Cat", and "Animal Farm" as prime examples. As the divine recedes and human sentiments and rationality expand in tandem, human animality also expands, with works like "I Am a Cat" adopting the perspective of animals to examine the joys and sorrows of the human realm. Reducing humans to the level of animals, as in George Orwell's

"Animal Farm", is a cruel yet truthful approach. Of course, efforts are also being made to elevate animal nature to the level of human nature or even the divine, as seen in "Moby Dick".

"A Pig That Goes Its Own Way", this article does not simply view the world from the perspective of animals, nor does it equate the world of the educated urban youth with the animal world, as the life of the people involves many non-animal factors. It also does not lower people to the level of animals, nor does it attempt to elevate animal nature to human or even divine nature. The article does not demand a high degree of transformation of common sense and life experience. On the contrary, it is very close to the life experience of the average reader. Where, then, does this article truly strike a chord with the reader?

The logic set in the article is that the pigs were originally living freely and carefree, which could be considered the natural state of existence for pigs. However, "after people came, they made arrangements for their lives: the life of every cow and every pig has a theme." This theme is very tragic for cows and pigs, "the theme for the former is to work, the theme for the latter is to grow meat," and so, the pigs' "life level is very low, completely devoid of merit," this is to reduce the pigs' existence from the free natural state to the unfree animal existence.

The animals' existential reality of losing their freedom is the true reality of the sent-down youth. This low-level existential reality is not uncommon in Chinese culture, as the "Zhuangzi" chapter "The World" states: "Considering affairs as constant and clothing and food as primary, multiplying and storing up, caring for the old, the weak, the orphaned, and the lonely—all have means of nourishment, which is the principle of the people." This "principle of the people" is actually the most basic existential reality, where common people breed and subsist, able to reproduce and survive, which is also the focus of Yu Hua's novel "To Live". The essay "A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" mentions that in ancient Greek Sparta, men were turned into doomed warriors and women into breeding machines, the former like fighting cocks and the latter like sows, which would seem familiar to those acquainted with the Shang Yang reform, where the people of Qin were either warriors or farmers, the warriors responsible for fighting wars and the farmers for growing grain, while all other people were just useless vermin.

The true life of the educated urban youth was largely like this, and they were accustomed to it. "I don't think there is anything to complain about, because my life at the time was not much richer either, apart from the eight model operas, there was not much entertainment." Surprisingly, "a lone nonconformist pig," because of its "maverick style," the enthusiasm for "living freely," awakened the consciousness of free and natural existence that should have been there, the pig began to have a certain "style," where was the "style" of the human?

This is actually the manifestation of the awakening of "personality" consciousness.

"Consciousness of free natural existence" cannot yet be called a complete "personality", but it is the prerequisite for the awakening of "personality" consciousness. "Consciousness of free natural existence" can only be the freedom of animality, primitive, chaotic, and arbitrary, but with freedom comes the opportunity to elevate animality to humanity and even higher divinity, and without freedom, not only can animality not be elevated, but humanity will also regress to animality. The essay "A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" can be found in the reason for the free exchange between animals and humans, and the gap between the two has become very small.

### 3. Humor and Black

Behind the playful, mischievous, and ironic tones of Wang Xiaobo's writings lies a deep sense of tragic consciousness.

"The ability to set up all kinds of arrangements for life is a unique characteristic of humans. It is not only about setting up animals, but also about setting up ourselves. We know that in ancient Greece there was a Sparta, where life was set up to be completely joyless, with the purpose of turning men into desperate warriors and women into breeding machines, the

former like fighting cocks, the latter like sows. These two types of animals are very special, but I think they certainly do not like their own lives. But what can they do about it? Whether it is human or animal, it is very difficult to change one's own destiny." The last sentence of this passage reveals the survival dilemma of humans and animals: what can they do about it if they don't like it? Suffering is inescapable, and tragic fate is unchangeable.

This is a rather dark view of the true nature of human existence, and this dark consciousness is actually the core essence of tragedy. What is called "fate" is first of all the acknowledgment of this existential truth, although the greatness of humanity lies in recognizing it without submitting to it. In fact, it is in resisting this truth that humanity has attained dignity and civilization. Whether it is Greek tragedy or Chinese mythology, the sole theme of tragedy is the rebellion against fate. The reason the spirit of tragedy can strike the human heart is that it shows how beautiful, natural things can be destroyed, and it faces the most cruel underlying reality of existence, which is the all-consuming blackness.

"A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" has touched upon the true reality of the lives of educated youth, where behind the daily routines and monotony lies a dark force that consumes all freedom and dignity. Fortunately, the obstinate and rebellious nature of the nonconformist pig towards freedom and regimentation has cast a mottled light and shadow upon this dark backdrop.

"Officially, it is a pork pig, but it is black and thin, with bright and shining eyes. This guy is as agile as a goat, jumping over a one-meter-high pig pen in one leap; it can also jump onto the roof of the pig pen, which is like a cat -- so it is always roaming around, not staying in the pen at all. "This pig breaks free of the constraints of training and order, and the freedom and ease of its roaming, and the young intellectuals find a sense of freedom in it." All the young intellectuals who have fed pigs treat it as a pet. "Caring for the pig is actually caring for the sense of freedom. The young intellectuals feed it with a porridge made from fine rice bran." After it has eaten enough, the bran is mixed with wild grass to feed the other pigs. The other pigs see this and are jealous, all shouting together. At this moment, the whole pig farm is filled with cries and howls, but my pig and I don't care. "The world of pigs also produces competition for survival and differentiation, which also shows that naturalness and animality are not actually reliable in themselves, and they need to be further improved. The indifference of the young intellectuals and the pig here is also natural, and also needs to be improved."

"In summary, all the educated youth who have fed pigs love it, love its unconventional style, and say it lives freely. But the local villagers are not so romantic, they say this pig is not proper". The villagers' evaluation of this unconventional pig is based on the stability of order, "not proper", not following the order, disrupting the operation of order, and the destruction of organization, structure, and order is intolerable. "I not only like it - I respect it, often disregarding the fact that I am a dozen years older, and call it 'Pig Brother'. For an ordinary educated youth, the first concern is not order, but the oppressive feeling that order brings to his life, the first concern is the sense of freedom in his own life, which also has sufficient natural and animal basis.

The contradiction between freedom and order, as well as between nature and society, has become apparent. "Later, the pig brother learned to whistle, and this ability brought him trouble." "The leadership convened a meeting and labeled him as a disruptor of spring plowing, and decided to take dictatorship measures against him - I already know the spirit of the meeting, but I am not worried about it, because if dictatorship means ropes and butcher knives, then it is all talk and no action. The previous leadership had also tried, and a hundred people could not catch him. The dogs were also useless: the pig brother ran like a torpedo, able to knock the dogs over a dozen feet away. This time, they really went all out, with the instructor bringing over twenty people, armed with Type 54 pistols; the deputy instructor brought over a dozen people, holding antique muskets, and they split into two groups to hunt him down in the open space outside the pigsty. This put me in an inner conflict: based on our friendship, I should have rushed out with two butcher knives and fought alongside him, but I also felt that would be too

sensational - after all, he's just a pig; and another reason is that I don't dare to defy the leadership, which I suspect is the crux of the problem. In the end, I just stood by and watched." This is the most important paragraph in the entire text, without the leisurely and carefree tone of the previous sections. The contradiction has suddenly escalated, leaving two choices with no escape - to help or not to help. The underlying dark truth is directly exposed, and a decision must be made in the face of this dilemma. If you help, you may get implicated yourself; if you don't help, the pig may be beaten to death. Regardless of the outcome, there is no more humor, only darkness.

"A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" responds to the dilemma of choice with black humor and self-mockery. The pig is calm, powerful and wise, and it finally runs out on its own, with great elegance. The pig's calmness and strength mitigate the awkwardness of human choice and dilute the inner conflicts. "I dare not resist the leader, I suspect this is the root of the problem. Anyway, I'm just watching on the sidelines." This sentence contains honesty, self-mockery, and also a sense of coldness, which could even lead to shame and indifference, but the author does not go there. He hides tears with laughter, and covers deep emotions with indifference - he deliberately avoids letting the language descend into a dark abyss, which is precisely the approach of black humor.

Of course, this black humor can no longer conceal the underlying color of life. When I saw the pig again in the sugarcane field, it had already grown tusks, and "it still recognized me, but no longer allowed me to approach it." The cruel world has treated this pig, and its animal nature has begun to expand and strengthen, becoming wary of humans and returning the indifference that humans have given it. "This indifference saddens me, but I also agree that it should maintain a distance from those with sinister intentions." On the surface, it seems to be a divide between the pig and the human, but in reality, it is the spiritual harm between people, which is the underlying layer of this humor.

#### 4. Daily Life and Reminiscence

The last paragraph of "A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" says: "I'm already forty years old, and aside from this pig, I've never seen anyone else dare to so blatantly disregard the way life is set up. On the contrary, I've seen many people who want to set up the lives of others, and many who are content with the lives that have been set up for them. For this reason, I have always missed that pig that marched to its own drum." The author confesses that it was not until he was forty years old that he realized that the pig that "so blatantly disregarded the way life is set up" and found itself in a desperate situation was actually an exception, and that the desperate situation the pig faced was an extreme state, not the state of the majority or the everyday. But what does "reminiscence" mean?"

"Reminiscence" is a hidden spiritual door in everyday life, which can lead to a dark abyss, and the various cold and ominous feelings that float up from the abyss make people fearful and unwilling to look any further. Like "Pig Brother", deeply trapped in a desperate situation, and lacking his calmness and strength, the result can be imagined, so I don't want to think about it, let alone experience it firsthand.

The black humor in everyday language experience gradually degenerates into a humorous inflation in words and rhetoric, unconsciously or consciously avoiding the disturbing darkness, after all, tragedy, dead-end, dilemma, these predicaments inevitably place people in embarrassment, panic and helplessness. Humor has become a game of sliding through words, as Lu Xun once pointed out, this is ridiculous, not humor. Ridiculous is playfulness in words, whereas humor hides a secret. Humor has a hidden well, and nostalgia is its cover. People prefer to talk around the well cover, enjoy and even celebrate, rather than uncover and enter. The various discussions about "A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" are probably like this. Of course, this

judgment in the article is not a condemnation of laughter. Qian Zhongshu said, "True humor is the ability to laugh at oneself." Indeed, self-mockery becomes self-reflection with a little seriousness, and self-reflection becomes self-mockery with moderation and relaxation. Black humor is the permeation of laughter and tears, the interweaving of light and shadow, and according to Nietzsche, the secret of art is precisely the fusion of Dionysian and Apollonian spirits, although the Dionysian represents the truth of existence, but without the light and shadow of the Apollonian, how can the truth of existence be presented?

Wang Xiaobo was very fond of quoting a line from Russell's "The Conquest of Happiness": "Diversity is the source of happiness". Diversity is the normal state of everyday life. His black humor always exudes a sense of openness, inclusiveness, and brightness, which is the tone of everyday life. His works, with black as the base color, do not deliberately make black the main color, which is the wisdom of respecting everyday life. Zhuangzi said: "To take the world as muddy is not to be able to speak with Zhuangzi". Even if the overall living environment is "muddy", it is not necessarily to use "Zhuangzi's language". On the contrary, precisely because the "world is muddy", it is necessary to use non-"Zhuangzi's language", which is the dialectics of black humor.

In the "Zhuangzi" chapter "The World", there is a saying: 'Nineteen parables, eleven emphatic phrases, casual words arise with the sun, harmonize with the heavenly pattern'. In his view, there are at least three ways to express the world: the parabolic, which is the first choice, using stories and images; the emphatic, the solemn words that directly reveal the truth; and the casual, which appears fragmented and disorderly, but actually conceals the mysteries of heaven. In the crevices of the everyday, one can actually find the way to the profound."

The writing of Wang Xiaobo, his novels are his parables, his essays are his casual remarks, and his profound statements are scattered in his parables and casual remarks. Take the article "A Pig That Goes Its Own Way" for example, "I have always missed this pig that goes its own way" has his own parable, and there are also his profound statements that are often quoted by readers, such as "the tendency to make various arrangements for life is a unique human trait", and more casual remarks in daily language. This highly colloquial language style is candid and intimate, yet it always uses the opportunity of "reminiscence" to quickly access the hidden and obscure places. The twists and revelations contained in them are indeed worth contemplating in depth.

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